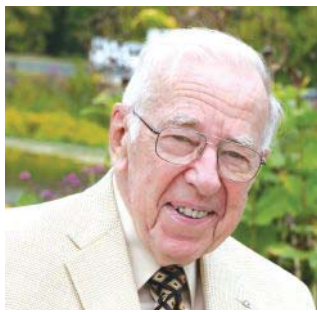


# Integrating Training and Performance Appraisal

Training and performance appraisal can work hand in hand if the appraisal looks ahead at what can be done to improve employee performance. **BY DR. DONALD L. KIRKPATRICK**



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**T**raining and performance appraisal have the same objective: to improve performance, which means both behavior and results. To what degree does your organization relate the two?

If you have a formal performance appraisal program, you probably think of it as a Human Resources program, with the main objective to determine merit increases and make decisions regarding promotions and other staffing issues. This is the emphasis put on most performance appraisal programs.

In the book, "Improving Employee Performance Through Appraisal and Coaching, 2nd edition," I describe how an effective performance appraisal program can have an objective of not just making salary and promotion decisions based on past performance, but of developing a performance improvement plan and implementing it with supervisory coaching. This puts it in the same category as training, which is looking ahead and developing practical programs that result in improved performance. Both programs rely on managers to work with direct reports to maximize performance.

Training in many large organizations has departed from the Human Resources department and become a unique entity separate from performance appraisal. In this case, I recommend that the two departments work together to see how they can integrate the functions. For example, nearly all performance appraisal programs identify strengths and weaknesses in an employee's past performance. These weaknesses can be translated into training needs, which are a basic ingredient of practical training programs. The needs of individual employees can be tabulated and used to determine subject matter for training programs.

## IMPROVING PERFORMANCE

How about the performance appraisal programs themselves? Are they related to training? In some organizations, they are not. The manager calls the direct report into his or her office once a year to go over the performance appraisal forms. The manager explains and justifies both the ratings and the merit increase. The direct report is given an opportunity to ask questions, and the interview and process are concluded for another year. More savvy organizations may include a self-appraisal by the direct report.

I have simplified and perhaps distorted what exactly takes place, but this is the general approach in many organizations. Unfortunately, little or nothing is said about what should be done to improve performance, and rarely is any performance improvement plan developed.

In some organizations, appraisals are done semi-annually or quarterly, and performance is discussed, but the overriding factor is still merit increases instead of improved performance.

There is general agreement that the same approach should not be used for appraisals aimed at salary decisions and improving performance, but in both approaches, an appraisal of performance is necessary. The main difference is that performance appraisal looks back, and training looks ahead. Another difference is the use of self-appraisal, in which the direct report completes a self-appraisal using the same form as the manager, and forms are completed in pencil and subject to change. The atmosphere of the interview is different in appraisal and training discussions. In salary decisions, it is mostly a one-way conversation, with the ratio of discussion averaging about 90/10 manager to direct report. In the interview aimed at future performance, the ratio is about 50/50.

In performance improvement conversations, the direct report needs to agree that the appraisal is fair, or there is no sense in going further. Input from the

direct report is also usually necessary. Once employee strengths and weaknesses are confirmed, one weakness should be converted into a mutually agreeable training need. The manager and direct report then jointly develop a performance improvement plan, and define each of their roles in accomplishing it. The manager subsequently develops a coaching plan to ensure that what was agreed upon gets done. Improved employee performance results, because the manager and direct report have worked together to accomplish what both of them want—improved performance.

#### BE A CHANGE AGENT

Yes, training and performance appraisal are close relatives if the performance appraisal looks ahead at what can be done to improve employee performance. If you are responsible for performance appraisal, see how you can be a change agent involving training. Look at your objectives, forms, and procedures and talk with the training team to see how your appraisals can be turned into training needs.

If you are a training professional, either under Human Resources or part of a corporate university, get together with the performance appraisal professionals to see how you can work together to improve employee performance and productivity.

## Put coaching skills on the top priority list for management development training and tie it in with your performance appraisal program.

One final thought for trainers: Put coaching skills on the top priority list for management development training and tie it in with your performance appraisal program. While you are at it, include a module on how to conduct an appraisal interview. This will help to solidify the close relationship between training and performance appraisal. **1**

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