

Leadership 201 Action Learning Assignment

Performance Reviews for Non-Research Grade Employees

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Team Leader: Marinna Martini

Your classmate, Marinna Martini, shared the following with us regarding her concern about the performance review process for non-research grade employees. We thought it would make an excellent action learning assignment for the class with her as the team leader. Below is her description of the problem.

“Some years ago the USGS jettisoned the peer review panel process for non research grade personnel. Participating was the best training for the supervisory position I have now, as I learned the details of classification, PD's, etc. I can certainly understand why the USGS did away with it because it was expensive and time consuming. But what was it replaced with? As far as I can tell, nothing.

Now that may not technically be true, but around here in my corner of the USGS....

What we don't have: There are no substantial periodic (6 month) reviews which help the employee understand the USGS personnel process, what their opportunities are in the USGS, how they can grow in their job, or how they cannot grow in their job given the limits of management's requirements for the position. If someone is topped out or about to be, they should know it. There is no method by which an employee can record their accomplishments and bring them to the attention of a supervisor who is too busy doing science to pay attention to what their employees are doing all the time (the previous vehicle was the Career Record). In short, all personnel matters are now up to the whim of the direct line supervisor. If you have a great, well trained, motivated supervisor, whom you respect and get along with, no problem. This is not reality for many employees. Perhaps in the future... but as long as most supervisory positions are occupied by people trained for years in how to do science and only for days on how to manage personnel in the context of the Government system, we have a dichotomy to address... for the scientists' sake too.

What we do have: There is some paperwork to fill out which revolves around what the employee will do in a given year and if they actually did it.

I do not think that everyone should be led around by the hand, but a six month review is pretty much de-rigueur in most employment situations, and it doesn't happen here. If you're RGE, you get feedback annually. My thoughts on this topic are not well formed as yet, but I want to do something to rectify this situation. There needs to be a review process for technical staff (and others) above and beyond what we have now. It needs

to be time efficient and communicative. The lack of it is costing us in low morale, employees with excellent technical talents who leave the USGS and a factor in hiring new talent. One BIG piece of the problem is that there is no official connection between job performance and promotion (I know that this comes from OPM). Do you reward a good performer with an endless series of STAR awards which leads to nothing special in five years? I predict you will have a) lost the employee, b) trained dead wood or c) lucked onto the rare individual who's happy to do this indefinitely (they exist, but they're rare).

So, in preparation for the follow-up course in June, I'd like to review a bit where the USGS is on this topic (I'm well aware that there may be things out there I've no idea are going on and I'm probably naive on a few things) and discuss this more when we see each other. Where is the best place to start 'catching up'? I've been through the intranet somewhat, but things there are still not optimally organized. Or maybe this can be the seed of something to discuss between all of us in June?"

- Assess the present status of the topic
- Develop at least three sound options that consider advantages and disadvantages
- Propose best option and a strategy for full implementation. Strategy should include high level objectives and detailed action steps.