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Performance, Pay, Behavior ... and Other Tough Conversations

How does any individual reach their potential? Think about people who have been influential in your life. Did they only tell you what you wanted to hear?

Do any of the following scenarios sound familiar?

1. You have inherited a performance challenge with an employee that has been with the organization for years. Though prior supervisors and managers knew there were gaps in their technical skills and/or behavioral performance, no one documented this on performance evaluations. Everyone around the person is aware; therefore, morale suffers and others have a heavier workload because the work culture has adopted “work-arounds” instead of addressing the real issues.
2. Several staff members in the same classification are asking about where they are in the pay range.
 - A. One person is at the midpoint or market rate. They are doing everything they should be doing to satisfy their job expectations.
 - B. One person is newly hired, and was brought in to the organization 10% above minimum due to their qualifications, education or experience.
 - C. One person was hired a year ago at minimum due to their qualification, education or experience.
3. As discussions about merit pay and changes related to the Classification & Compensation Study take place, there needs to be a clear understanding about who should communicate what, and the roles different entities in the organization should play in creating a strong foundation for partnership and service for the wellbeing of all employees.

In **scenario one**, the supervisor and management up the chain have to accept the responsibility of addressing the challenge today. If the “can is kicked down the road,” it will result in improper stewardship of our employee resources, the rumblings will tear down trust in the fairness of the work culture, and will result in an erosion of overall trust in leadership.

The higher performers will either speak with their feet by finding another job, or will become cynical and slow down performance.

In **scenario two**, Person A is being paid at the appropriate rate if they are satisfying job requirements and not going beyond. More *quantity* of work in the same classification does not justify an upward movement in job class or an adjustment in pay. Only if there is more breadth or depth to the work and/or decision making would it be considered a possible justification for extra pay or classification increase.

Person B and Person C should be coming in at different rates; and this should be explained openly and with confidence. All of us have a responsibility to understand the ‘whys’ and ‘hows’ of Human Resources processes and of Appointing Authority/department processes within each part of the organization. Supervisors may not be the experts, yet we should know where to find the answers and feel comfortable fielding general questions in leadership.

In **scenario three**, any difficulty in performance evaluations that are showing up now will be compounded if/when merit pay is added to the mix. Supervisors and managers must understand differentiation of performance based on competencies for technical skills, interpersonal skills and employee self-awareness. These are all part of performance.

If not executed properly, merit systems can become ‘flat raises’ because supervisors do not have the knowledge, skills, willingness and/or support for really differentiating performance based on measurable KSAs (knowledge, skills, abilities).

If employees do not hear honest feedback directly from their management hierarchy, then they will assume merit pay decisions are being imposed from outside, not by you.

Are you prepared, willing and courageous enough to look at your part and be accountable in the overall puzzle moving forward for your improvement, and for your employees’ and your department’s improvement?

Human Resources is here to help you reach your potential. Contact our Business Partners and Organizational Development Team at 464-3796.