

FIREHOUSE®

Weekly Drill

DRILL #148: PERFORMANCE EVALUATIONS

Introduction

With the economic climate being what it is today, many fire departments are finding larger numbers applying for positions in the fire service. Recruitment standards are often pre-set and, in general, are high. But once the firefighter is off probation, what performance evaluations are you conducting on these firefighters?

The old saying that there is more than one way to skin a cat still holds true today. In the fire service, there are several methods for conducting a performance evaluation and each is geared with a primary purpose. Some are conducted to improve the employee's performance and productivity, or used to identify whether a pay increase is in order, or if the individual meets the requirements for a promotion, etc.

Another area where the performance evaluation comes into play is when determining whether remedial training is needed or some other means of corrective action. However, keep in mind, the performance evaluation should only serve one purpose; in doing so the employee will then feel that they received a fair and honest treatment.

The ultimate outcome of the performance evaluation is to assist the employee with improving his or her job performance. The document should describe both the firefighter's strengths and weaknesses observed over a specific period of time. When reviewing the performance evaluation with the firefighter, it should be explained clearly. Additionally, any improvement plans should be discussed to assist the employee with getting back on track and up to acceptable levels.

The performance evaluation program that you use has to be based on the duties and responsibilities of the position you are evaluating, along with an accurate means of measuring the member's performance.

No matter which method you use for the evaluation, an area that should be of concern is the firefighters need to know that the method and person conducting the performance evaluation are honest, fair, objective and, by all means, unbiased. Firefighters are going to make their own judgments as to who works hard and who is performing. If the evaluators do not reflect this same at-



titude, both the evaluations and the evaluator lose all credibility.

An organization has three critical performance cycles:

1. The job analysis – this describes each personnel classification (responsibilities)
2. The performance standards – describes the job expectations (quality of the work performed)
3. The evaluation system – assists in identifying how successful the firefighter is in accomplishing the desired results

In any event, the performance evaluation should relate to the job requirements. The Federal Equal Employee Opportunity Commission has established guidelines that stress the importance of a valid process and is especially important should you be using this performance evaluation when demoting and individual, or when taking disciplinary actions that could lead to termination of employment.

–Prepared by Russell Merrick