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## EFFECTIVE PERFORMANCE ELEMENTS AND STANDARDS CHECKLIST

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This checklist provides questions to help supervisors and employees determine the effectiveness of the performance elements and standards they develop and whether those standards meet legal and regulatory requirements. This checklist contains questions for consideration which will assist in the development of sound management principles that comply with regulations, Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB), and court decisions. It is important to note that all elements are critical elements in the Performance Management and Appraisal Program.

- Are the elements truly critical?
- Is the meaning of Fully Successful performance clear?
- Are the standards attainable?
- Are the standards challenging?
- Are the standards fair?
- Are the standards applicable?
- Will employees understand what is required?
- Are the elements and standards flexible?
- Is the Fully Successful level surpassable?

### **Are the elements truly critical?**

As all elements are critical elements in the Performance Management and Appraisal Program, failing a single element means that the employee's overall performance is unacceptable. Therefore, assigning generic elements to all employees - regardless of the type of work they do - can be risky as it may not truly reflect the work required to meet the team, Organization, or Agency mission.

### **Is the meaning of Fully Successful performance mutually understood?**

Are the expectations established by the elements and standards quantifiable, observable, and verifiable? Expectations that are specific and that clearly define what must be done as well as how well it must be done are more effective for managing and directing performance than vague or general expectations. In addition, MSPB and the courts have ruled that employees must know what they have to do and how well they have to do it to perform at a Fully Successful level. Both sound management principles and court rulings support this key criterion.

### **Are the standards attainable?**

Are expectations reasonable? MSPB and the courts have ruled that, in most instances, retention standards must not require absolute perfection. Research has shown that setting expectations that are impossible or nearly impossible to achieve can actually cause performance levels to drop as employees tend to give up what they perceive as impossible.

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### **Are the standards challenging?**

Does the work unit or employee need to exert a reasonable amount of effort to reach the Fully Successful performance level? Or do they merely need to show up to work in order to be considered Fully Successful? Research shows setting expectations that are too easy (or too hard) lead to low performance. Further, specific and challenging expectations result in higher performance. The most effective Fully Successful standards will find a balance between too hard and too easy.

### **Are the standards fair?**

Are they comparable to expectations for other employees in similar positions? Applying different standards to employees doing the same work does not appear on its face to be fair or valid. Requiring higher-level management review of standards for similar work across an organization is one way of ensuring equity.

### **Are the standards applicable?**

Can the supervisor/manager use the standards to effectively appraise employee performance? The standards should clearly describe the elements that the supervisor/manager will look for and how well those elements should be done (i.e., the quality, quantity, timeliness, and cost-effectiveness requirements). In addition, can the supervisor/manager effectively use the data collected through the measurement process? If monitoring performance on the element is too costly or time-consuming, the standard might need to be altered to include more manageable measures.

### **Will employees understand what is required?**

Elements and their standards should be written clearly and be specific to the job. If the standards are generic, how will employees know what they have to do to demonstrate Fully Successful performance?

### **Are the elements and standards flexible?**

Elements and standards can be modified during the appraisal period with a minimum 90 day period of performance required to be rated on the adjusted elements and standards. It is not recommended to modify elements/standards less than 90 days from the close of the appraisal cycle. This flexibility allows performance plans to be used as management tools to manage employee performance on a day-to-day and week-to-week basis rather than as a bothersome, meaningless paperwork exercise.

### **Is the Fully Successful standard surpassable?**

Is it possible for an employee's performance to exceed the standard? By including Fully Successful standards that cannot be surpassed, the performance plan effectively eliminates the higher assessments.