

EVALUATIONS

FROM SANTA'S LIST AND REPORT CARDS TO EVALUATIONS

By Paul Clayton

Evaluations started almost from the day I was born. First it was Santa keeping a list to see if I were naughty or nice. I went to school and it started up again. From the time I was in kindergarten, elementary school, high school, college and even to post graduate work there were report cards. Reports cards seem to be around from almost day one till the big one when you die. When I went to look for a job there it was again, the evaluation, except they called it an "interview". I got the job and again they mentioned that there would be my evaluation, yet another report card. When I went on my own into business I thought "no report card". The first workshop I did they handed out an evaluation and it has been going on ever since.

The problem with evaluations is a lot of personal baggage is carried with us by the time we get our work evaluations, especially if we had bad ones in our earlier life. One of the things that I have been working on, is not focusing on the negative comments. I could have 99 great comments and one negative and my mind goes right to the negative one. For every person who gives an evaluation there is a different philosophy about what its' purpose is in the big scheme of work life. Some of the people in my classes will give me all fives while others might give all ones all from the same class. One person's philosophy maybe success builds success and focus on the all the person did right and ignore what they could improve on. Yet another might take the academic approach and point out what went wrong, these are the extremes. Worst of all they can go from one page to fourteen pages. I think if I had the person's philosophy behind the evaluation I would feel better about what was said. I do have the luxury of having different perspectives on the same work.

Maybe we should give out report cards to our clients on a regular basis let them know where they are in the big picture. If you have a few minutes this week, this might be a good discussion topic at a meeting; evaluations and the philosophies behind them. If you have any thoughts on work evaluations and the philosophy behind them or if you give clients report cards let me know and I will pass the m on. Also if you evaluate your manager I would like to hear how that works in your office.

EVALUATION RESPONSES

We do evaluate our customers in some way from the moment they walk in the door. They fill out forms to give us an idea of their work experience, their skills, and their needs. We also evaluate their performance in job club and other activities. But for all this evaluating, we never show them their 'report cards'! We all focus on the negative aspects of our evaluations, but this can be particularly devastating if no one prepares us for this aspect of employment (and life!); sheltering our customers from this aspect of life, rather than preparing them for it and teaching them how to respond positively to it, will most likely

do more harm than good. That's something that we'll be working on in our office. Hillary CA

One thing that I have learned about 'evaluations' and constructive criticism is that the process often puts the receiver into a defensive mode. Once the defensive mode has set in, this person only receives a distorted message. A lot of times this distortion is because the person has developed a strong resistance to any criticism because they have been criticized for a lot of things that they didn't believe applied to them.

In my workshops I have asked customers (peer group evaluations/criticisms) to build the message like this:

1. Tell the person something good about what they had done, such as ' the presentation was clear and precise'.
2. Then tell the person your criticism
3. End with another thing that the person did well.

This will keep the person from shutting down on the criticism and will also give them some positive feedback. Penny CAE

The problem with working for the state, managers have no clout and they often. Do not know a good worker from an bad one. There is very little positive reinforcement for good workers and no consequence for bad workers. And we Are dealing with a current generation who thinks that just because they showed up the employer showed be grateful Bottom line, everyone makes the same amount of money. Presently at this office we are trying to control 1000 cases. There is no way anyone can handle this amount in an appropriate manner for any length of time. And we will be getting more. Top management is all retiring and do You think they care about getting a solution for all this work? MI

I don't give out report cards to my clients, however, I do try to give them positive feedback. It is such a big emotional withdrawal when you lose a job. Even if the loss was caused by a lay off. The longer it takes you to find work, the bigger the loss. They used to use the analogy of the emotional bank account. It takes many deposits to overcome one withdrawal. I try to remember that I need to do more than just talk to my clients about what they need to do to get a job. I need to encourage them by praising their efforts and affirming their skills. I need to show them that I have confidence that they will get work, just because they are who they are.

Sandy Lynch, Redding, CA

I think the report card idea is a great one for the clients as well as for the case managers. Would make us all more accountable and be a good score card to show us reaching our goals. Way to go!! Have a great day. Susan GA

I enjoyed your theory on evaluations. Countless books have been written on how to evaluate your infant child. We learn at an early age that someone will be noticing our

successes and failures. Usually our successes are quickly forgotten but our failures are thought about for long periods of time, sometimes our entire life. I often ask a teenager what grade they are in and if they have 'failed' a grade they will disclose this instantly, but if they were advanced early they are often embarrassed by their success.

I have noticed that when evaluations come around I immediately become defensive. Even though I am aware that the stupid thing just goes into 'my file' and no one but my boss is allowed access to it. I see it as a comparison to a standard that perhaps I find unfair. No evaluation can measure the chores I am responsible for. However the attempt by my supervisor to do so makes me squirm inside. Over the years I have found that if I try to use the information to improve my performance in the future instead of kicking myself or cursing my supervisor [under my breath of course] it makes life a whole lot easier. Although I have the opportunity to write additional comments on my evaluation I try not too for fear it may offend my supervisor. Again I fail myself for not blowing my own horn while I have the opportunity.

After our yearly evaluations are done at DSS I listened to numerous employees complain about their ratings. Nobody would have known about their poor rating if they had not drone on and on about it.

The supervisors are well aware that we do extra things above and beyond my job responsibilities but somehow that rarely has a place on the evaluation. If the employees would only realize that the raises and promotions usually are not even related to their evaluation they may rest better at night. Perhaps the employer could be kinder and inform the employee about how they are being evaluated and what the expectations are. But it is better not to count on this. VA

If you have to choose, bet on the team (people) NOT the plan. In other words, it's people, individually and collectively, who generate good ideas and drive the mission. That's why we need to ask the question that former NYC Mayor Ed Koch asked his staff each week "How are we doing?" Once we get straight on the real purpose of Evaluation, we have a better shot at doing it in a meaningful way. Evaluation is about measuring progress-- individual and collective. Are we doing what we agreed to do and do we have a way to quantify our individual and collective responsibilities. Get clear first about who is responsible for what in the short and long term. Include risk-taking and stretch in those responsibilities and make room for and openness to failure. Then share the progress AND failures (if there is no failure, you probably didn't stretch enough)...that's real learning and that is what evaluation is all about. If you don't do this you are simply counting beans. Quality staff people want to be involved in much more than counting and measuring. They want learning and the challenge that new learning about themselves and their co-workers brings. That's my view on the real purpose of evaluation. There may be other practical reasons like compensation...but I try to separate the two unless I am in a position to give a bonus tied directly to performance. Bill MA

I think report cards for clients is an interesting idea. However, I'm struggling with it because I'm not sure how to integrate it with my method of facilitating learning through self-evaluation and peer-evaluation.

Because of my training through Winning New Jobs, I've really reduced the amount of direct evaluation I do. In my workshops, I instead ask questions that are directed to helping each participant "discover" the answers for themselves.

One-on-one, I don't evaluate performance, I ask questions to help the person pinpoint what isn't working, so that they tell me. I'll give my perspective and ask the person what they think, how the perspective feels to them. And then I ask them what they want to do about it, and what they want from me. If they're still not clear, I'll make a suggestion by asking, 'what about this' or 'what about that?'

Much of this has grown out of my own process of learning that, by the time we see people, they've been through so much and are so discouraged and feel so powerless, that my primary goal is to find ways to give control back to them. I ask them to evaluate themselves and their process. I recommend that they work together in groups to support each other. I give them tools to use to structure (control) their process and tools to check their progress toward their goals.

Another way I give them back control is asking them to evaluate my performance. I ask for feedback in workshops and groups. I distribute evaluation forms as an opportunity to give anonymous feedback. And I make changes and adjustments based on the feedback as quickly as possible so that participants see that their feedback is valued.

I'd be interested in creative ways to integrate client evaluations into my program because I think it's possible that it might be a useful tool.

Now, if only management would follow this protocol and treat us the same way we treat clients...what a difference that would make! Even though management has occasionally asked staff for feedback, they have made it clear that they rarely care about the feedback enough to make changes or implement suggestions. Requests have usually only been made as a concession to CQI requirements. --Cindra-CA-