Texas Police Chiefs Association

New Supervisor Course #3737

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Texas Police Chiefs Association

Unit 3 From Insight to Action: Performance Tools for Strong Leadership

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Learning Objectives for Unit 3, From Insight to Action: Performance Tools for Strong Leadership

Upon successful completion of the course the student will be able to:

(3.1) Identify performance management tools discussed in the class.

(3.2) Identify effective strategies for conducting performance evaluations

(3.3) Explain the liabilities of ineffective performance evaluations.

(3.4) List effective strategies for using feedback tools.

(3.5) Identify approaches for delivering a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP).

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Performance Management

- Performance management is proactive, not punitive
- Effective performance management is developmental, focusing on coaching, mentoring, and helping employees succeed
- Disciplinary actions may be part of performance management, but only when necessary, the primary purpose being to prevent issues before they escalate.



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Performance Management

- Performance management is a shared responsibility between a supervisor and employee
- Supervisors play a key role in guiding, supporting, and holding employees accountable, but the employee is responsible for their own performance and professional growth
- Good performance management creates a two-way communication process, where employees feel informed and supported.



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Performance Management Tools

- Performance Evaluation
- Coaching
- Counseling
- Performance Improvement Plan (PIP).



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Performance Management Tools

- Performance Evaluation
- Coaching
- Counseling
- Performance Improvement Plan (PIP).



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Purposes of Performance Evaluations

- Provide a formal, documented record of performance
  - Serve as an official record of an employee's strengths, areas for improvement, accomplishments, and any concerns
  - Provide documentation for promotions, raises, disciplinary actions, and legal purposes
  - Provide evidence of their past performance and readiness for advancement.

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Purposes of Performance Evaluations

- Deliver constructive feedback based on observed behavior
  - Focusing on specific, observable behaviors rather than personal opinions makes feedback actionable and fair
  - Instead of saying, *You have a bad attitude,* say, *You've been late three times this month, which impacts team coverage.*

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Purposes of Performance Evaluations

- Promote consistency and fairness in employee treatment
  - Using the same evaluation process for everyone reduces bias and favoritism, helping employees feel that performance is measured objectively
  - Having clear rating criteria ensures that two employees with similar performance records receive comparable evaluations
  - Using the same criteria for all employees avoids favoritism and builds trust.

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Purposes of Performance Evaluations

- Offer protection from liability by documenting issues and supervisory efforts
  - A thorough evaluation creates a paper trail showing that supervisors provided feedback, training, and opportunities for improvement
  - If an employee is later terminated for poor performance, having past evaluations that clearly documented concerns and coaching efforts protects the agency legally
  - Thorough documentation demonstrates fair and consistent management.

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Hallmarks of Good Evaluations

- Evaluations should never surprise the employee; issues, both good and bad, should be addressed as they occur during the year
- In effective evaluations, comments and assessments should be documented, objective, specific, and actionable
- Evaluations should build trust, accountability, and protection for both the employee and the agency.

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Rating Errors to Avoid in Evaluations

- Halo Effect
  - Occurs when an evaluator allows one positive trait or characteristic of an employee to overshadow other aspects of performance
  - If an employee is highly skilled in one area, the evaluator may unconsciously rate them more positively across all performance dimensions
  - It distorts the accuracy of performance assessments, leading to inflated ratings and potentially overlooking areas needing improvement.

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Rating Errors to Avoid in Evaluations

- Leniency/Strictness Bias
  - Occurs when an evaluator consistently rates employees higher or lower than warranted, regardless of true performance
  - May result from personal tendencies, such as a desire to avoid conflict, *leniency bias*, or a belief in maintaining high standards, *strictness bias*
  - Makes it difficult to differentiate between high and low performers, potentially leads to unfair treatment or demotivation among employees.

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Rating Errors to Avoid in Evaluations

- Recency Bias
  - Occurs when the evaluator places undue emphasis on recent events or performance, which influence the overall assessment
  - Distorts the accuracy of the performance assessment, neglects the broader context of employee performance
  - Without documentation for the entire performance period, the employee will likely only be rated on the past couple of months because that is all the human mind will likely remember.

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Rating Errors to Avoid in Evaluations

- Similar to Me Bias
  - Occurs when the evaluator favors employees who are like them in terms of background, personality, etc.
  - Leads to higher ratings for employees who share commonalities with the evaluator, regardless of actual performance
  - Undermines the fairness and objectivity of performance assessments and disadvantages employees who do not fit the evaluator's preferred profile.

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Rating Errors to Avoid in Evaluations

- Central Tendency Bias
  - Occurs when the evaluator avoids extreme ratings and tends to cluster around the average
  - May stem from a desire to avoid confrontation
  - Flattens performance assessments, making it difficult to differentiate between high and low performers
  - Fails to provide meaningful feedback for employee development.

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Rating Errors to Avoid in Evaluations

- Comparison or Contrast
  - Occurs when a supervisor rates an employee by comparing them to other employees instead of evaluating them against established performance standards or objective criteria
  - The employee may receive an inflated or unfairly low rating based on how their peers perform, rather than their own performance
  - This distorts evaluations and reduces fairness and accuracy.

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Preparing for the Performance Evaluation

- Evaluations should:
  - Be tools for development. They are now mandated by TCOLE and should be taken seriously
  - Build mutual trust between supervisors and employees by promoting fairness, transparency, and ownership of performance
  - Help identify areas for skill development, training needs, leadership potential, and readiness for expanded duties.

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Preparing for the Performance Evaluation

- Gather Objective Performance Data
  - Disciplinary documentation (formal counseling, written reprimands)
  - Complaints that have been verified or substantiated
  - Compliments or commendations from coworkers, supervisors, or the public
  - Awards or formal recognition
  - Major contributions or achievements
  - Training completed (internal, external, mandated).

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Preparing for the Performance Evaluation

- Methods to maintain documentation of an employee's performance
  - OneNote folders – Creates a separate folder for each employee
  - Personnel software - Guardian Tracking, 360, etc.
  - Folders – Create a folder for each employee and place them in your locked desk or filing cabinet. As events happen, jot a note on a scratch piece of paper and drop it in the employee's file.

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Preparing for the Performance Evaluation



- Regardless of the method you choose, nothing should be placed in the employee's files that hasn't been discussed with them
- Regularly review the file to identify any repeated events that require attention.

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Preparing for the Performance Evaluation



- Review Alignment Materials
  - Evaluations should assess how the employee's work fulfills the responsibilities outlined in their job description and the overall objectives of the agency
  - Evaluations are not just about effort or attitude, but about measurable alignment with expected duties and organizational priorities.

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Preparing for the Performance Evaluation

- Key documents to review prior to the evaluation
  - The employee's job description and core duties
  - The previous evaluation and any goals that were set
  - The department's mission, vision, and values—do their actions support agency culture and priorities
  - This alignment ensures evaluations are grounded in expectations, not personal opinion.

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Preparing for the Performance Evaluation

- Final prep checklist
  - Avoid vague or subjective phrases such as *bad attitude* or *does a good job*
  - Use clear, behavior-based examples and documentation
  - When feasible, allow the employee to review the evaluation before the meeting to encourage a more thoughtful and productive discussion.

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Delivering the Performance Evaluation

- Highlight strengths
  - Highlight the employee's strengths and achievements
  - Focus on the following areas
    - Reference tangible outcomes that demonstrate initiative, efficiency, or high performance
    - Acknowledge professional strengths that contribute to success in their role
    - Recognize efforts that positively affect the work environment or community perception.

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Delivering the Performance Evaluation



- Discuss challenges honestly
  - The goal is to bring attention to issues in a way that is fair, specific, and solution-focused, without damaging trust or morale
  - Avoid vague or judgmental language and instead highlight observable behaviors that can be changed or improved.

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Delivering the Performance Evaluation

- Discuss challenges honestly
  - Be direct and constructive. Employees should understand exactly what the concern is and what steps they can take to address and improve it
  - Criticize the action, not the person. This emphasizes the employee's ability to make adjustments
  - Frame issues as opportunities for growth instead of personal failings.

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Delivering the Performance Evaluation

- Avoid these pitfalls
  - Words like *always, never,* or *bad attitude* can feel accusatory and unhelpful
  - Avoid calling someone *lazy, unprofessional,* or *difficult.* These attacks focus on character, not behavior
  - If employees leave unsure of what needs to change, the conversation has failed its purpose.

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Delivering the Performance Evaluation

- Establish Forward-Looking Goals
  - Make goals SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound
  - Encourage employee to develop their own goals
  - Joint goal-setting improves ownership and engagement.



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Delivering the Performance Evaluation

- Encourage Dialogue
  - Ask open-ended questions to encourage a meaningful conversation
  - Use EI strategies - empathy and self-awareness
  - Actively listen and understand the employee's perspective
  - If the employee expresses frustration, disappointment, or even anger, remain calm and open. Acknowledge their feelings without taking it personally or becoming combative.

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Delivering the Performance Evaluation

- End on a constructive and optimistic note
  - Reaffirm appreciation for their contributions
  - Express confidence in their growth
  - Clarify next steps (e.g., follow-up, support, development plan).



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Liability of Ineffective Performance Evaluation

- Risks of Ineffective Evaluations
  - Employees who receive generic or inaccurate evaluations may feel undervalued or treated unfairly
  - Strong performers may become disengaged, and weak performers may feel no need to improve
  - Avoiding difficult conversations or glossing over deficiencies enables ongoing problems to continue.

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Liability of Ineffective Performance Evaluation

- The Lasting Impact of Evaluations
  - Supervisors should assume that every evaluation could one day be reviewed by HR, attorneys, or even in court
  - Language should remain neutral, objective, and free from bias or personal judgments
  - Evaluations should contain enough concrete information that someone reading them years later can assess the performance of the employee.



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Causes of Poor Evaluations

- Common causes of poor evaluations
  - Inconsistent documentation
  - Vague, unhelpful language
- Bias or emotion-driven comments. Words like *lazy, has an attitude,* or *isn't liked by others* create a liability
- Ignoring widespread issues or praising underperformers to avoid confrontation creates a false record and hurts overall fairness.



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Effects on Performance from Ineffective Evaluations

- Effects on performance
  - When employees don't understand what is expected of them, performance suffers
  - Feedback that lacks structure leads to serious performance issues, including
    - Repetition of poor behaviors
    - Low accountability
    - Increased errors and risks to safety or citizen service.



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Effects on Morale From Ineffective Performance Evaluations

- Effects on Morale
  - High performers become disengaged when they receive the same *meets expectations* rating as underperforming coworkers
  - Employees begin to question leadership motives, leading to
    - Resentment
    - Rumors of favoritism
    - Complaints to HR or external oversight boards.

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Effects on Supervisor Credibility From Ineffective Performance Evaluations

- Damage to supervisor credibility
  - When supervisors fail to uphold the standards, employees begin to lose trust in their leadership. This can happen when:
    - Weak performers aren't held accountable and face no consequences
    - No one can earn a top rating because the criteria for high performance are never explained or are used inconsistently
    - There is a lack of feedback, which signals that the supervisor isn't invested in their growth or success.

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Liability of Ineffective Performance Evaluation

- Damage to supervisor's credibility
  - When a supervisor has a history of generic performance evaluations, it becomes difficult to justify serious personnel actions
  - During grievances, arbitration, or legal proceedings
    - Evaluations that lack clear documentation of performance can be used to challenge the fairness or legitimacy of the discipline
    - Arbitrators or oversight boards may side with the employee if there is no documented pattern of feedback or progressive discipline.

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Liability of Ineffective Performance Evaluation



- Legal and compliance risks
  - Performance evaluations may become official records that are reviewed in high-stakes settings, including
    - EEOC complaints - Inconsistencies or vague documentation can undermine the agency's defense
    - Disciplinary hearings - A lack of documentation may be viewed as a failure to manage properly.

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Liability of Ineffective Performance Evaluation

- Legal and Compliance Risks
  - In lawsuits involving negligent supervision or misconduct, evaluations are reviewed to determine whether supervisors ignored warning signs or failed to act on known issues
  - Evaluations that ignore prior warnings, complaints, or performance patterns or show no concerns, despite a history of complaints, counseling, or known issues, may be viewed as:
    - Dishonest - suggesting the supervisor concealed problems or failed to document them truthfully
    - Negligent - indicating a lack of follow-through, oversight, or awareness.

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Liability of Ineffective Performance Evaluation

- Damage to Citizen Trust
  - Unaddressed poor behavior leads to serious consequences, including:
    - Use of force complaints
    - Mishandled calls or reports
    - Unprofessional conduct captured on video
  - Failure to correct these issues gives the impression that the agency tolerates misconduct, which undermines public trust and signals a lack of accountability.

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Coaching

- A collaborative process designed to help team members strengthen skills, overcome challenges, and achieve both short-term and long-term goals
- Relies on consistent dialogue, constructive feedback, and encouragement to build confidence and professional growth
- Emphasizes development, learning, and future success
- It is not used for corrective action.

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Coaching

- Coaching is used to develop, counseling is used to correct, but both require:
  - Professionalism
  - Preparation
  - Clear, respectful communication
  - Emotional intelligence.



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Coaching

- Coaching is a supportive, future-focused leadership approach useful for:
  - Skill development - Use coaching when an employee needs to improve or strengthen specific job-related skills
  - Motivation - Coaching can help re-engage employees who may be feeling burned out, disconnected, or disinterested in their work
  - Confidence building - Coaching is valuable when an employee is capable but hesitant to take on new or greater responsibilities.

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Coaching

- Best practices for using Coaching
  - Create psychological safety where employees feel safe to speak honestly
  - Use active listening and observe nonverbal cues
  - Be transparent about goals.



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Coaching



- Coaching Techniques
  - Use open-ended questions such as *What strategies have you tried so far?* or *What do you think would work differently next time?*
  - Give timely, behavior-based feedback by addressing specific actions rather than general traits.

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Coaching

- Coaching techniques
  - Offer resources and opportunities to practice skills - training, mentorships, assignments
  - Set clear, achievable goals
  - Check in regularly to reinforce growth, celebrate progress, and adjust strategies as needed.

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Counseling

- A supportive, structured dialogue between a supervisor and an employee
- Designed to address personal or professional issues that are affecting performance
- Emphasizes understanding, support, and corrective action when needed.

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Counseling

- Key Characteristics of Counseling
  - Addresses personal and professional issues
  - Recognizes that off-duty stressors (family, financial, health) or workplace challenges (conflict, morale, workload) can influence performance and behavior
  - Supervisor provides employees access to assistance such as Employee Assistance Programs (EAP), peer support, or training resources.

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Counseling

- Key Characteristics of Counseling
  - Conversations remain professional and centered on observable actions and their effects on performance
  - Employees are expected to take ownership of their actions, while supervisors ensure they have the support needed to succeed
  - Counseling helps address issues before they escalate into formal discipline or long-term problems.

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Counseling



- Use when an employee's behavior or performance requires corrective action
- Typically involves documenting the concern, setting clear expectations, and warning of potential consequences if the issue continues

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Counseling

- Use counseling for policy violations, including:
  - Chronic tardiness or unexcused absences
  - Failure to follow procedures or policies
  - Unprofessional or disrespectful conduct toward coworkers, supervisors, or the public
- In these cases, counseling reinforces expectations, addresses the seriousness of the behavior, and puts the employee on notice that improvement is required.

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Counseling

- Use counseling when an employee's work fails to meet minimum expectations, especially when it affects operations, safety, or service, including:
  - Missing deadlines or submitting incomplete work
  - Making repeated or serious errors in tasks that require accuracy
  - Not following through on assigned responsibilities
- Counseling identifies the gap between expectations and actual performance, and it documents the steps being taken to address it.

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Counseling

- Use counseling when prior coaching has not resulted in meaningful improvement. This applies when:
  - The same performance or behavior issue occurs again after feedback and support
  - The employee fails to follow through on agreed-upon improvement plans
  - The situation is becoming disruptive to the team or organization
- Counseling sends a clear message: the issue must be corrected, and continued failure may lead to formal discipline.

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Counseling

- Indicators of Problems
  - Change in performance, attention or concentration
  - Deliberate acts of misconduct
  - Refusal to obey orders
  - Becomes withdrawn.



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Counseling

- Know your personnel by observing conduct and appearance
- Be alert to behavioral or performance changes
- Employ counseling techniques sanctioned by the department
- Document discussions.

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Counseling

- Counseling best practices:
  - Don't store up issues for annual reviews
  - Address concerns soon after they occur
  - Do not match an employee's emotional response
  - Retain a written record summarizing what was discussed and what steps were agreed upon and have them acknowledge receiving it.

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Counseling

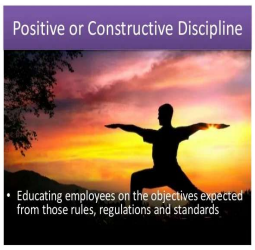
- Counseling Techniques
  - Connect the issue to performance
  - Explain how it affects team members
  - Offer resources and support
  - Set clear improvement expectations moving forward by explaining timelines and consequences
  - Document the counseling session and revisit the issue at agreed-upon intervals to track progress and provide continued support.

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Strategies for Using Feedback Tools

Counseling is often necessary when behavior has crossed from *could do better* into *must improve now*.



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Performance Improvement Plan

- A structured and formal process to address persistent performance issues
- A final opportunity to guide employees toward improvement with clear expectations, measurable goals, and documented support
- Ensures transparency and fairness for the employee, while protecting the supervisor and agency.

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Performance Improvement Plan

- When to Use a PIP
  - After informal coaching or counseling has failed
  - For ongoing, documented issues that are specific, observable, and supported by documentation
  - When improvement is realistically achievable with support and effort.

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Performance Improvement Plan

- Key Components of a PIP
  - Clearly stated performance deficiencies
  - Specific, measurable objectives for improvement
  - A defined, realistic timeline with progress reviews
  - Support and resources offered
  - Potential consequences if improvement is not achieved.



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Performance Improvement Plan

A PIP is a *second chance*, an opportunity to reset and demonstrate improvement, rather than a step toward termination. Tone, consistency, and fairness are critical to ensure the employee sees the process as supportive.



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Delivering a PIP

- Keep accurate records of all relevant performance-related interactions. Supervisors should document key details such as:
  - The specific performance or behavior issue
  - The date(s) the issue occurred
  - Any coaching or counseling conversations held
  - The employee's response or explanation
  - Any improvement plans or expectations that were discussed. This includes both informal coaching and formal counseling.

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Delivering a PIP

- Provide the written plan and walk through each component together
- Do not rush the meeting; allow time for the employee to process and ask questions
- Show empathy
- Convey that your intent is to help the employee succeed
- Avoid a punitive tone, frame the meeting as a supportive and professional collaboration
- Express confidence in their ability to meet expectations.

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Delivering a PIP



- Be transparent
  - Clearly define the specific issue, its impact on the team or agency, and the needed change
  - Provide tangible, observable examples
  - Example: *On three separate occasions in the past month, radio transmissions were not acknowledged, causing delays in field response.*

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Delivering a PIP

- Set Clear Expectations
  - Tie performance goals to the job description, policies, and measurable standards
  - Define what success looks like, how it will be measured, and when it is expected
  - Provide necessary resources (e.g., peer mentoring, retraining, check-in meetings).

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Delivering a PIP

- Invite Feedback
  - Allow the employee to voice concerns, ask clarifying questions, or share barriers
  - Listen actively and adjust when reasonable, without compromising standards
  - Example: *What resources or changes do you feel would help you meet these goals?*

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Delivering a PIP

Require Acknowledgment

- The employee must sign the PIP, confirming they received and understood it
- Clarify this is not their agreement, but an acknowledgment of receipt.



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Delivering a PIP

- Monitor Progress
  - Use objective criteria to determine their progress
  - Schedule formal check-ins (e.g., weekly or biweekly) to evaluate and support progress
  - Adjust the approach if needed but remain consistent in your expectations
  - Hold them accountable for the results.

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Delivering a PIP



- Possible Outcomes
  - If they are successful, celebrate improvement, remove the PIP, and maintain coaching support
  - If they are unsuccessful or if there is no improvement, initiating reassignment or disciplinary processes.

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Attitude Problems

- Tie the attitude to a performance problem
- Discuss the issue with the employee following policy and counseling procedures
- Document all conversations
- Be prepared for termination if all else fails.



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Unit Review Questions

- What performance management tools were discussed in class?
- List two strategies that can be used to assist you in conducting effective performance evaluations.
- List two liabilities of ineffective performance evaluations.
- List two effective approaches for conducting an effective performance improvement plan.

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