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### FRONT AND CENTER: *Conducting Employee Performance Reviews*

*Duck and cover.* Many managers shrink when the issue of evaluating team members arises. It's no secret that a number of small business owners routinely postpone formal assessments for as long as possible, and some even forgo them altogether. The reasons for this avoidance range from not liking confrontation to not seeing such appraisals as essential.

Since business school enrollment is not a prerequisite for becoming an entrepreneur, the value of systematically reviewing personnel isn't apparent to everyone who heads a company. With seemingly too little time to handle even the daily necessities, it's common to find the evaluation process treated as hardly more than an inconvenience. "Unsold" leaders don't commit the time and effort that building and maintaining a high performance management atmosphere calls for. Generally, business consultants charge this lack of buy-in to a one-dimensional understanding of "performance management." Most review-averse executives are apprehensive of the discomfort typically associated with annual evaluations because they haven't considered the weight on the other end of the scale. In most instances, they haven't slowed down long enough to discover the overarching benefits of skillfully critiquing employees throughout the year.

In "*How to Conduct Annual Employee Reviews*" (*Inc.com* - 12/1/08), Rick Galbreath, president of Bloomington, Illinois-based Performance Growth Partners, says, "Unfortunately, very few companies get performance management. They think it's all about the appraisal form and the process. These are important, but good performance management starts well before the evaluation itself." Leading consultants agree it begins with a quality job description, noting that detailing position specifics makes not only for good business plan content and ad copy but also establishes a roadmap for work execution.

A well-crafted and solidly-followed description signals both concern for the organization and care for the individual. In truly competitive outfits, job descriptions serve as cornerstones for sound operations. They anchor performance in every slot from CEO to laborer, providing vital benchmarks for gauging success. In these companies, administrators make sure each employee knows that assigned duties are closely aligned with job descriptions. From the first day, they frame their culture as one grounded in continual communication and periodic review. High on the agenda is erasing the "singular" feel from the review process. Whoever handles orientations advises each newcomer that besides providing informal day-to-day coaching, managers will, at regular intervals, reiterate company process and policies, highlighting and documenting individual strengths and weaknesses.

Doing so offers an added benefit for executives. According to Susan Lessack, a labor and employment law partner of Philadelphia-based Pepper Hamilton, LLP, handling performance matters in such a front-and-center fashion also cushions the company should legal action be taken. "The best defense in a case brought by an employee who was terminated for poor performance is a strong record reflecting that the employer advised the employee of his or her performance problems and afforded the employee opportunities to improve." ("*Tips for Minimizing Lawsuit Risks*" [*HR Focus* - 6/10])

Overall, this practice can yield huge dividends since research shows that one of the greatest productivity inhibitors is not being given constructive feedback on a consistent basis. Most workers genuinely want to know how well they're

doing their jobs. So making fairly frequent assessments a priority can safeguard your staff's morale. And, certainly, in economic times where raises and bonuses are rarities, intangibles count more than ever. Appreciating that paychecks might look similar from one company to the next, top performers, especially, are drawn to environments that stimulate their desire to produce winning outcomes for their team. "How to Conduct Annual Employee Reviews" mentions one recent survey finding that small companies with good employee management practices saw 23 percent higher profits than those that fell short in this area.

If you don't have a formal appraisal system in place, build one with your employees help. Working together to define tasks and performance goals enhances the entire evaluation experience especially if your annual form has a self-rating segment and includes categories that focus on the individual's personal development aspirations. Even when you must address poor performance, the chances of employees being receptive will be greater because you've shown respect for their input and growth. Recall of this gesture, along with your tactfully identifying a couple of specific examples of deficiencies, can lessen the negativity of the year-end review.











And while the coaching relationship you've nurtured for twelve months should mitigate any surprise factor, occasionally you might find a significant gap between an employee's self-assessment and the management evaluation. In these cases, do your best to use the review discussion as yet another teachable and, hopefully, inspirational moment. Just be sure to lead with something positive and end on as good a note as possible.

Not underestimating a performance management system founded on inclusion, sensitivity, communication and documentation can have business-building consequences.

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## MARTA Business Opportunities

[Click here for current bid opportunities](#)

***The procurement and contract opportunities noted below can be found on the Internet at [www.itsmarta.com](http://www.itsmarta.com). Because dates for noted events are subject to change, you should contact MARTA's Contracts & Procurement and Materials Division at (404) 848-5131 for verification.***

NAME OF BID/PROPOSAL	CONTRACT NUMBER	BID/PROPOSAL OPENING/DEADLINE DATE (Eastern Standard Time)
Expression of Interest and Statement of	A / E 18466	JUNE 11, 2010 at 3:00 PM

***Prospective vendors are urged to visit MARTA s web site for weekly updates.***

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## **Announcements**

### **WEDA WORKSHOPS**

The Women s Economic Development Agency (WEDA) offers various workshops to small business owners. For registration information, contact WEDA at (678) 904-2201 or <http://www.weda-atlanta.org/registration.htm>.

### **JUNE - JULY 2010**

#### **Construction Skills Development Institute (CSDI) Summer Internship Program**

For additional information call (404) 827-9677 or via E-mail: [info@alliance4u.org](mailto:info@alliance4u.org)

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### **U. S. SMALL BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION**

#### **DISASTER LOANS - GEORGIA #11886 & #11887 (Disaster #GA-00027)**

For the Counties of Bartow, Carroll, Catoosa, Chattooga, Cherokee, Cobb, Coweta, DeKalb, Douglas, Fulton, Gwinnett, Heard, Newton, Paulding, Rockdale, Stephens and Walker; and for Economic Injury Only the contiguous counties of Banks, Barrow, Butts, Clayton, Dade, Dawson, Fayette, Floyd, Forsyth, Franklin, Gordon, Habersham, Hall, Haralson, Henry, Jackson, Jasper, Meriwether, Morgan, Pickens, Polk, Spalding, Troup, Walton and Whitfield in the State of Georgia; contiguous counties of Cherokee, Cleburne, and DeKalb:

**Filing Deadline for applications for Economic Injury: June 24, 2010**

**For More Information, contact SBA at 1-800-659-2955 or [www.sba.gov](http://www.sba.gov).**

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#### MARTA Information

All public events (i.e., bid openings and conferences) are held at the MARTA Headquarters Building, 2424 Piedmont Road, NE, Atlanta, Georgia 30324, unless otherwise indicated.

Most solicitations may be downloaded free of charge and are available via the web at [www.itsmarta.com](http://www.itsmarta.com). Solicitations with drawings may be ordered for the above noted contracts via telephone by contacting MARTA s Documentation Control Branch at (404) 848-5580 or other sources as indicated.

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