EVALUATING DYSFUNCTIONAL POLICE PERFORMANCE

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Dr. Van Meter's expertise is in performance technology and evaluation systems. He developed Z-Base: Performance Evaluation System for private and public sector. He works with counsel as an expert witness, reviews, discipline and termination cases, and develops standard operating policies and procedures manuals for agencies nationwide.

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A Zero-Based Approach

By

D.J. VAN METER, Ph.D.

*This book is dedicated to the memory of
Dr. Thomas Gilbert, father of Human Performance
Technology, and all scholars and practitioners
who have been influenced by his work.*

PREFACE

Performance evaluations can be one of the most important and effective means for giving recognition, improving future performance, and justifying personnel decisions. However, in order for evaluations to be effective and defensible they must satisfy a number of standards established by technical experts and courts alike. Among these standards are:

- The rater should be capable of observing the performance being rated.
- Raters should be trained in the system and in how to rate performance using the system.
- Objective (i.e., measurable without human bias) measures should be used. Vague and subjective standards undergo heightened levels of scrutiny by the courts.
- Avoid using single rater systems with subjective measures and employees rated are different from the rater in sex, race, national origin, or religion. They will be subjected to a higher level of scrutiny by the courts.
- Written policies and procedures should be provided for raters, and management must ensure that such policies and procedures are followed.
- Employees should have a right to challenge an evaluation score they believe to be unfair or inaccurate. When possible, the employee should be given a chance to improve the performance before receiving an unfavorable score.

The system you are about to learn meets all of these criteria- and more. In fact, if you study the information presented in this book and follow its guidelines, Z-Base will benefit your organization in at least five ways. It will:

- Remove the subjectivity found in nearly all other evaluation systems.
- Enable fair and legally defensible decision-making based on evaluation information.
- Increase management's credibility and trust with employees.
- Improve handling employee complaints.
- Increase employee performance.

However, Z-Base is not a substitute for good management. It cannot:

- Make decisions for you. It can only give you the information needed to make defensible decisions.
- Make you popular with all of your employees. Not all people like to perform, nor do they want to be held accountable for their lack of performance.
- Replace the need to supervise and pay attention to the needs of your employees.

Furthermore, Z-Base will not improve your shooting score, golf score, make you a better guitar player, storyteller, or bank robber. There is a good chance that you probably already knew that.

Z-Base is short for Zero-Base. The name is appropriate because it describes a system that objectively measures and *rates performance*, determines if improvement is needed, and if so, *evaluates improvement*.[1] If so, the costs associated with the improvement effort do not affect the employee's final evaluation score. It will remain at zero, a perfect score. If improvement failed to occur, then (and only then) all costs associated with the improvement effort become the employee's evaluation score. While this may sound like a negative way to approach performance evaluation, I believe that after you have studied the information presented in this book you will agree with me that it actually makes a great deal of sense.

Chapter One presents an overview of the system. After reading this chapter, you will understand why a zero-based approach to performance evaluation is needed. This chapter in conjunction with the information located in Appendix N provides answers to many of the

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1. Throughout the book, an effort has been made to distinguish between rating performance and evaluating improvement. The intention is to convey that these are treated as two separate and distinct processes in this system.

questions that are asked about this procedure. The information presented in this chapter should be used for conducting orientation training for all employees in your organization.

Chapter Two contains a review of the technical and legal issues associated with performance evaluation systems and how Z-Base addresses those issues. Case law is used to support management's rights to establish performance standards and to evaluate performance against those standards. Unfortunately, not enough is said today about management's rights in this area, and my hopes are that the information presented here will serve to help fill that void.

Chapter Three provides information for developing the proper organizational infrastructure (e.g., mission, code of ethics, values statements, job descriptions) that must be in place before implementing Z-Base, or any evaluation system for that matter. An organization's infrastructure establishes the legal validity required by courts should a system come under judicial review. Information in this chapter should be presented to all executive and supervisory personnel.

Chapter Four instructs how to develop objective Priority Performance Measures (PPM's). Measures are at the heart of every evaluation system. They are the system's rating and evaluation items. The information in this chapter, in conjunction with the numerous examples provided in the *Directory of Performance Measures* located in Appendix J, will establish a solid foundation for Z-Base.

Chapter Five explains how functional and dysfunctional performance data is gathered, analyzed, and rated. Detailed information is presented in Appendix A for developing *Performance Profiles*, a computerized data tracking and rating system designed for Z-Base. The information presented in this appendix assumes that the reader has a basic understanding of how computerized spreadsheet programs (e.g., Microsoft Excel) function.

Chapter Six is devoted to explaining how the Problem-Solving Conference (PSC) is conducted when a rating indicates that an employee's performance needs improved. PSC's are central to Z-Base and ensure that employees are given a fair opportunity to correct problem (i.e., dysfunctional) performances, before the employee's evaluation score (i.e., Z-Score) is affected.

Chapter Seven is devoted to Z-Scores and their calculation. A Z-Score is an employee's final evaluation score. This score is a direct count of the administrative costs associated with an employee's failed

improvement efforts and disciplinary action taken against the employee during the evaluation cycle. All employees are encouraged to read the information presented in this chapter. This information in conjunction with that in Chapter One will help to alleviate concerns employees may have about the system and how it will affect them.

Chapter Eight, the final chapter, presents a plan for implementing Z-Base within the typical police services organization. This plan is grounded in organizational change research and experiences I have encountered over the last several years helping agencies improve their evaluation systems.

As you study the information presented in this work it will be helpful to keep this point in mind. This system is based on the premise that *all* employees deserve a good evaluation score and *are guaranteed* that they will receive one at the end of the evaluation cycle–unless they have a performance problem and cannot or will not fix it.

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