



ENTRY TO THE NEW ZEALAND POST MANAGEMENT EXCELLENCE AWARDS

CATEGORY - THE NEW ZEALAND POST PEOPLE MANAGEMENT AWARD

Introduction

The Council's staff performance appraisal system was a "hit and miss" affair in the years prior to 2002. Some staff received an appraisal and remuneration adjustments as a result, whilst others did not and if they belonged to a collective agreement, received the adjustment secured by the relevant Union.

In 2002 a radical overhaul of the appraisal system was undertaken. In the years since then, every staff member has had an appraisal with their Manager.

In December 2002 a Code of Ethics and Values were introduced. Key values were incorporated into the appraisal system so that they could be a "living pulse" in the organisation and not just another ad-hoc document that was a Human Resource Department adornment and nothing else.

Performance competencies were developed for both management and non-management staff. Seven of the competencies are the same for both levels of staff. These are:

- Contribution to positive working relationships
- Customer service
- Initiative
- Team work
- Health and safety
- Quality
- Output

The system has been fine tuned over the past couple of years to take into account health and safety requirements and job description updates. The job description update is valuable as it ensures that each staff members' job description is current and reflects their current duties.

A well established procedure is that non-management staff are appraised first, followed by middle Managers and then senior Managers. The quality of appraisals conducted by Managers forms part of their own appraisal with their Manager. This ensures there is a standard of quality and consistency throughout the organisation.

The Need for and Expected Benefits of the Project and how it furthers the Council's Vision and Strategic Direction

The vision of the Gore District Council is to provide an environment that allows people to enjoy the lifestyle and culture of their choice.

Part of the Council's mission in order to achieve its vision, is to encourage participation by the people as well as providing an efficient, quality service and facilities.

For this to happen, the staff of the organisation are encouraged to provide excellent customer service and show respect for the public as well as internal customers. They also need to exhibit the ability to communicate with them in a polite, informative, positive and helpful manner.

Making a contribution to positive working relationships is defined as always looking for, expecting and encouraging a positive and friendly environment; making sure communication is appropriate, clear, concise and timely; recognising that we are not always right and that others have solutions or points of view that are valuable; treating others in a way that is respectful and polite. This is a key value which is important, irrespective of the discipline or the level in which an employee may be working.

Customer service and excellence and continuous improvement are also important values. This latter one is defined as engaging in learning and development which supports and motivates us to achieve results; being conscientious, having high standards for personal performance and always striving to excel.

Effective Project Management Techniques

The Council has implemented an "appraisal season" which takes place during May and June each year with any adjustments to remuneration taking effect from 1 July of that year.

The process is very efficient and streamlined which is paramount to ensuring that appraisals for non-management staff are completed promptly and within the 30 June deadline. Management staff are completed generally by the end of August once the financial results of the year under review are known.

Each Manager arranges appointments with their staff and after the appraisal meeting has taken place, the final version is written up before being presented to the staff member for signature and/or comment. It is then sent to the relevant General Manager and then the Chief Executive. Once it is returned to the Human Resources Manager, a copy is provided to the staff member, any remuneration adjustment is actioned through payroll and the appraisal document filed on the employees file.

A Participatory Approach to Communicating with and getting "buy-in" from Stakeholders associated with the Project

Whilst it is acknowledged that in the early years of this appraisal system there were a lot of staff who were very wary of the impact it would have on them personally, over the past 2-3 years particularly there has been a heightened

sense of goodwill throughout the organisation towards the appraisal process. New staff are encouraged to learn an annual appraisal is part of our culture.

Self-assessment sheets are provided for employees. Whilst there is no compulsion to complete these, it does provide for a more structured platform for discussion at the appraisal meeting.

The system has been used as a credible trail of tracking performance, setting objectives and formulating training plans for each staff member. Staff have come to appreciate the interest that not only their Manager takes in their personal development, but also their General Manager and perhaps more importantly, the Chief Executive. Being a smaller Council allows this to occur.

The opportunity for training and other professional development is also welcomed by staff although it is not limited to only being finalised at appraisal time. The Council has a firm resolve to ensure that staff are able to maximise any relevant training opportunities that arise during the year. It is up to the employee's Manager to ensure that the training plan is met as it will be part of the Manager's own performance objectives. It is expected that the Manager in conjunction with the HR Manager, will source relevant training opportunities.

Training plans are prepared in accordance with the Council's Conference and Training Policy.

Excellence and continuous improvement is a key driver to encouraging staff at all levels to go outside their comfort zone and achieve professional development qualifications that assist in their roles. In fact, some staff have moved out of non-management roles into management ones by virtue of being encouraged to "break out" of their positions and grow and develop into integral and valued members of the organisation.

Examples of comments from managerial staff who have benefited from this approach are as follows:

"With a combination of learning to delegate, more confidence in my abilities and the audit of the rates database now behind me, I can concentrate on the job at hand and am really enjoying the challenges associated with this."

"Although it has been an extremely busy year, I am looking forward to future challenges and have really enjoyed working in a positive and happy workplace."

"I thank xxx sincerely for his generous and kind comments and unwavering support of my new role. His willingness to offer suggestions and advice is very much appreciated and has been most helpful. The past year has been challenging and rewarding. I am looking forward to the year ahead and increasing my HR knowledge and practices as well as making a difference in other areas to the benefit of the Council and its staff as a whole."

Delighted with such a positive appraisal. Would like to record my sincere appreciation for the great opportunities and challenges presented to me by xxx and for his continued support over the past year. It is a pleasure to be part of such a great team, due in no small part to his leadership and encouragement. Thank you!

An example of comments received from non-management staff:

Essential Services Employee – “No problems with work, happy, enjoys the job, good variety”.

Parks and Reserves Employee – “Happy with my current role”.

Aquatic Services Employee – “Pool is improving in customer service. Great to see equipment being supplied. Promotion of the facility has gone up 100%. Staff morale probably the best since the pool opened”.

i-Site Visitor Centre Employee – “Love working here”.

An example of comments provided by the Chief Executive to a non-management employee:

“A very promising employee. xx is already showing terrific signs of being a polished professional. Keep forging ahead!”

An example of comments provided by the Chief Executive to a management employee:

“xx has blossomed over the past two years and the last 12 months especially. She is one of a few great success stories at the Council in terms of being given an opportunity to grow, develop and shine. I value our working relationship and look forward to her continued progression over the coming year. Well done!”

Professionalism is paramount at the Gore District Council for all employees. It is defined as maintaining high personal standards; being honest, reliable and credible; demonstrating a high level of skill, expertise and technical knowledge in one’s professional field; enjoying the respect of fellow staff members; maintaining composure under pressure.

Innovation and Originality in the Specific Award Category Area

The system is consistent, undertaken at the same time each year and it tracks employee’s abilities and achievements in detail.

The templates that have been developed for Managers and non-management staff have been customised to the organisation’s specific needs and linked to the values of the Council. The process has been designed to drive up performance levels and capture any potential problems or niggles before they blossom. It is vital in ensuring that an employee’s training, development and job description are not lost sight of. Prior to this, there were multiple instances of many staff either having no job description or one that was considerably out of date which led to confusion over just what the employee’s role was supposed to be.

This is not an off the shelf system, but something that has endured now for five years and is now considered “the way we do things around here.” The signals sent to the staff are that good performance will be acknowledged and rewarded and there is no room for passengers with bad attitudes.

We believe it is innovative by virtue of its simplicity. Other systems we have seen are cumbersome which in turn dampens enthusiasm for all parties.

Successful Results, in both Financial and Non-Financial Terms

In accordance with a prescribed management policy on remuneration, adjustments are considered appropriate following consistently good performance in all aspects of a staff members' job. All Council employees are entitled to a fair and equitable remuneration as assessed through the Council's remuneration system.

As well, all remuneration, job evaluation and performance appraisal processes are to be open, fair and transparent.

The appraisal system has enhanced the working environment and encourages and enables employees to develop to their full potential.

All appraisals are signed off by the relevant General Manager as well as the Chief Executive.

That the Project was a "Good, Sensible and Right Thing to do"

The appraisal system developed has resulted in a rich body of information for each staff member's career and personal achievements which have and will continue to be used to plot further changes in their job and career.

From an individual's point of view, a perusal of their personal file would be enlightening in seeing their personal growth over a 3-5 year timeline. No one is disenfranchised no matter where they work. Staff now believe that performance is important and does matter in the organisation.

Summary

We believe that whilst every organisation has its own set of values, the basic framework of this system and its application can be readily transplanted into and used by other organisations.

The process has been subject to a number of enquiries from fellow HR professionals who have been interested in developing a system at their own Council. By sharing the information, other Councils have and will adapt it for their own use.


The system has enabled people to realise their full potential. Employees do have a right of appeal to their senior Manager and ultimately to the Chief Executive, although this has rarely occurred over the past five years.

Finally, the system has recently been recognised by the two Unions associated with the Gore District Council – the Public Service Association and the Amalgamated Workers Union. They have both agreed by virtue of the appraisal system, that future increases under the collective agreements will be determined by movement in the Consumer Price Index. This is an acknowledgment of the consistency and reliability of the performance appraisal system by the individual members over and above any cost of living adjustment.

Appendices

- *A. Template and competency definitions for Non-Management Staff*
- *B. Template and competency definitions for Management Staff*

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