

Performance Management I Transcript

Welcome and thank you for standing by. At this time parties will be able to listen only. Today's conference is being recorded. If you have any objections, please disconnect at this time. And now I'll turn the call over to your host today - Mr. Tony John. Sir, you may begin.

Thank you very much. Thank you for your patience in waiting. We wanted to give people extra time to sign into the meeting. We will make sure that your time is well used. We will not go over time I assure you. We will use your two hours today to make sure that at the end of today, we want to make sure that you know more than you did before about human resource management governing principles within the federal government and performance management.

My name is Tony John. I am an HR consultant with OPM. And I -- I have worked on this project with Allison Savage.

I am an HR consultant. I work with various agencies on their performance management issues, but also my thing is virtual training. And so I make a pledge to you -- this will be the most interesting virtual training of a performance management you've ever had. And I know that's a low bar but I am excited to talk to you today. I think at the end of today - my goal will be -- I am going to ask all of you -- and hopefully some of you will be brave enough to answer the question. How many of you feel that you have learned at least one thing, one practical piece of knowledge?

Or at least maybe not learned something, but that you've got a new thought that maybe you didn't have before about something you can do better to manage your team better than you did before. And if I can do that then we have succeeded -- we've succeeded during these two hours.

To start off today's training -- this is not an average virtual training. I want you to point your right index finger in the air, point at the ceiling, and draw the number six. Fantastic! You've done a wonderful job. Congratulations. Now, you can stop writing the number six.

I want you, with your left foot lifted a few inches off the ground, to draw clockwise circles with your foot. Draw clockwise circles. Keep drawing those circles. Now add the first action in drawing with your right index finger the number six on the ceiling. You got that? Were you able to do it?

Well, congratulations. If you were able to do that, you are in the minority of human beings. You are able to multitask. Let me just tell you that research shows multitasking is essentially a myth that our Western culture has created. It is really a fancy way of saying that you are able to do two things less well than you would otherwise be able to do than if you did them alone. So if you think that you are a great multitasker just know -- and don't tell this to my wife-- because she tells me she's a great multitasker. But really, if you want to really do a job well, you need to focus on one thing at a time.

With that in mind here are some guidelines for today. Please close out your Outlook and your other Internet tabs. If we are really going to have a legitimate virtual training where something is learned, you'll need to eliminate those other distractions. But also, outside of eliminating the other distractions,

I need you to engage as much as possible. Now, I apologize because there are up to 200 people on the phone lines and our phone lines are muted to start off the training. So people won't be able to engage by asking the questions out loud over the phone.

However, I will be asking throughout the training “poll questions” that I need you to answer so we can engage your brain in different ways. If all you did was listen to me talk -- and I think I am engaging and interesting and pretty funny -- but if all you did was listen, you won't learn nearly as much as if you engage and think and answer some of the questions that I give you.

Also, there is a Q&A function at the top of your screen you will see in this bluish-gray bar at the top that says Q&A. If you click on that, you can type in questions to me, and I will answer them throughout the training if I see them. But then I will also answer questions -- I will type out answers during the 10 minute break we will take in the middle of this training, and I'll also answer them at the end of the training. So, if you have a question and I am not answering things, you can ask it via this Q&A functionality.

Also, another functionality that you need to be aware of is at the top right hand of your screen there is a handout button. It looks like three white pieces of paper. If you click on it you will see that there is a whole bunch of uploaded handouts that you can upload to your computer at any time during the training. Once the training ends you won't have access to these. You can also e-mail me and e-mail Allison Savage from Rural Development and get access to these but you can download them during the training at any time. You will see the first document there is the slides for this training which is usually the most common question I get --How can I get the slides?

You can click on the file on this handout page and upload it or download it to your own computer. And again, you can do that during any point of today's training.

Now, we -- like any good agenda -- like any good training, have to have an agenda because I have to tell you what I'm going to teach you, then I'm going to teach you and then at the end I'm going to tell you what I taught you.

This is just one good way teachers make sure people learn the things they need to learn. So we are going to talk relatively quickly about human resource management principles that are the foundation of really all HR actions in the government and all the human capital things that we do in the government, and then after that, we'll start talking about performance management and really the importance of writing measurable performance standards. We are going to talk about the two biggest gaps that I see as a consultant to many agencies.

The two biggest gaps I see in performance management is “writing performance standards “ that are measurable and useful and valid and also “giving good performance feedback” to employees. So, those are the biggest gaps I see across the federal government. So if we can improve in those areas, you will have a marked improvement over the average manager in the federal government.

So, first, like I said, we are going to be talking about federal supervision and human resource management principles. And since you all work for the government and you are all brilliant, you instantly recognize the picture on the screen. This is a picture of President James Garfield. President Garfield, he was -- up until Garfield was president, we didn't have anything -- there really weren't what we call merit principles in place in government. And so, presidents and politicians were able to just hire cronies and their friends mainly to do work in Washington.

And President Garfield found this appalling so he instituted what he called -- were principals of merit, that managers should be fair, that hiring officials should be fair to all applicants and all employees. Everyone needed to be treated with equity no matter what their political affiliations were, and that people should be hired or let go or hired and retained based on the work that they do. Whether or not they achieved the results. An interesting enough, Garfield ends up -- the reason why you might have even heard of Garfield, he wasn't President for that long. He was assassinated because he refused to hire a man by the name of Charles Guiteau, and Guiteau shot him because he refused to hire him. And Guiteau -- he was crazy, so that is probably the reason why Garfield refused.

In the end, his merit principles -- he ended up being kind of a martyr for some of those principles. Very quickly, we are going to go over them. If you have questions about merit system principles and the prohibited practices, feel free to e-mail me. But there's also a lot of information on OPM.gov. I'm going to go over these to the extent possible that time allows.

The first merit system principle is that managers are responsible for recruiting, hiring, promoting people because they are actually good at their jobs and not because they are buddy-buddy with them.

Second, they are supposed to treat applicants and all employees fairly. They're not allowed to -- because you like someone -- it is against merit system principles to give them favorable treatment.

Third, when employees do equal work, when they do the same job, they should get the same pay. I actually see this as one of the more problematic principles currently in the government today. It is difficult sometimes for some agencies. It is important -- there is a sacred trust as federal employees, as we use tax dollars from the public.

Forth --then we must maintain integrity in conduct and concern for that same public. So there is a sacred trust that we have when we use that money, and we should act according to that promise that we've made to do our jobs and protect the Constitution.

Five-- managers must manage employees as efficiently and effectively as possible. Not only do we want to hire and bring on employees who do their work well, but another principle six-- is we actually want to keep them in their jobs in government. And so we should do things in order to try and keep them.

Seven--We also want to educate and train employees, not because it is out of the goodness of our hearts and because we are nice people. We want to train employees because it results in better performance, and people will get better at their jobs. Eight-- As managers, we protect employees from political influences that would hurt their work. And the last merit system principle -- managers protect

employees from backlash in whistleblower situations. These are principles that in general managers are held accountable for. They're also -- those are some of the do's that you're supposed to do. Here are some of the don'ts.

Here are the prohibited practices that managers need to be aware of. And again, if you have questions about these you can go to OPM.gov. But the key is here what we found as consultants, if it is worthwhile for managers every three to five years, even if it is just hearing the list of them it helps managers avoid these practices.

Prohibited practice number one. We are not allowed to illegally discriminate against any employee or applicant. We are also not allowed to consider improper employment recommendations. People need to be considered based on their experience and the skills that they have given. Outside of those things, it is improper employment things to consider.

We are not allowed as managers to pressure an employee's political activity.

We are not allowed to keep anyone from initially competing for the job. Anyone can apply. And usually managers don't have a problem with that. It's when managers as hiring officials, in my experience, usually are more likely to have conflict with this one -- where they influence someone to withdraw from competing for a job. This is a sticky issue sometimes with managers who don't like certain applicants who have floated to the top. Sometimes it happens with people with veterans preference or maybe it's other applicants who they think their resume isn't nearly as good as their score. It is important that as managers we understand we are not allowed to influence someone to withdraw when competing for a job.

And the key is as managers, we need to do our homework on the front end to make sure the assessment we put out on USA jobs.gov or any sort of job announcement that we make, that those assessments are good and lead us to getting good final applicants.

Managers are not allowed to give an unauthorized advantage to friends or to family. You are not allowed -- managers are not allowed to employ a relative on their team. Managers are not allowed to retaliate against whistleblowers. In my opinion, this is actually typically more what happens -- managers are not allowed to retaliate against employees or applicants who file an appeal of any managerial decision. Some common types of appeals or grievances or ones having to do not just with hiring and promotion but also with performance management ratings, with grade increases, with rewards. Those are also things that employees appeal. And managers are not allowed to retaliate just because someone appeals their decision. You cannot unlawfully discriminate for off-duty conduct.

What that means is, for the most part, what employees do off-duty, as long as it is not unlawful, it is of no concern of any manager. And really, you don't really want to go on those fishing expeditions. What happens on duty or what happens on government computers, those things are a manager's business. But otherwise, we are not allowed to really worry about off-duty conduct.

We are not allowed to knowingly violate veterans preference. Unfortunately, we see this happen too often in the government. If you have questions about how veterans preference works in today's hiring climate, please talk to your centralized HR folks. And then lastly, we are in general, you are not allowed to violate any rule that concerns the merit principles that we just talked about.

That gives you a quick overarching list of merit system principles and prohibited practices, and maybe that spurred in your mind one thing maybe that you can do a little better. Those are things we found, that when we go over them every three to five years, it helps managers stay on the straight and narrow and to keep focused and not get into trouble.

Now we're going to talk a little bit about performance management, and you will see in the bottom right I've got this little graphic about voting. I am going to bring up our first poll. My first question for you is this -- let's see if we can bring it up. What is your general feeling about the performance management process? Again, I am going to give you a minute or two to answer the question, and I'll let everyone see the answers. Just so you know, this is totally anonymous. No one will see who answered what. I am just curious to get a feel in the room what your feelings are about the performance management process in the federal government and maybe at Rural Development. Let's see, we've got -- 18, probably about 40 brave souls so far. I'll show the poll results but we'll still let people answer because we're still getting the answers coming in. There's about a third of you who are pleading the fifth. And that's ok.

So in general, interestingly enough, compared to our training group on Tuesday, this group feels more positively about performance management than the other group. They were much heavier on the yellow and green than this group was. Interesting. But I'd say in general, most federal managers find themselves somewhere intermittently on the blue and yellow answers. They feel that they do an OK job, but they wish that they did it better.

Too often in the federal government, some of the parts of our performance management process have deteriorated to the point where managers understandably feel that it is a glorified paper pushing process and they just go through the motions, and really my hope today is to give you some tools to leverage performance management process to accomplish things you really care about. So not just to -- you don't just have performance management discussions that you can check off the box.

You don't just give people ratings because you've got to get through it. To leverage those tools to accomplish -- to help you accomplish the goals that Rural Development has and the Department of agriculture has, that's the point of performance management and hopefully you will recognize some tools that maybe you can use going forward. So, why do we care? What's the deal with performance management?

Research has shown -- and it's not just qualitative research, it's also data being pulled from federal government institutions and private institutions. We care about performance management because it leads to higher performance. People do better in their jobs. It also leads to more engagement. Employees who get better feedback and have -- they feel that they get valid ratings from their -- from

managers, they are more likely to be engaged and to work hard for us and to be satisfied about their work. Also, increasingly in the federal government, agencies are moving toward a virtual work environment where their teams are filled with workers that are dispersed around the country. And I know that for some of you managers, that's already the case. You might be based in Kansas City, and you might have people in Wichita, Kansas, in St. Louis, and Des Moines. And you got to find -- how do you manage those folks?

How do you know that the work is getting done? Will you know what results you're looking for? And that's a huge part of managing -- doing your performance management well. So that's why we care about correct performance management. Before this training, you were assigned a pre-training assignment. There was an article, a very brief article, that talked about common federal performance management issues. And you will see those come up on the screen, and maybe you'll remember. I picked that article because I did think it reflected at least my experience working with different managers about common issues they experienced.

The first issue -- performance reviews are sometimes infrequent. And also -- sometimes they are not useful. The reviews that employees get, sometimes -- really, a lot of these problems come from the fact that managers are very busy and they are not reinforced or they are not supported in taking time out of their other work to do these performance management jobs -- these tasks that they have.

The second problem is that everybody -- typically sometimes in the federal government people get rated as above average when they haven't done above average work. And it leads to not only the reviews being not useful, but that means the ratings themselves are not useful to the employees. Here I think the truth is, a lot of federal managers lack experience and training in how to do these things well. They were hired as managers because they are fantastic employees who do good work. They are subject matter experts but they are not necessarily hired because they are great at managing people, and they need training.

Also, a lot of times the performance plans are not aligned to what agent actually care about. A lot of times employees' plans are not aligned to the things that their managers come to them and say, "hey, this is really, really important. We've got to get this work done." Sometimes that doesn't match the things that the employee is being held accountable for. Lastly, there's oftentimes a lack of clarity in what's expected. Some of these performance plans that agencies use have things in them that are really old. I like to say, sometimes they are filled with what I call panda's thumbs. Again, since you're all brilliant federal employees, you know that panda's thumbs are rock solid. A panda can't move them. They don't use them. They just stick out from the rest of their fingers close to a right angle. And just over the course of the history of pandas, they just stopped using their thumbs. They didn't need them anymore. And they eventually just became solid appendages that stick out of their hands. Similarly, a lot of the things that we find in performance plans -- I do a lot of audits. A lot of times when I have one-on-one conversations with executives and managers, a lot of times they will say the things that are in our performance plans that are handed down to us, a lot of those things are very vague and they are also old and not useful. So, my second poll of the day -- I'm afraid it's a little bit of a forced choice --

but in your experience, what is the biggest performance management issue -- of those common federal performance management issues, what is the biggest issue you face?

I'll let people see how people are answering. Got about 50 people answering. Interesting. The biggest problem -- overwhelmingly, alignment is a big problem. I'd say typically in situations where alignment is the problem, a lot of times it stems from difficulty finding out what the executives have in their performance plan and what their goals are and then having that trickle down to upper level management and then having those goals trickle down to other people. The rest of this training isn't necessarily hitting alignment really hard but one of my consultant suggestions, putting that hat on, is if you could send feedback up to those upper management and executive level teams, what can be really effective is holding a short all-hands meeting at the beginning of the fiscal year where a leading executive says, "You know what?"

These are the five things that keep me up at night. And if you can have your work align with these things, that would be great." And if you have all employees in on the all-hands meetings then employees and managers are more likely to feel and more likely to see the clear alignment between what's in their plans and what executives are being held accountable for. And that type of alignment can be a very valuable motivator in getting people to feel engaged and feeling that their work is important and cared about.

So here's my beautiful self-made performance management model. This is the whole performance management process. All the things that managers are responsible for. At the very beginning of the performance -- of the cycle you have to plan. You create a performance management plan, you align the plans with things that your manager and your manager's manager care about. Once you've created a valid plan, that enables you to monitor the work over the course of the year, and then at the end of the year, you rate people based on the work that was done, based on the results that they produce. And then you reward them according to the rating that they've given. And you can see how this is all connected.

And also at every stage, each of these stages informs the manager about what developmental needs their employees have. It's pretty easy to see that at the planning stage, if you put garbage in, you are going to get garbage out. So if you don't have a very good performance plan, it means that during the monitoring phase, you are going to give feedback about things that are important but it may not be related to the things they are being held accountable for.

And then at the end of the year when they get rated, if their plan isn't particularly clear or valid, then their rating is going to feel -- employees will feel that their ratings are subjective and that the reward that they got are more based on who they're friends with and not based on the work that they do. And you can see that when the planning piece falls apart, the rest of the process kind of crumbles in on itself, and you kind of deal with those problems where federal employees are feeling that the performance management process is just a paper pushing exercise. Because it doesn't really matter. Really it all stems from performance plans that aren't up to snuff. And really it is a cultural thing, because everyone has been dealing with this. I say even compensating for this for so long across the federal government

and even in the private sector, that almost everyone views this as something that is almost like performance management as a necessary evil, and I just will get through it because I have to. And it doesn't have to be that way. So when you do the performance planning at the beginning of the year -- today we are really going to hit at making a good plan and then also giving adequate feedback. Because I find those to be the two major gaps in manager's knowledge.

And when you are doing performance planning, you see there's four different important aspects of the planning process. The biggest gap of those four is in writing a good performance plan. Now again, engaging in open dialogue, I also see that initial discussion as being important. So here's another one of my hot tips. If you are tempted to just send your employees an e-mail that says, "Hey, your new performance plan is attached to this e-mail, take a look at it, sign it, and send it back to me, that would be great." I understand -- I know a lot of managers do that because they are very busy. If you can, if you have time, please consider having an actual face-to-face discussion or have a teleconference with an employee where you talk about the expectations for the upcoming year.

I can almost hear some of you and your eyes are rolling. You're saying, "Tony, that sounds nice, but a lot of that stuff that's in my plan -- it isn't good material." So the key is, first you've got to ask the stuff that is in your plan and then you can more fully engage people in that type of dialogue. So what are the pieces of the plan?

Like every good training, I am going to give a little -- I got to give you some definitions. Very quickly, there's three components to a performance plan.

There are performance elements, performance standards, and performance levels.

Performance elements are really the categories of work that are important to an employee. From what I understand, at least from the feedback I have gotten so far, in Rural Development, there's not necessarily -- I think typically a lot of you have three performance elements. But you can't have more, and you have mostly -- you use all critical elements, which means everything in your elements has to be measurable.

Some examples of performance elements are written communication, problem solving, really what it's -- by regulation -- OPM's regulation, you can -- the manager can name their elements anything that they want. It may be different within Rural Development. You may have some more specific guidance and maybe even some rules within Rural Development about what your elements are. But that's really what the regulation says -- there is flexibility there. But a lot of times, there is some wisdom that agencies use to come up with standardized elements to help their managers know what is important so that they are not starting from scratch every year. Now, where the rubber really hits the road is with performance standards. That's what really -- what's important. It's where the level -- the work is more defined. It is not just that you expect people to have good oral communications, but you articulate what are the results that you as a manager expect over the course of the year that the employee will accomplish?

And it must be of sufficient depth and complexity, and typically there's one to four standards under each element. At the bottom of this thing you see an example of a performance standards. Now, each of the

performance standards must be written at the fully successful level. Which means that is a level at which you do not have a performance problem, that you as a manager do not want to put the employee on a performance improvement plan. Now if their performance falls under the fully successful level, then that is the level at which you need to be considering putting someone under a performance improvement plan.

One of the things to be aware of is by regulation, we kind of put our -- kind of a low bar or our average expectations in performance plan. As a manager, one of the burdens that you have is you could either put in writing what outstanding or exceeds expectation looks like, or you can say out loud during performance discussions over the course of the year what outstanding might look like. But you do need to articulate that for employees. Especially -- the last thing you want to do is only articulate what average looks like and then you lose an opportunity for your superstar to really come through for you and do outstanding work because she or he only knows what average is.

So again, the burden is on managers -- they don't necessarily have to put it in writing, but they should. Putting my consultant hat on, they should say out loud to employees what outstanding looks like over the course of the year so their employees understand that. There are certain plan requirements for all performance management plans. So by regulation, all performance plans have to have some sort of alignment between what the agency cares about and what the employee is being held accountable for. We talked a little bit about that already. Also, plans are supposed to have measurable results. So any critical element that a performance plan has, has to be measurable. And by regulation, at least one of your performance elements should be critical and should have all measurable elements in it. And that's the same element that's the most important to have alignment with.

So when you potentially have performance issues on your team, it's on the critical elements that you can put someone on a performance plan. If you use non-critical elements on your team and non-measurable performance standards, you cannot put an employee on a performance plan for non-critical elements. That's going to be one thing -- if you ever do have a problematic employee, I really suggest working with centralized HR folks who can help make sure that all of your i's are dotted and t's are crossed and that your performance plan is up to snuff.

Because if there's a problem there -- and this training isn't about performance problems, but I think it really goes to show how seminal this piece is. If there's a problem there and your employee appeals the performance-based decision that you make about them, they will win. If there is an issue there, they will win, and the merit systems protection board will rule in favor of the employee. Also, almost automatically you have distinctions in levels of performance in your plan.

What that means is, we have to write the standards so that it's possible for employees to exceed expectations. We cannot write our plans at a level where they cannot exceed expectations. Because we are supposed to be able to give people not just "meets expectations" but also "outstanding" rating if their work merits that. Also, the fourth requirement is that employees are supposed to be involved in creating a plan. That is why they sign the plans at the beginning of the cycle. So the responsibilities are this -- managers, the buck does stop with you all on the phone.

You have to create the plan. But employees are supposed to help you in that, help you know what is reasonable, help you know if the important work that they do is reflected in the plan. I think a face-to-face discussion at the beginning of the year is one of the ways in which managers can develop a partnership relationship with their employees as opposed to just sending them a document and telling them to sign it. The final requirement for all performance plans is that employees are supposed to receive feedback throughout the course of a year.

And at the very least, they get a formal performance review at the mid year and they sign the plan. My suggestion -- and we'll talk more about this later -- is it is really important to give more informal feedback than just giving people -- talking to people about their jobs at the middle of the year and at the end of the year. Now, OPM also has requirements about what's in supervisory plans. Managers are held accountable for holding -- they are supposed to listen to their customers and their employees and take their perspective into account and then act on the feedback that they get from employees and customers.

And then lastly, managers are supposed to have some sort of standard in their plan that talks about holding their -- that the manager is held accountable for doing robust performance management. If you use that phrase, you will make OPM's auditors hearts go aflutter. You are supposed to be held accountable for good performance management practices and for doing those with your employees. Now, you will see, if you click on the handouts link again, the three white pieces of paper at the top right of your screen, one of the documents that you can download is a performance plan example.

I guarantee it doesn't look like your performance plan, but in there is all sorts of sample language that meets all of these requirements. You'll see that each of these requirements is circled and highlighted so you can see -- if you look at your plan -- maybe one of the things you want to consider is going through your plan and your employee's plan and seeing if these requirements are met and if they are not, I suggest trying to fix them and working with your centralized HR. Those are OPM's expectations for performance standards. Now, I say there are expectations.

If you notice, I didn't say -- people aren't going to jail when they do bad performance management but what happens is truly the work does suffer when people aren't held accountable in these ways. I want to talk about the difference between activities and results. We are going to do an activity with that and then we are going to talk about general and specific measures. In fact, we're probably actually going to take our break after we do this activity with activities and results.

So, in my experience, auditing the thousands of performance plans that I have audited, one of the big problems with performance plans is a lot of times managers use activity-based standards. What do we mean by an activity? An activity is an important action that the employee does typically have to do that leads to a result that we actually care about. Whereas, the result is that tangible product or service that results from the activities. And an outcome are results that are based out of the outputs that a group of employees create.

Just so you know, typically front line employees are more likely to be held accountable for outputs, whereas managers, and especially executives -- the higher you go up in the executive chain, the more

likely the executive is to be held accountable for the outcomes. Essentially the cumulative efforts of all the people that they manage. Again, when we have activity-based standards, there is a problem. That is articulated pretty well in this analogy I'm going to share with you. So you're going to have to bear with me. I am going to tell you a little story about bees.

Once upon a time there were two beekeepers that each had a beehive. Business was stagnating and at the beginning of the new fiscal year each beekeeper was told to produce more honey at the same quality. A phenomenon that lots of government employees and managers are very familiar with -- doing more with less. With different ideas about how to do this, the beekeepers designed different approaches to improve the performance of their hives.

The first beekeeper established a bee performance management approach that measured how many flowers each bee visited. At considerable cost to the beekeeper, and extensive measurement system was created to count the flowers each bee visited. And the beekeeper provided feedback to each bee at the midseason report on individual performance, but the bees were never told about the hive's overarching goal to produce more honey so that Bees, Inc., could have better sales.

The beekeeper created special awards also for the bees who visited the most flowers, who did the activity of visiting the most flowers. The second beekeeper also established a bee performance management approach but this approach communicated to each bee the goal of the hive, to produce more honey.

This beekeeper and his bees measured two aspects of their performance -- the amount of nectar each bee brought back to the hive and the amount of honey the hive produced. The performance of each bee and the hive's the overall performance were charted and posted on the hive's bulletin board for all bees to see. The beekeeper created a few awards for the bees that gathered the most nectar but he also established a hive incentive program that awarded each bee -- that rewarded each bee --excuse me, I apologize. That rewarded each bee for the amount of money -- oh, goodness -- rewarded each bee in the hive based on the hive's production of honey.

The more honey they produced, the more recognition each bee would receive. At the end of the season, the beekeepers evaluated their approaches. The first beekeeper found that his hive had indeed increased the number of flowers visited but the amount of honey produced by the hive had dropped. The Queen Bee reported that because the bees were so busy trying to visit lots of flowers, and as many flowers are possible, they limited the amount of nectar they would carry so that they could fly faster.

Also, because the bees felt they were competing against each other for awards, they would not share information with each other that would have helped performance across the hive. The second beekeeper, however, had very different results. Because each bee in his hive was focused on the hive's overarching goal of producing more honey, the bees had concentrated their efforts on gathering more nectar to produce more honey than ever before.

The bees worked together to determine the highest nectar yielding flowers and to create processes for depositing the nectar they gathered. They worked together to help increase the amount of nectar

gathered by their poor performers. And because the hive had reached its goal, the beekeeper awarded each bee his portion of the incentive payment. The moral of the story is this--measuring and recognizing accomplishments and results rather than just activities, and then giving feedback consistently to workers and worker bees, it often improves the results of teams. And really, I will give you a real life example. At OPM--OPM took over federal investigations from the FBI. We started doing the background investigations for federal employees before they got hired. And initially, OPM investigators, the metric--one of the metrics that was used to rate the performance was the amount of miles that they drove to do their investigations. Because in general, yes, the more miles you drive, though more work you've done.

And some managers felt that that would be a good way to reward hard workers. What happened was, is that yes, employees started driving miles like crazy around town. But they weren't necessarily doing more investigations, and they weren't necessarily doing better investigations. But they were driving, and so they were getting really high marks on that one aspect of their performance plan but they weren't necessarily accomplishing what OPM really wanted them to do.

Again, there's also examples--I don't know how many of you have been following the news, but the Patent Trademark office -- PTO is held up as the beacon of teleworking. They've been teleworking for a long time. And they let a lot of their trademark people work from anywhere. And they have these trademark quotas that they have to meet. Well, they found recently--an auditor found that some of these trademark employees had quotas that were somewhat old, and they could meet those quotas in about half of their work period and then for the rest of the work period they weren't doing any work at all. They were just hanging out watching movies.

It's really important that when we set measures, that as managers we make sure that not only are those measures important and they are the results that we care about, but that they are up to date and that we are holding people accountable for the work that we need them to do because they just can't sit around and await the things--they can't accomplish all their work and sit around the rest of the day.

So we are going to -- based on what we talked about, the difference between results, activities, and elements. I am going to be opening up some polls and I want you all to answer these questions. Is the thing that you see in the question, is that a result, is that an activity, or is that a performance element? So is training employees, is that a result, an activity, or a performance element? Brilliant. So almost all of you are right. It's an activity. And you can kind of tell by the grammar of the thing.

The next question, we are going to do about six or seven of these really quickly. Supervision -- results, activity, or performance element? So a little bit more disparate ideas. I would typically say that it is a typical performance element. However, it could be considered an activity. I would be hesitant to say that it is a result. It could be -- but it is definitely not obviously a measurable result.

Let's look at the next one. A completed case -- result, activity, or element? Brilliant group. That was very, very fast. Yes, it's a result. Go to the next one. Public relations.

The most common answer is performance element. That's also what I would -- that's most likely what I would say. Here is a big one -- recommendations. Result, activity, or element?

Now, I think with this one, I think that the mixed group on results and activity is actually totally understandable. Because I think really this is a case where it depends. So, I work with a group of lawyers. And lawyers, one of the results that they produce are recommendations on what an agency should do based on the law. But also almost every employee makes recommendations over the course of the year. It's something important that they do but it does not necessarily a tangible result that they create. The answer is, when it comes to recommendations, it depends. That's one of the things I want you to be aware of is -- it's not always obvious. HR policy interpretations -- activity, results, or elements?

And again, most of you say activity. I would say that usually interpreting HR policy is an activity. It's something that everybody has to do. But for some people -- you know, people who work in centralized HR shops, interpreting policy and applying policy is a huge part of their job. There may be documents that they produce that are called policy interpretation. So, in general, yes, I'd say this is an activity, but it also could be considered results. Let's go back to the training slides. I hope from that you get an idea. Maybe one of the things you want to do is go look at your plan and see, OK, do I have activities or do I have results in my plan? And so, as you look at this screen -- so here's a standard that I pulled from one of my audits. And it's not a terrible standard. It actually has a lot of good stuff in it. But the original standard says, "prepare and submit subsidy cost estimation information for the agency's OMB performance budget submission." And it's not terrible. But the problem -- so, one of the questions or one of the tips I will give you is this--when you look the standard, if you want to know whether or not it is good or not, one of the things you could ask yourself is, ask yourself "If Tony John, the hypothetical slacker employee, had this standard, is there a way he could weasely accomplish this standard but still do poor work?"

The answer is, yes. When it comes to this -- Tony John, the weasely slacker he could -- I can present cost estimation information with the best of them. I can give any old information, and it may not be good information. So it is important, as you look down at the new standard that's improved, it's better. It's not necessarily perfect but it is a lot better. You'll notice, it's the same standard but there's measures that will enable a manager to hold someone accountable for doing good work. So they can't just hand in any old estimation information. It has to be accurate information. And how are you going to know it is accurate?

Well, it says right here that accuracy will be measured by acceptance by the chairman with limited revisions. I like to add the word actually limited substantive revision. And that it will meet all established time frames. I actually suggest to you, I wouldn't use the word all. Just using the phrase meets established time frames is one way for managers to hold their employees accountable for the timeliness of work but at the same time -- so, a lot of managers I see in their work, they will put dates at the end of everything in their performance plan because they really -- those dates may be important but they think it's a great way to create measurable standards, and it is.

The problem is -- and I know some of you have encountered this--over the course of a performance year, our objectives as an agency shifts. And the plan at the beginning of the year may be an adequate plan. So maybe at the beginning of the year, you were planning on accomplishing this one report by

January 30, but when the priorities changed, it turns out that a reasonable expectation would be that it was done by the end of March. If you use the phrase meets established time frames, not only will an auditor say, yes, that is a measurable standard, but it means that the manager does not have to rewrite the standard all the time. One of the things I also want to give you--information.

You can rewrite performance standards throughout the year. So, priorities change, and what you have written doesn't match the work that is actually important to you, it is good management is to change the performance plan to match what is aligned with the agency actually cares about. The hot tip I will give you is that the really important time to do this is either at the midyear or with 100 days left in the performance plan. An employee, in order to get a rating on a new performance plan, they need to be on that plan for 90 days. That is the government regulation, 90 days. Some agencies actually have even a more stringent policy of 120 days. That way, if you can assess at 100 days left or 130 days left whether or not the plan is still good, you could end up with a plan at the end of the year that matches really the work that your employee--that is important to them and to you. And you are more likely to have a better experience at the end of the year instead of what typically happens, is priorities change and managers then take their best guess at what would have happened if they hadn't and rate their employees according to a more subjective opinion. Again, you'll never really take all the subjectivity out of the performance management process. That is an ideal goal. But it is very difficult. I have a lot of empathy--managers try to take as much subjectivity out of their performance rating process. It's very hard. But creating good plans minimizes the amount of subjectivity that a manager needs. We have hit our breaking time. I want to give you 10 minutes of break. So, go check your e-mail, go to the bathroom. We are going to start this training back up. And, please, don't put us on hold. You don't need to mute us. Everyone is muted. Just come back at 2:10 central time and we'll start back up. So, we'll talk again at 2:10, thank you.

Dive right back into talking about some of the important aspects of writing useful valid performance standards and creating standards that are going to help us use this process to create things that we actually care about. There are four different types of general measures. There are quantity measures, quality measures, timeliness measures, cost-effectiveness measures. In my experience working with agencies, I found a lot of times managers who feel really frustrated about making their plans measurable think that they have to have--they have two frustrations typically that sometimes are just misunderstandings. They think that they have to have some sort of quantity measure, that their employee has to create three reports or do five audits. That's the type of measure that they have to create. When the truth of the matter is, that's just one of the types of measures. I say increasingly in my experience that the most common and really the most important useful measures for federal employees are quality measures. And why that is, is that decreasingly federal employees really don't work in what I'd call factory jobs. Of course they don't work in factories, but it's just not so simple to measure someone's performance by -- that if they do eight investigations we are happy and if they do 12 investigations, we are ecstatic. Really most of the things that we care about the federal government usually are about the quality of the work. Did they -- when they created the report, did they follow the operating procedure?

Was it according to the guidelines and regulations that our agency has?

Was it done within established time frames?

You'll notice, when I gave that example, there was no number in it. But in the end, it really gave the employee and managers some criteria for what success looks like. The important question to ask yourself as a manager, if you are starting from scratch and trying to figure out how you are going to make your plan measurable is to ask yourself what truly is important to me and my team?

Ask the question, what keeps me up--what keeps my manager's manager up at night and how can I align what we are doing to those things?

Typically, almost always, quality measures apply. Usually timeliness measures apply. Sometimes quantity. Increasingly I am seeing a lot of federal agencies using cost effectiveness measures. And they can be fantastic. A word to the wise, it is really useful if you have a lot of data to know what types of cost effectiveness measures are useful. I have done some consulting with managers who are holding their employees accountable or some cost effectiveness measures where they didn't have that data and then at the end of the year, because they didn't adjust the performance plans, that those managers were forced to scramble, and really a lot of them made the choice to just fudge their final ratings.

And when managers do that, every time they do that, it just adds another brick in the wall between employees and managers alike feeling like the performance management process is useful -- they just won't think it's useful the more times we just make a -- have our subjective opinion be the guiding principle in how someone is rated. Also, another thing to be aware of, when you use timeliness measures, don't just use the end of the performance year as your guide. It just doesn't add anything to the performance plan. All of the standards in your performance plan have to be accomplished within the performance year. So by adding the dates, whatever the last day is, that doesn't add really any information.

So, you really only -- you can use timeliness measures if you have a date that's something that's different than the end of the year. In general, that's typically a good rule of thumb, is just to not use the end of the year date for a timeliness measure. But once you've identified the general measures that are important--in general, what types of measures are going to be important -- then you can get more specific. You can find specific measures in the things typically that you already measure a lot of. So, if you have things that your team measures or that you talk about in your management all-hands meetings that you have to send reports up the chain, as much as possible, you want to have those things be reflected in employees' performance plans. As long as it's within their control.

Some of the questions over the break that people asked were, some people feel that the alignment problems in the performance plans really have to deal with employees being held accountable for the things that are within their control and not holding them accountable for things that are outside of their control. And I say typically that's a problem that gets bigger and bigger the higher you go up in the food chain. So managers are going to have more problems -- typically going to have more uneasiness about being held accountable for things that they don't have control over.

That it's typically things that are in their plans more so than employees. Then if you go up to the executive, there are even more things in their plan that they are uneasy about that they are not sure it's within their control. And the key is, the phrase that's used, it's not just things that are directly within someone's control. For example, if you have some data that shows that an employee has influence on this type of thing, then that can sometimes be a useful measure even if they don't have total control. So for example, my part of OPM, we work on a fee-for-service basis. We have a revolving fund authority. And my manager is held accountable for how much -- the business that we develop for our team. That's one of her measures.

Something that she--she doesn't necessarily have direct control of because a lot of the business that we develop, it happens because an agency has a problem they need solving. If no agencies had any problems, she wouldn't be able to develop any business at all. I know from talking to her that it's one of the standards that she is actually always talking to her manager about to make sure they think that she's being held accountable for something that is reasonable as opposed to something that is unreasonable. And that--they are constantly having that feedback over the course of the year to compensate for the fact that the measure sometimes may be problematic.

So, if you agree with me or if your employees, their work is best measured by quality measures, important questions to ask yourself-- "Who is going to judge that element and the work was done well? Most times, it's the manager. But sometimes it can be coworkers. Sometimes it could be someone above the managers. That's an important question to ask yourself. And also -- the most important question--"What are the factors that that person would look for?"

Oftentimes, you know, you could also use phrases--again, I'll go over some of the phrases again. You could say "quality will be measured by acceptance by the chairman or acceptance by the manager with limited substantive revisions. The product was created within established time frames. The product was created according to USDA Rural Development budget report regulations, OMB guidelines, and USDA guidelines." And whatever guidelines apply.

Because those would be the criteria that a manager would have up in their head when they are looking at the product and gauging how much quality there was in the product. And a lot of times, some of the measures that have problems are ones that are really experienced and have a lot of knowledge, but it's all -- they've got it up in their head and they tell me when I consult with him one-on-one, they say, "Well, Tony, I know what I am looking for and I'll know it when I see it."

And much as we can move from that method of rating to putting the things that we know when we see it--if we can articulate at least some of them for employees, we are going to increase clarity for them and be able to give them more valid performance management standards. So, here's again some more of my hot tips. I've already shared some of these. But don't just list tasks and activities like "hold five meetings." Again, the hypothetical Tony John the slacker, he says, "I can hold five meetings with the best of them. I can hold five meetings." And as a manager you say, "You can't just hold five meetings. They have to be these five meetings that will lead to these other -- these criteria that we need as a team. Tony the slacker says, "Well, put it in writing." Don't rely--and this is one example of the end of

the performance year. Don't use the end of the performance year as a timeliness measure. A lot of people brought up absolute and backwards standard as one of the concerns. Because one of the examples I used, I used the word "all." And that is, when you have the word "all" in a standard, it could be considered an absolute standard.

We need to avoid absolute and backwards standards. Absolute standards are standards that you cannot exceed if you take them literally the way they are written. So if you use the word all, you hold the employee accountable for delivering products to all the stakeholders, for example, well, that is a case where--all the stakeholders, there is no way to exceed performance there. So you want to avoid using the word all. Absolute standards are only applicable in the government.

They are only usable in the case of national security, in a case where American lives are on the line and in the case where large amounts of dollars hang in the balance. So, for example, I was working with an Air Force executive who was frustrated that he wasn't able to ever get "exceeds expectations." And we looked at his plan. And when we looked at his plan, it says that he was held accountable for keeping his classified information protected from enemies of the state." And he joked with me, "Yeah, North Korea never got a hold of my nuclear secrets." He said -- and I wrote that I was an outstanding employee, but the way that was written is an absolute standard and he would consistently get knocked down to "meets expectations."

So, absolute standards are not only problematic when we have a performance issue, but they can also be problematic in justifying giving our superstar employees high ratings. Backwards standards are problematic because they reinforce for employees potentially doing no work. So, a really common standard that I have seen that is slightly backwards is that "employees will not receive negative feedback" or "they will receive no more than two negative customer service surveys over the course of the year."

That can be a useful measure. The problem is, is that it depends on how work is doled out amongst the team. And if Tony the slacker gets that measure, essentially Tony the slacker tells himself, "OK, the best way to not get negative feedback--because I'm bad at my job--is to take on no new work. If I can systematically avoid work, I will get no negative feedback." So the key is, managers need to make sure that if they use backwards standards or even absolute standards, the effect of those standards are negated when they are used in a battery of standards -- when they are not just the only one there, but they can be the only one under an element, but there's four or five standards there that enable a manager to justify "exceeding expectations."

They just cannot stand alone, or else they will lead towards problems. And if there is an appeal of your decision for a problematic employee with the merit systems protection board, the MSPB will rule in favor of the employee. Also, don't use vague terms like enhanced, increase. Just be more specific. When an auditor sees "shows measurable progress," he wants to know -- what do you mean by measurable progress? Not just auditors but employees want to know, ok, what does measurable progress mean and how do I meet that expectation? Smart framework is really useful. Again, if you go to the handouts,

there is a page--I've got a couple of handouts. I've got smart framework handouts, I got a quality check handout, and there's a guide to writing performance standards.

All of these are one-page guides to help people. Also, there is some guidance in there, there's policy from USDA that I got from centralized HR and from my contacts at USDA, some handouts about performance management that you can use to do these things. But the smart framework is really useful framework for personal goals. In my opinion, when it comes to writing performance standards, it's most useful as a quality check. So after I do performance standards, I'll write-- I'll write S, leave a space, M, leave a space, A, leave a space, and then I'll go through the standard and check off the things that I see they are there.

And then if I see that there's gaps, that enables me to do a quality check. I think it's more useful as a quality check than something to be worried about from the front end. In my experience, worrying about things on the front leads to writer's block for managers. So use them as a quality check. Last, but not least, performance management gets a lot of the material of this training but the other really important cap that I see in performance management practices in the government is giving good feedback. Here is what's true about feedback. I am a relatively new father.

I've got two children. Will is four and Lauren is two. If I want them to change their behavior, it is critical, critical, that I give them timely specific feedback. If I wait for a day to tell them to cut that behavior out or to reinforce the behavior, the things that I've done, the feedback that I've given will make no change in what they do. And an interesting truth--in psychology, kind of jokingly you can say that grown-ups are just grown-up toddlers. And the same principles apply.

If we don't give feedback in a timely manner that's specific enough, we won't get the results that we want. For example, a lot of managers rely on the midyear performance appraisal and the end of year performance appraisal to give people feedback, and then they'll give awards at the end of the year. And especially in today's environment where no one has any money to really give awards, agencies wait until the very end of the year in an attempt to kind of give the same level of awards they've always given. It is so much more impactful--and actually, there's actually in the feedback literature, there's really different strokes for different folks. So it is important for managers to kind of know what kind of feedback do their employees need. What do they find motivating?

It's actually a great question to actually ask your employees, "What type of feedback do you need? What type of rewards that you find motivating?" Currently, my current hotlist in this environment where no one has any money, things to consider are time off awards, also giving small spot cash awards. So soon after a product or result is created and it's done well, managers can have a greater impact on future performance by giving spot cash awards quickly than waiting until the end of the year to reward outstanding employees. It's just more effective at getting the result we want. I really have a lot of sympathy for managers.

I really think the reason why they don't give as much feedback as they should is because they are not really given time to do it. And so, you see at the bottom of the screen, a critical question to ask and something for you to consider--maybe it's the one thing you want to do differently--if you can ask your

employees or ask yourself how often do I need to meet with my employees to ensure that they have the feedback they need to do their jobs. What you might find is it different for each of your employees. So it's worth it to ask them because you may find out that some of them need more feedback than they are getting. And it's not--you know, most employees want to do good work.

There are some bad eggs out there. But employees who want more feedback, it's not just because they are annoying or they are needy. Some of it is truly because they want feedback so that they can do their work better. Also, another principle when it comes to feedback, focus on the behavior and not the character of the employee. I will give you an example. This is just a feedback example. When my wife and I, when we talk about maybe there's a chore I'm not doing so well around the house, like putting the garbage sack back in the garbage can.

Now, if she gives me feedback and she focuses on my character and is like, "You know what, Tony, the problem with you is that you are forgetful and you are lazy, and it drives me crazy. If the conversation starts and ends there, that is the recipe for not effective feedback. I am going to resent her. I'm not going to change my behavior. Because in my mind, when I get that type of feedback, I think, "You know what, you are talking about my character and there is not that much I can do about changing my character. Changing my character is a big psychological thing."

However, if she focuses on the behavior--"Hey, Tony, when I woke up in the morning and you were gone for work I noticed you failed to put the liner back in the trashcan. And we talked about this. Is there something that I can do to help you increase the frequency with which you put the liner in the trashcan? Is there a skill gap there? Do you not know how to do it?"

A lot of this is a little bit sarcastic, but when we can focus on the behavior and treat it like there is potentially a performance issue, that something that's not necessarily a character flaw, the employee is going to see the feedback as something that they can do something about, and they're going to be more likely to fix that behavior. Last--the last screen of the day. No more lecturing. When it comes to motivating your team -- I have a lot of managers, a lot of agencies come to me and say, "How can I create a more motivated and a more engaged workforce?"

Engagement is one of the hot button topics in the federal government today. A lot of times, agencies do their best. They try to really pound the fact that their mission is important. And they believe that if their employees just understood how their work impacted and protected the public, if employees understood that, the importance of their job, then they wouldn't be motivated in their job. The slide you see is based on research by Hackman and Oldham, and they have found -- this called job characteristics theory.

There are five characteristics of a job that leads toward motivation and engagement from employees. And the main two are feedback--giving good--not just--I don't mean positive feedback when I say good. I mean useful, valid feedback. And also giving employees the maximum amount of autonomy. I found in order to give employees autonomy, managers have to know what results they're looking for. When they know what results they're looking for, they are able to cut the cord, so to speak, and say, "OK, I know what results I'm looking for. Go and do it."

If you give good feedback and you get maximum amount of autonomy and your employees feel they own their own work, you have done 60% of the work you possibly could do to get them motivated. The last third comes from the amount of clarity that an employee has about their job, also very much effected by performance management.

And also when an employee knows that their work is important. So we already talked a lot about alignment today. When an employee understands how their work is aligned to the things that Rural Development cares about, they know that their job is important. Task diversity. That just has to with the principle that when an employee-- when someone does the same work over and over and over again they lose motivation. So you can see outside of task diversity, four out of these five things are very much related to good performance management.

So, if you want to have a more motivated and engaged workforce, it is critical to examine -- and if you can't improve your own performance management practices, that is the best thing in my experience manager can do. We've got a final poll of the day -- is this. Do you feel you have at least one thing you want to focus on and change or improve when it comes to performance management or in respect to merit principles based on our training today?

If the answer is yes--and answer no if the answer is no. If the answer is yes, then you we've spent our two hours at least a bit well.

OK. I'll reveal the poll results. So, thank you very much. A final question before I let you go. If you write down the things that you want to change, it's been shown in research to make a huge impact in your likelihood of actually doing those things. So, if you are brave enough it would be great to write in the Q&A function of the training--let me know the one thing you want to change.

Or at least just write it down on a piece of paper nearby. But write that thing down and you are much more likely to change. What we are going to do right now--there are 26 minutes left in the time. People--there's one question in the Q&A queue. If you have more questions, you are welcome to stay on the line and also to ask questions in the Q&A function. I am going to be here.

I have often found that the time after the training where people get to ask applied questions is some of the most valuable time as opposed to the more general lecture. But if you're busy and you've got other stuff you need to do, I want to respect your time. Please, thank you so much for your time today. Good luck implementing the changes that you want, and you'll be hearing from me in the not-too-distant future and we'll be talking more about performance and conduct. Thank you so much for your time today and good luck.

Feel free to sign off. And then in about -- what will do is in about two minutes I'll have the operator take everyone off mute and people can feel free to ask questions. On Tuesday we had a whole bunch of questions. I thought it was really fantastic. So, I want to give you all the same opportunity. While we are waiting for people to sign off that want -- I want to answer some of these questions. Someone asked-- should standards be specific to an employee?

I have many employees that hold the same position but have a wide disparity of knowledge, experience, and the way they perform their job. They also talk and want to have exactly the same plan to ensure fairness and they do not want measures. Also, what if the employees refuse to sign a plan based on principle?

I'll answer that final question first. First of all, in the end, if an employee refuses to sign, the burden is still on managers. They are still held accountable for the plan that they have not signed. And it's critical in that situation that managers take note that the employee has been talked to, they have been invited to sign, they have been involved in the process. You have solicited feedback.

But in the end, the burden of making sure the plan is good is the supervisor's and not the employee's. The employee doesn't get to bully their way into having the standards that they want. They are encouraged to give input. And I think, in my experience, been really a critical aspect of having a partnership relationship with employees. But they don't get to bully managers into being held accountable for what they think is important. Also, related to that, here is the principle--again, the merit system principle is that employees that do the same work should get the same rating.

They should get the same pay. Just because people do have different skills, or they bring different skills to the table, the expectations for work across your team are the same. They should have relatively the same performance standards. However, I think it's really -- when you start off with the same performance standards then you're more likely to rate your outstanding employees outstanding and rate the average employees as average. Even if employees do not want measures--I'm sorry, but that's another one of those things if that's what they want, that's not a reasonable want.

They cannot dictate to that. But when you ask should standards be specific to an employee, I hear a lot of questions in that a little bit. Standards should be specific to the employee's position but not necessarily the skills that they have. What I typically see is a lot of really old position descriptions in the federal government. A lot of managers compensate for that by making performance plans that are a little bit more specific. But just be careful. If people--if everyone on your team is a GS-13 HR specialist, it should have the same performance standards unless someone else's job is a little bit different. You could maybe add one performance element that's a little bit different than other people's.

But in general, in general, they really should be pretty close to the same. The things that can be different is when you give feedback. When you have your excellent employee, you can bring up things that you want them to do and let those excellent employees know, "OK, this is what outstanding looks like. I think you can do it. This is what you need to do." Hopefully that answers your question. We have another question--I want to have my employees help me write the standards to the element. Amen, that's a fantastic idea. Like I said, most of the time it is the goals from -- put into the standards rather than those that are truly measured.

I hear actually pretty common issues in this concern actually. Very common. I need to bring up my slide again because the last slide is actually my e-mail address. Just in case people have more questions they want to ask. But in this question, I really -- these are kind of those organizational panda thumbs that I talked about. To air my dirty laundry, my performance plan is not good just like this manager is talking

about. And my manager compensates for that by--she keeps the same plan for me that is dictated to her by OPM, but she creates a supplementary work plan where it gets more specific about each of the performance elements.

And she adds things that are specific to our team so that we can be held accountable for things that are more specific. She uses really her work plan to really drive performance. She uses the organizationally dictated performance plan to kind of go through the motions. Because it is dictated, we have actually offered for free to fix OPM's plan, and they haven't taken us up on it.

So, it is what it is sometimes within agencies, and that is how you can compensate by creating supplementary work plans that are more specific and more measurable. And then also compensating by having more frequent performance discussions so that you can overcome the vagueness in the plan. Another question--how do you keep from having overkill or overload in results for employees?

I think--I'm going to do my best to understand that question. But, you know, what's in the performance plans, we're supposed to have standards that hold people accountable for work that meets our average minimum expectations that will keep them from being in trouble. So at that level, an employee shouldn't have any sort of overkill and overload.

When I think of overkill and overload, one of the things I think of is actually currently there's a lot of people moving towards working virtually and teleworking. And teleworkers, research is now showing that they are a lot of times doing a lot more work than they used to. They are producing a lot more. But some of them are actually even just working more hours than they used to. And those employees really need--the federal government, really the teleworking is kind of an experiment. The private sector doesn't have great data on what happens.

The government doesn't. And we need to be careful about overloading those employees. I don't know exactly how to answer your question, but I really have tried my best. Feel free to ask a follow-up question. I am still getting written questions. We'll take people off mute when I'm done answering these written questions. How is our attendance at this training going recorded so we can show we have taken it?

This question is easily answered. I have a list of attendees that I send off to Allison Savage at Rural Development and she is the training coordinator and she takes that. Also--I didn't bring this up, but everybody is going to get a training survey after we are done with this class. It's not required, because that's bad science. But let me tell you, the survey and your response is critical in how I get rated by my manager and also critical to Rural Development making the strategic decision of what type of training they want, what's useful and what's not useful.

That is how your attendance has been noted and marked down. So that is how we will know that you attended. I have another question--I have worked on changing performance measures for one of our staff members. The old one uses measures that cannot be defined such as "at least 90% of work products are accurate and timely." To get away from that I think I used a backwards definition such as no more than two complaints. How can I develop a different approach to this situation?

So just pump the brakes a bit. Having one standard in there that says having no more than two complaints can be OK as long as there's other standards along under that same element. As long as it's not the only way in which they are rated.

Because there needs to be other standards under that element that show that the work that they do this quality, so that they do have to at least produce some work. The problem with backwards standards is when they are left alone, they have the potential to motivate employees to not do any work. If they are with other performance standards, it negates that, it mitigates your risk. So that in general is how I deal with that.

There's also other things to add like quality standards. So instead of saying that 90% of the work will be timely, you can just use the phrase the work will be accomplished within established time frames. I oftentimes will even add language--if a manager thinks that there is going to be exceptions to the rules and they want to make sure that the employees know that those exceptions will be taken account for, that they even will put language in their standards that say exceptions to this will be monitored and discussed between employee and supervisor.

And adjustments--you know, reasonable adjustments will be discussed. Anyway, the exceptions will be taken into account. That is OK to put into your standard. That way, when you say that they will meet--you know, that the work will come in within established time frames, it indicates that there's going to be a feedback process, and that it is a healthy thing to put in performance plans. Other things maybe you want to add--the work was done according to Rural Development guidelines or OMB guidelines. Guidelines are really useful.

They are great quality measures because it tells employees what document they can look at to know what the quality measure is. And you don't have to list out 50 things that are in the standard operating procedure. You can just reference the standard operating procedure. If you don't have standard operating procedures, that's actually an excellent thing to tell your employee--hey, if you want to be rated as outstanding, if you could help me create a standard operating procedure that we accept and we implement for our team, that is -- I want to leverage your expertise to use that for our team.

That can be a great example. And then someone says--someone has a question about the work that we do, that they have five different plans, different grades and programs, and they have mission and employee and customer perspectives -- the only elements that are different between the plans. And we are a small agency with 47 employees. Please, take a look. I am not going to talk about my keys -- but in general, the theme behind my keys is we are not for profit.

We are a government entity. So essentially, when you hire me, essentially you pay--you can look me up in the Internet but you pay my GS-13 consultant salary for that time. And then when you are done using me I go back to being paid by OPM. That is essentially how it works. So you just paid for that time. Feel free to contact me, and we can explore what that would cost. Melissa, can you take everyone off of mute?

Sure, one moment.

At this time, all lines are open and interactive.

Does anyone have any lessons they want to ask out loud that weren't answered via the Q&A function through the training?

I don't mind asking this question. I did put it on one of the written questions. I currently have several employees that do the same job function. And two of them are currently brand-new employees and new to the position. Do you see that their elements and standards should be the same because they basically hold the same position and the same job, or do you see that those would be different since they are at different pay levels and grade levels?

How would you perceive those elements and standards to be written?

The general principle is that if employees are the same GS level and classified as being in the same position, their performance plans should be for the most part very similar. So how I would compensate for that is--you know what happens sometimes over the course of years and decades is that even people that are doing the same--doing work under the same job title, oftentimes their work changes. It kind of morphs into other things. I don't know --

The same account number for both of them.

Yeah, but you have to at least start off with having the same standards for everybody in general. I have seen some managers -- and it's ok to do this -- have one extra performance element that maybe has to do --

Yeah, one for October and one for November. I'm sorry.

Oh, ok.

The 609 was for November.

60 -- Excuse me?

Yeah.

So, the key is you might want to use an extra performance element that's different for --

I think that's feedback from another person answering someone else.

Exactly. If someone -- if people aren't -- feel free to mute your lines if you're not asking a question. That'll help me answer the question. I sorry I get so distracted. But using one extra element to maybe have some specific, more -- if that person's job has morphed to a slightly different position. But if they really do very, very different work, that's an indication that there may be some foundational differences. And there may be a reason to reclassify the positions as different jobs.

But if the work they are supposed to be doing is pretty much the same, they should be held to the same standards if they are at the same GS level.

Great. You answered that very well. I completely understand. Thank you.

Despite someone keeping asking about November and 609. I don't know what that is. Any other questions?

I have a comment.

Comment away.

I was only able to get into the teleconference line. I never got anything on my screen. So, in the future, you may be consider before you mute all the lines making sure that everybody was able to get through on everything.

OK. Sure. We can do that. Reach out to Allison Savage or my e-mail address is Thomas.John@OPM.gov. And I would be happy to e-mail you the slides so that you can have them, so that you can look at what was being said. To be honest, I know--I know it is not the most efficient use of your time but I'm happy to share them to make up for that deficiency. And I apologize, sir.

That's OK. I just thought before you mute the lines, next time, if somebody else is having the same trouble it may save them that aggravation.

I had the same trouble and I e-mailed Allison and what it was is they changed the password in links when they did the reminder e-mail yesterday of the meeting, so you had to use the reminder information and not the original request.

OK.

Apologize.

Sounds like it was my fault.

No, it's not your fault. In general, it's always the guy who's coming in from outside agency's fault. So, it's my fault. Any other questions? Great point. And that's good feedback. Going forward, just so you know, there will not be those types of changes. Everything is already set up going forward. You are going to get invitations to the trainings going forward also from Allison Savage. And things will not change.

They will be set in stone. And we've kind of worked out the kinks on these first two trainings. They've been minor, but, you know, not being able to see the slides is kind of a major thing. So that is over and done with. So it will be better going forward. Any other questions, comments?

Hi. I think it would be helpful if all of us could get the slide presentation. I think that would be great. It was a really good session. Thank you.

You can actually download the slides right now. If you are in the Live Meeting, if you click on the handouts link, it is three white pieces of paper. There is an icon at the top right of your screen. If you click on that, there is actually about, I think there's 10 of them-- 10 handouts. The very first one is a slide deck.

OK, I got it. Thank you.

Any other questions?

Yes, what if we missed one of these sessions? The week of December -- the first week of December I am not going to be able to get online even today. Will it be available to us at a later time?

Yes, we are recording all of the sessions. That's the dirty secret. You're not supposed to think that you shouldn't attend all of them and watch them recorded. This will always be better -- you'll engage a lot more parts of your brain by attending them. You will learn more by attending. But if you can't, we are recording all of the sessions. In fact, if people--for example, the gentleman who wasn't able to watch the training, if he wanted to then go and watch the recording later on, he can do that. So yes, things will be recorded and shared with managers if they want to view them in the future.

I see someone has raised their hand. I don't know if I've answered your question.

That was me. I just don't know how to operate this computer.

Perfect, perfect. You are using the technology that's available to you. Any other questions?

I will take that pregnant pause as meaning no. Thank you so much again. I find that the question and answering sessions are oftentimes--I truly do find them to be some of the most useful times because people can ask exactly what is bothering them and I can do my best to answer them so they can actually change something meaningful back in their real lives where real people are involved as opposed in my training where we are kind of talking about hypotheticals.

And I hope this training wasn't purely academic, and that there was some practical advice for you. Thank you for your time, and I will talk to you all in the not-too-distant future again.