

**Exploring the Benefits of an Employee Job Performance Review Program for the  
Cumberland Trail Fire District.**

By: Mark E. Sommers  
Lieutenant  
Cumberland Trail Fire District #4  
St. Clairsville, Ohio

A proposed research project submitted to the Ohio Fire Executive Program

August 19, 2009

## CERTIFICATION STATEMENT

I hereby certify that the following statements are true:

1. This paper constitutes my own product, that where the language of others is set forth, quotation marks so indicate, and that appropriate credit is given where I have used the language, ideas, expressions, or writings of another.

2. I have affirmed the use of proper spelling and grammar in this document by using the spell and grammar check functions of a word processing software program and correcting the errors as suggested by the program.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name: Mark E. Sommers

## ABSTRACT

An issue that was identified with the Cumberland Trail Fire District was the lack of a periodic job performance review program to evaluate the Cumberland Trail firefighters. The problem that was studied was whether an employee review program is beneficial and should be implemented at the Cumberland Trail Fire District.

This research project addressed the following questions:

1. What would be the impact on the administration in establishing an employee performance review program?
2. What would be the impact on the staff in establishing an employee performance review program?
3. What impact on employee relationships might be expected if a performance review program is initiated?
4. What obstacles to establishing an employee performance review program would need to be addressed?

Literature was researched from the Fire Service, Government and the private sector concerning current trends and management issues involved with performance reviews. The literature review was conducted using two local college libraries, a public library, in house resources and internet searches. Opinions and research, both pro and con, were cited.

Descriptive research developed a survey that was distributed to the firefighters and line officers concerning their opinions about performance reviews as they pertain to those being evaluated. Another survey was distributed to Chief Officers and line officers concerning their opinions about performance reviews as they pertain to those who might be doing the evaluations. A third survey was sent to the Fire Chiefs of 53 Career and Combination departments within a 60

mile radius of St. Clairsville, OH about the current status of their departments concerning performance review programs in their organizations.

One interview was conducted with the President of The Cumberland Trail Career Firefighters, I.A.F.F. Local 3667 concerning labor management issues that might arise from a performance review program.

The results of this project strongly indicate that the Cumberland Trail Fire District and its staff would benefit from the institution of a periodic job performance review program of some type that focuses on improved communications, career growth, and involvement with the overall short-term and long-term goals of the Cumberland Trail Fire District.

The recommendation is to convene a voluntary committee of Chief Officers, line officers, and firefighters from within the Cumberland Trail Fire District to review this research project and to develop a plan to implement an objective and effective formal annual periodic job performance review program free from subjective bias and personal conflicts.

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

CERTIFICATION STATEMENT ..... 1

ABSTRACT..... 2

TABLE OF CONTENTS..... 4

INTRODUCTION ..... 5

    Statement of the Problem..... 5

    Purpose of the Study ..... 5

    Research Questions..... 6

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE..... 7

LITERATURE REVIEW .....9

PROCEDURES..... 19

    Definition of Terms..... 20

    Limitations of the Study.....20

RESULTS ..... 21

DISCUSSION .....27

REFERENCES.. .....29

APPENDIX 1 - .....33

APPENDIX 2 - ..... 35

APPENDIX 3 - .....37

## INTRODUCTION

### **Statement of the Problem**

In today's Fire Service there are numerous issues that have to be addressed, on the short term and on the long term basis. Many of the issues are business and personnel problems that need to be handled efficiently and fairly. The Cumberland Trail Fire District currently does not have a performance review program in place. At present no feedback is documented or used for the career progress of the employees. The problem that this study will address is whether an employee review program is beneficial and should be implemented.

The Cumberland Trail Fire District has seen significant growth in population and use of fire district resources over the past decade. Short term personnel issues have arisen periodically that may have been better addressed before growing into significant problems. Long term planning for the future of the district may also have been better served if more personnel were aware of the expectations and goals that have been established for the district. In order to meet the demands of its citizens now and in the future, administration as well as personnel need goals established to guide the Cumberland Trail Fire District into an uncertain future.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to identify the potential effects of an employee performance review program for the Cumberland Trail Fire District. The performance review program would need to meet the needs of both the fire district and its personnel. The program would need to identify goals for the employees and each employee would have a clear understanding of the goals of the fire district and how their individual goals would help the fire district in attaining its vision for the future.

## **Research Questions**

The project will be researched using the descriptive methodology. Evaluative research will be used to gather employee views on the issue of performance evaluations by means of a survey to be filled out by employees of the Cumberland Trail Fire District.

### ***The research questions to be studied are:***

1. What would be the impact on the administration in establishing an employee performance review program?
2. What would be the impact on the staff in establishing an employee performance review program?
3. What impact on employee relationships might be expected if a performance review program is initiated?
4. What obstacles to establishing an employee performance review program would need to be addressed?

## **BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE**

The Cumberland Trail Fire District is an organization that was established in 1991. Prior to this date, fire service and EMS were provided to the City of St. Clairsville and Richland Township by the St. Clairsville VFD. In 1990, voters approved the formation of the Cumberland Trail Fire District and combined both jurisdictions into one Fire District. Full-time and part-time personnel were hired and 24 hour staffing was provided. The CTFD provides coverage to 55 square miles and a population of 12,000 from two fire stations. The district has a full-time Fire Chief and full-time Asst. Chief, 15 full-time FF/Medics and 20 part-time FF/EMTs. It operates three ALS medic units, one engine, one ladder, one rescue/engine, one brush fire unit and a regional USAR truck. There are normally eight employees on duty with minimum manning set at seven per shift. The district responds to approximately 500 fire calls and 2000 EMS runs per year. The district is a bedroom community of mostly semi-rural areas with two major retail shopping areas and some light industrial complexes. The CTFD is currently rated as an Insurance Services Office (ISO) Class 5.

The district has not only seen significant growth over the past decade, but also a population that is aging due to longer life expectancies and increases of assisted living and nursing homes opening and expanding throughout. This growth has placed a greater burden on fire and EMS services that are provided.

As with any new organization, growing pains have been encountered and handled as they arise. An issue that seems to hamper this organization, as well as others, is employee relationships. With no formal performance evaluation program in place, miscommunications or



lack of communications between supervisors and subordinates have created issues within the department that may have been recognized earlier and handled more effectively.

Due to the lack of a performance evaluation program, employees may not have a clear picture of district goals and their role in these plans. Generally, the only feedback about an employee's job performance is negative when a problem arises. There is little opportunity to have a face-face discussion with supervisors to present some feedback about their individual situations or as a group. The ability to talk privately and freely with supervisors would provide a forum for open discussion that is usually very helpful to both employees and their supervisors.

The potential for this study on the Cumberland Trail Fire District is to provide information for the district to use to determine if implementing a performance review program could be an effective tool. At this time there is no means to gauge the progress of an employee's career.

With no performance review program in place, the ability to evaluate current job performance may entail many assumptions that may or may not be accurate. The goals need to originate from the administration, then to the line officers who would be in a position to pass on a clear and unified picture of what is expected of the staff. The employees then would have an understanding of the district's expectations. If used effectively, a performance evaluation program could not only improve employee relations but also give the firefighter an opportunity to help set goals and become an integral part of the vision and mission of the district. The firefighters would be able to have input into their careers. Feedback and communication is critical for any organization to thrive and prosper. This type of program could be a major step in this process.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Although there is a limited amount of literature available on performance review programs specifically for the Fire Service, there is a great deal of research information available specific to performance reviews in the private sector and in public sector generally. The literature was made from a local university library database, textbooks, journal articles and internet research. The literature review will attempt to address the research questions presented in this research project.

### **Research Question #1: What would be the impact on the administration in establishing an employee performance review program?**

Throughout much of the literature reviewed for this project, many common themes were apparent. Communication and feedback were needs that seemed to be at the forefront of many authors.

Appraisal of employee performance is one of the most important responsibilities of supervisors. An effective system can play a crucial role in an organization attempting to remain competitive and efficient (Allan, 1994).

“There are four reasons for appraisal performance. First, appraisals provide information upon which promotion and salary decisions are made. Second, they provide an opportunity for you and your subordinate to review the subordinate’s work related behavior. Third, the appraisal is part of the firm’s career-planning process, because it provides an opportunity to review the person’s career plans in light of his or her exhibited strengths or weaknesses. Fourth, they will help better manage and improve your organization’s performance.” Dessler, (2000), (p. 322).

In order to effectively manage Fire Service personnel, many administrators turn to the MBO (Manage By Objective) program. This is a widely accepted means of management in many areas of business. It can be a highly effective technique to be used by FD administrators to effectively manage their staff. For an MBO program to be successful, periodic reviews are required. Reviews should be well planned to allow for quality two-way communication between the supervisor and the employee and allow both sides to know what is happening (Carter, Rausch, 1989).

The firefighting staff is the most important asset that is available to the function of the department. Recruiting, outfitting, training and motivating the employee is critical for the retention of the quality individuals that maintain the high level of efficiency that is needed in the fire service. This is also an important management skill that is an investment of funding as the value of the employee continually increases over time if they are cultivated. In order for this to be accomplished, administrators must review the firefighters' performance and establish new goals to keep them motivated and focused (Stocker, 2008).

The Cumberland Trail Fire District currently has a labor contract with the full-time staff that does not include merit increases, so using performance evaluations for this application is not appropriate. Promotions within the department are done by application and review of a promotion committee. Performance appraisals could be a very useful tool for reviewing candidates for promotion.

In the fire service, the need for continuing education is an issue that is presented on a daily basis. Using performance evaluation as a learning process is another advantage of the system that should not be discounted. Effective administrators will use this opportunity to learn about individual needs (Glen, 1990).

Many fire departments face the growing challenge of losing experience, skill, and knowledge as senior members and officers retire or promote. This information is traditionally passed on to newer members and officers through training. Another more regimented method that is becoming more prevalent is mentoring. Mentoring has been used in the business world with great success for decades. The fire service is starting to recognize the advantages of mentoring as a tool for career development of officers and firefighters. With company officers and crew working closely and being together for extended periods of time, there is a great opportunity to use the mentoring process. Establishing goals and periodically reviewing the progress of the individual is critical for this concept to succeed (Schrage, 2007).

The benefits of mentoring include not only improved performance of the employee, but also for the mentor and the department. As mentioned previously, the mentoring process is gaining interest not only in the Fire Service but elsewhere as well by harnessing the improved performance at the individual, group or organizational levels (Sonntag, 2002).

**Research Question #2: What would be the impact on the staff in establishing an employee performance review program?**

Not only do employee performance reviews fill many needs for supervisors and the administration of an organization, employees also have a stake in this process and also have many needs that can be met during the appraisal process.

Some of the main needs of the employee are that the performance evaluations are consistent, two-way communication is encouraged, evaluators are familiar with the employee's work, and opportunities to rebut or challenge the appraisal are available (Longenecker, Goff, 1992).

People like to have a clear understanding of what is expected of them in the work place. Having the opportunity to discuss their performance and goals will go a long way in preventing misunderstandings in the future. Employees should be directly involved in developing the performance standards that they are trying to meet. Even if they are not involved in establishing the goals, they should have a clear understanding of what is expected of them and providing periodic feedback on performance is also likely to promote acceptance of the process and prevent the resentment of having surprises at the time of evaluation (Allan, 1994).

Employees have a right to know exactly what is expected of them. In the Fire Service, people's lives depend on our employees being able to do their job effectively. In order for the employees to function in their chosen field, they need to understand what is required to accomplish the goals that are set for the individual and for the department. Most employees want to do their best in all endeavors. Although a motivated individual will find a way to accomplish their goals, there are always those who need guidance and leadership from the

supervisory staff. The unmotivated employee may need to be challenged. Performance review may be an effective tool to use to set goals that will challenge and motivate this person (Stocker, 2008).

Feedback from supervisors increases the employee's ability to evaluate them and correct problems as they arise on their own. Employee's who are used to getting feedback, will look for it and know how to use this feedback (London, 2003).

Another means that is growing in popularity and importance for evaluating employees is the use of multisource feedback. This is a system where employees can be rated by any number of sources including subordinates, peers, supervisors, internal customers, external customers, or others. When feedback comes from numerous locations it is sometimes referred to as "360-degree" feedback. This type of evaluation can be used for not only supervisory personnel, but for any member of the staff. This type of multisource feedback is used by all Fortune 500 companies and has become a very effective tool. Multisource feedback contributes to individual development by providing information on worthwhile directions for learning and growth. Building self-awareness increases self-reflection and understanding of others and how they react to you. This, in turn, might encourage supervisors to think more about the consequences of their actions towards others. This could be a very powerful and effective tool for supervisory staff in preventing the "Tunnel Vision" that sometimes occurs (London, 2003).

As addressed in the review of the previous question, use of the performance review process as a learning process is also an asset to the employee. The employee can use this opportunity to learn of organizational needs (Glen, 1990).

**Research Question #3: What impact on employee relationships might be expected if an employee performance review program is initiated?**

The main benefits that were discussed in much of the research, were opening communication lines that previously were impaired or non-existent. Giving the employees opportunities to discuss their performance enhances the work atmosphere creating higher morale and less tension.

Feedback directs behavior, influences future performance goals and sets objectives for achieving higher levels of performance. Employees will know what they do well and how much better they can be if they apply themselves. Feedback also increases the amount of power and control that employees feel. This allows them to feel that they have a greater stake in the operation. This type of situation will enhance the feeling of cooperation between supervisors and staff (London, 2003).

Keeping current with both the employees and department will enable the flow of information both up and down the chain of command. Informal feedback, oral or written should follow each significant task. These actions will greatly assist in keeping a performance evaluation system up-to-date and responsive to both the employees and to the department resulting in greater departmental goal accomplishment (Martin, Bartol, 1998).

Performance reviews often conflict with relationship management. Situations arise where employees and supervisors work very closely on a regular basis. Relationships are formed that may interfere with the ability to evaluate in a completely objective manner. In the Fire Service, employees and supervisors work and live together for extended periods of time and interpersonal relationships may be sometimes difficult to keep separate from the professional

relationships. Negative feedback may not motivate the employee and many times this primary tool to improve performance has the opposite effect (Simmons, 2003).

At any particular time, union leaders and department managers are seen as antagonists. If a performance review program is initiated within the department, union leadership may interpret this as a means to infringe on the rights of the employees. Both sides need to discuss the issues and come to an agreement on the implementation of the program. Many times during grievance procedures, the sides may not be as opposed as originally thought. Clear, open dialogue will show the benefits for labor and management that can be achieved with the review process (Carter, Rausch, 1989).

In the case of the Cumberland Trail Fire District, a collective bargaining agreement is in place with the Cumberland Trail Career Fire Fighters, IAFF Local 3667. Lance Rice, President of the local stated that there should not be any problem with the implementation of an employee periodic performance review program if the reviews are kept within the parameters of constructive criticism and goal setting. If it were used to be a disciplinary device, then it would be in violation of the contract. Specific guidelines have been established for the handling of disciplinary cases. He felt that a performance review program should have a positive effect on both the employees and administration of the department (L. Rice, personal communication, March 2, 2009).



**Research Question #4: What obstacles to establishing an employee performance review program would need to be addressed?**

Many obstacles, both operational and philosophical were addressed in much of the literature researched for this project.

Few people look forward to a performance review and many supervisors do not want to be put in the position of judge. Many employees and supervisors do not see these events as positive and productive. These are some of the complaints that are heard about a performance review program. Critics are quick to assert a negative spin on these issues without suggesting an alternative, but more often than not, the negativity stems from a poor training program for the evaluators (Rudman, 2003).

Supervisors are given the responsibility to motivate the employees. If they are not giving them regular feedback, why are they in this position of authority (Dauten, 1995)?

It is essential that evaluators are trained and employees are oriented. This will require an investment of time, energy and fiscal resources. The burdens on evaluators are increased when they are to rate a large volume of employees or lack the expertise to do the job. Union opposition also will need to be addressed as the union will have a different perspective on employee evaluations. Historically the unions will emphasize seniority as the preferred way to make decisions. Longevity in a position assumes that the longer an employee has been in a position will cause them to be more proficient than a person with less tenure (Roberts, 1994).

Despite a seemingly overwhelming case in favor of performance reviews, some experts call for their complete abolishment. Most of the obstacles are due to poor or insufficient training in the proper techniques that are required for the fair administration of the reviews. If the

officers are properly trained and keep their focus on competence development, many of these obstacles can be overcome. The evaluation skills necessary are very difficult to establish on an organizational level. The officers will be confronted with many difficult and touchy situations that will require a heightened level of compassion and tough minded implementation of the performance review. This obstacle may be alleviated with officers enhancing their own competence with new and progressive training and encourage department wide development programs (Carter, Rausch, 2006).

“Research suggests that having a technically sound appraisal system and procedure is no guarantee that the process will be effective. To be effective, managers and subordinates must have a shared perception of the purposes and functions of the process and a shared belief that it is useful to them on an individual basis.” Longenecker, Goff (1992), (p. 1)

If a department opts to establish a mentoring program, it must insure that the mentors are properly trained and equipped to handle the responsibilities of establishment of goals and the periodic performance reviews that are needed for success, this will require time and resources that may not be readily available to the department. Another obstacle that departments are facing is the lack of experienced personnel to be mentors. Many departments are turning to retirees to fill this void. As a program progresses, this will become less of an issue (Schrage, 2007).

Some feel that the time of periodic performance reviews has past and more effective means of supervision and evaluation are needed. One area to consider is to educate supervisors in leadership principles and their obligations, select employees more carefully and once selected, provide better education and training to employees. This is a challenge to any organization (Aluri & Reichel, 1994).

If the supervisor has employees who are making mistakes, do they wait and speak to them at a formal performance review? Of course not, they are met with and an effort is made to correct the problem at that time. Some supervisors may wait for the formal review to address these issues and by then the problem may have escalated (Cantoni, 2001).

## PROCEDURES

Information gathered for this research project was obtained from human resource books from local college libraries, fire service management books obtained through the Ohio Library System and the Cumberland Trail Fire District, articles from Fire Service and business periodicals from the CTFD archives, local libraries and the Internet. Descriptive research method was used as a polling tool to gather current data only from personnel of the CTFD. A cover letter was attached to the form to explain the purpose of the survey. Each full-time employee of the Fire District was asked to participate in the survey regardless of rank. One form was given to supervisory personnel with close ended questions dealing with the supervisor's opinions and perspectives. A different form was given to non-supervisory personnel with close ended questions dealing with the employees' opinions and perspectives. Company Lieutenants were given both surveys since they will be evaluators and evaluated.

A survey was sent to 53 career and combination departments within a 60 mile radius of St. Clairsville, Ohio requesting information about their specific organization concerning employee performance reviews. The region surveyed included eastern Ohio, northern West Virginia and southwestern Pennsylvania. This area was chosen to collect data from departments in similar economic circumstances as the CTFD.

One interview was conducted during the research period. FF Lance Rice, President of the Cumberland Trail Career Fire Fighters, IAFF Local 3667 was interviewed concerning labor issues that might arise from the possible implementation of a periodic employee performance review program at the CTFD.

### **Definitions of Terms**

Antagonist: One who opposes and contends against another.

Feedback: The communication of responses and reactions to proposals and changes, or of the findings of performance appraisals, with the goal of enabling improvements to be made.

Mentoring: It is an employee development program where a senior employee will work with a new employee on a one-on-one level to enhance their performance.

Objective: Undisturbed by emotion or personal bias.

Periodic Job Performance Review: Evaluating an employee's current or past job performance relating to the established job description and standards.

Relationship Management: The ability to separate the personal relationships that develop when employees work closely together and the professional duties required by the job.

Subjective: Taking place within the mind and modified by individual bias.

### **Limitations of Study**

Research material specifically about performance review in the Fire Service is very limited. Most Fire Service performance review information dealt with evaluation of a firefighter's ability to perform specific skill sets. Most of the research material on the subject comes from the government and private sector.

The personal surveys were limited to the opinions of employees of the Cumberland Trail Fire District. The outside department surveys of performance review programs were limited to departments located within a 60 mile radius of St. Clairsville, Ohio to collect data from departments with relatively similar geographic and economic backgrounds.

## RESULTS

Fifteen employee surveys were distributed to nine firefighters and six lieutenants concerning job performance reviews. All fifteen were completed and returned with no evidence that any of the data was tainted. Eight supervisor surveys were distributed to the Fire Chief, Asst. Chief and six lieutenants. All eight were completed and returned with no evidence that any of the data was tainted. Department surveys were mailed to the Fire Chiefs of 53 career and combination fire departments within a 60 mile radius of St. Clairsville, Ohio concerning their organization's job performance review programs. 39 of the surveys were completed and returned with no evidence that any of the data was tainted.

The results from this research project show that there is a need, and maybe more importantly, a want, of some type of annual performance review system within the CTFD. The employee survey indicates an overwhelming opinion that a review system in the Fire Service should be used and would be an asset in career planning and goal setting. It was also apparent that they feel that this could be an opportunity for open discussions with supervisors and could open lines of communication. They also felt that if properly administered by qualified and trained staff, this annual process should be beneficial. This review process should not be a negative experience for the employee. In what possibly could be deemed a very telling indicator of the popularity of instituting a review program is that thirteen out of fifteen employees stated that they would be interested in participating in the establishment of the performance review program. See (Table 1.1)

TABLE 1.1

**EMPLOYEE SURVEY:  
PERFORMANCE REVIEWS IN THE CTFD**

	<b>Issue</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Unsure</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
<b>1</b>	Periodic performance reviews should be used in the Fire Service.	<b>8</b> 53.3%	<b>7</b> 46.7%	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>2</b>	Periodic performance reviews should be an important tool in career planning and professional development.	<b>6</b> 40.0%	<b>7</b> 46.7%	<b>2</b> 13.3%	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>3</b>	Periodic performance reviews should be used as a chance to establish goals for the upcoming review period	<b>5</b> 33.3%	<b>9</b> 60.0%	<b>1</b> 6.7%	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>4</b>	Periodic performance reviews should be an opportunity for open discussions about all aspects of the CTFD.	<b>7</b> 46.7%	<b>5</b> 33.3%	<b>2</b> 13.3%	<b>1</b> 6.7%	<b>0</b>
<b>5</b>	Periodic performance reviews should be completed by an Immediate supervisor.	<b>2</b> 13.3%	<b>4</b> 26.7%	<b>5</b> 33.3%	<b>4</b> 26.7%	<b>0</b>
<b>6</b>	Employees should complete a self-evaluation before their formal performance review with their supervisor.	<b>2</b> 13.3%	<b>10</b> 66.7%	<b>2</b> 13.3%	<b>1</b> 6.7%	<b>0</b>
<b>7</b>	Periodic performance reviews should be beneficial to the employee by providing positive feedback	<b>7</b> 46.7%	<b>8</b> 53.3%	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>8</b>	Periodic performance reviews should be used by supervisors as an opportunity to criticize the employees and impose negative consequences.	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>6</b> 40.0%	<b>9</b> 60.0%
<b>9</b>	If a periodic performance review program were to be started, it should have influence from all ranks concerning the development of the system.	<b>9</b> 60.0%	<b>6</b> 40.0%	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

		< 6 months	6 months	12 months	24 months	> 24 months
10	How often should periodic performance reviews occur?	0	1 66.7%	13 13.3%	1 6.7%	0
11	Do you feel comfortable that your immediate supervisor is qualified and sufficiently trained to conduct a performance review.	Yes 8 53.3%	No 7 46.7%			
12	Would you be willing to participate on a committee to develop a periodic performance review program for the CTFD?	13 86.7%	2 13.3%			
<b>Surveys Distributed: 15</b>						
<b>Surveys Returned: 15</b>						

Results of the supervisor survey were also very positive and reflected opinions of the employee survey. They feel that annual performance reviews should be a part of the Fire Service if done responsibly by qualified and trained personnel, but the staff needs appropriate training to administer fair and appropriate performance reviews. There is mixed opinions as to whether they are qualified to administer evaluations. They feel that this type of program should be a very positive procedure for the employees and an opportunity for open discussions and establishment of positive goals. Again as with the employee survey a large majority, seven out of eight supervisors would like to be involved with the establishment of the program. See (Table 1.2)



TABLE 1.2

**SUPERVISOR SURVEY:  
PERFORMANCE REVIEWS IN THE CTFD**

	<b>Issue</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Unsure</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
<b>1</b>	Periodic performance reviews should be used in the Fire Service.	<b>3</b> 37.5%	<b>5</b> 62.5%	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>2</b>	Periodic performance reviews should be an important tool in career planning and professional development.	<b>3</b> 37.5%	<b>4</b> 50.0%	<b>1</b> 12.5%	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>3</b>	Periodic performance reviews should be used as a chance to establish goals for the upcoming review period	<b>5</b> 62.5%	<b>3</b> 37.5%	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>4</b>	Periodic performance reviews should be an opportunity for open discussions about all aspects of the CTFD.	<b>4</b> 50.0%	<b>3</b> 37.5%	<b>1</b> 12.5%	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>5</b>	Periodic performance reviews should be completed by an immediate supervisor.	<b>1</b> 12.5%	<b>4</b> 50.0%	<b>1</b> 12.5%	<b>2</b> 25.0%	<b>0</b>
<b>6</b>	You are sufficiently qualified and trained to conduct appropriate periodic performance reviews.	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b> 25.0%	<b>4</b> 50.0%	<b>2</b> 25.0%	<b>0</b>
<b>7</b>	Training of supervisors is necessary to conduct appropriate periodic performance reviews.	<b>3</b> 37.5%	<b>5</b> 62.5%	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>8</b>	Employees should complete a self-evaluation before their formal periodic performance review with their supervisor.	<b>4</b> 50.0%	<b>3</b> 37.5%	<b>1</b> 12.5%	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>9</b>	If a periodic performance review program were to be started, There should be input from all ranks concerning the details of the system.	<b>4</b> 50.0%	<b>4</b> 50.0%	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

		< 6 months	6 months	12 months	24 months	> 24 months
10	How often should periodic performance reviews occur?	0	0	7 87.5%	1 12.5%	0
11	Would you be willing to participate on a committee to develop a periodic performance review program for the CTFD?	Yes 7 87.5%	No 1 12.5%			

**Surveys Distributed: 8**

**Surveys Returned: 8**

Results of the outside department survey give a picture of what is being done in other departments in the same geographical and economical situations as the CTFD. Of the departments who responded to the survey, 61.4% are conducting periodic performance reviews of their staff mostly on an annual basis by trained immediate supervisors. The training of the supervisors is being done by mostly educational facilities, but also by private consulting firms, and in house by training officers or chief officers. See (Table 1.3).

TABLE 1.3

**OUTSIDE DEPARTMENT SURVEY:  
PERFORMANCE REVIEWS**

<b>1</b>	<b>Issue</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>			
	Does your department conduct periodic performance reviews?	<b>25</b> 61.4%	<b>14</b> 35.9%			
<b>2</b>	How often are the periodic performance reviews conducted?	<b>6 months</b> <b>2</b> 8.0%	<b>12 months</b> <b>22</b> 88.0%	<b>24 months</b> <b>1</b> 4.0%	<b>Other</b> <b>0</b>	
<b>3</b>	Who conducts the periodic performance reviews?	<b>Immediate Supervisor</b> <b>21</b> 84.0%	<b>Chief Officer</b> <b>4</b> 16.0%	<b>Other</b> <b>0</b>		
<b>4</b>	Were the evaluators given specific training to properly conduct a periodic employee performance review?	<b>Yes</b> <b>25</b> 100.00%	<b>No</b> <b>0</b>			
<b>5</b>	Who conducted the training of the supervisors?	<b>Training Officer</b> <b>6</b> 24.0%	<b>Chief Officer</b> <b>2</b> 8.0%	<b>Municipal HR Staff</b> <b>1</b> 4.0%	<b>Education Facility</b> <b>12</b> 48.0%	<b>Consulting Firm</b> <b>4</b> 16.0%
					<b>Other</b> <b>0</b>	
	<b>Surveys Distributed: 53</b>					
	<b>Surveys Returned: 39</b>	<b>73.6%</b>				

## DISCUSSION

The data from the literature review and the surveys indicate that there is a strong case to be made for the implementation of some type of periodic job performance review program in the Cumberland Trail Fire District. There are four reasons to institute a program. The first reason is to provide information that can be utilized in the promotion processes. Second, they provide an opportunity for the employee and supervisor to review the subordinate's work and related behaviors. Third, the appraisal provides a chance to review the person's career goals and to look at how this individual's strengths and weaknesses can be addressed to enhance the opportunity for advancement in the department. Fourth, the review process will improve the management and performance of the organization (Dessler, 2000).

In the CTFD, communications up and down the chain of command would be improved dramatically if a review program were to be instituted. Every individual would feel more involved with the operations of the department and would be more motivated to improve their job performance. Career goals would become clearer and the means to achieve these goals would be more achievable to the individual. When the objectives of the department become available to the employee, ideas on ways to achieve these objectives may come forward and create a more effective atmosphere when all have input into the issue.

Communications between the administration and employees are absolutely critical for the success of the organization. Some feel that the performance review process is obsolete and ineffective. If a performance review program is not implemented, then some other form of assessment is required. Enhanced communications can only improve the opportunity for the department to progress in an effective and proactive manner (Dauten, 1995).

Trust in the abilities of the supervisor to objectively and effectively review the subordinate is very important. Reviews must be administered fairly and without personal bias. Training of the supervisors is paramount in establishing this trust. Unqualified administrators will cause a great deal of frustration to all involved and the program will become ineffective and eventually fail to achieve the goals of the reviews. In order for an organization to maintain maximum efficiency and move forward into an uncertain future, the most effective employees need to move up into more responsible positions within the department. Identifying these individuals requires that they be evaluated objectively (McBey, 1994).

In order for a periodic job performance review program to be successful, the administration, line officers and firefighters all need to feel comfortable with the process and believe in it or it will lose credibility and be a waste of time for all involved. If some type of review program can be initiated and administered effectively, it can only improve overall operations of the department and allow the organization to deliver the expected high quality of service to its customers.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The research done in this project clearly indicates that periodic job performance review program of some type should be implemented at the Cumberland Trail Fire District. The literature review revealed an overwhelming number of authors who believe in this review process as very beneficial to both the employees and the department. Although there were some who seem to have doubts about whether a performance review program is worthwhile, most of their arguments could be effectively countered by training the supervisors thoroughly in the process of evaluation.

The employee and supervisors surveys show strong support for an annual performance review program if the evaluators are equally and properly trained in conducting these appraisals. Labor issues should not be a problem as a disciplinary process is already in effect, so the review process should not be used as such.

A committee should be formed with representation from all ranks of the department to review this research project and use it as a starting point to ultimately create an effective review process. If the committee does not wish to implement a performance review program, some other type of interpersonal communication and professional guidance process needs to be established. The survey indicated a lack of communications as a problem within the department. This could be a strong first step in alleviating this problem.

The survey also showed some reluctance on the part of the employees in accepting their supervisors as capable to conduct these reviews without some training. It is strongly recommended that the supervisory staff receive professional education from a credible source on how to conduct performance reviews so that all are administering these reviews objectively. The committee needs to routinely meet and reevaluate the system for effectiveness. A very telling

item in the surveys showed an overwhelming enthusiasm to participate on the committee and be a part of the process. This is a very positive sign of cooperation.

The survey of other fire departments from the area shows that even in these trying times, many departments feel strongly about conducting performance reviews and believe in their effectiveness. The survey also shows that training is available to help establish this program.

The Cumberland Trail Fire District, its administration and Board have short-term and long-term plans in effect. A problem that has arisen is that very few of the employees know what these plans are. This could be a great opportunity to bridge this communication gap and work together effectively to take the CTFD securely into an insecure future.

## REFERENCES

- Allen, P. (1994). Designing and Implementing an Effective Performance Appraisal System. *Review of Business*, 16(2), 3-10.
- Aluri, R., & Reichel, M. (1994). Performance Evaluation: A Deadly Disease? *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 20(3), 145.
- Cantoni, Craig J. (1996). Consider a New Adult Approach to Conducting Performance Appraisals. *ACA News*, January, 1996.
- Carter, Harry R. & Rausch, Erwin (1989). *Management in the Fire Service*: (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Quincy, MA: National Fire Protection Association. (Original work published 1977).
- Carter, Harry R. & Rausch, Erwin (2006). *Management in the Fire Service*: (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Sudbury, MA: Jones & Bartlett Publishers. (Original work published 1977).
- Dauten, D. (1995). Two Thumbs Down For Yearly Performance Evaluations. *Business Journal*, 9(9), 11.
- Dessler, G. (2000). *Human Resource Management*: (8th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall. (Original work published 1988).
- Glen, R. M. (1990). Performance Appraisal: An Unnerving Yet Useful Process. *Public Personnel Management*, 19(1), 1-6.
- London, M. (2003). *Job Feedback: Giving, Seeking, and Using Feedback for Performance Improvement* (chap. 2, 6, 7). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Martin, D. C., & Bartol, K. M. (1998). Performance Appraisal: Maintaining System Effectiveness. *Public Personnel Management*, 27(2), 223-228.



- McBey, K. (1994, November). Perfecting Performance Evaluations. *Security Management*, 38(11), 23.
- Roberts, G. E. (1994). Barriers to Municipal Government Performance Appraisal Systems: Evidence from a Survey of Municipal Personnel Administrators. *Public Personnel Management*, 23(2), 225-230.
- Rudman, Richard (2003). *Performance Planning and Review: Making Employee Appraisals Work* (chap 1). Crows Nest, N.S.W.: Allen & Unwin.
- Schrage, Doug (2007). Officer Mentoring Preserves Fire Service Heritage. *Fire Engineering*, 160(7), 83-86.
- Simmons, Annette (2003). When Performance Reviews Fail: Performance Management Often Conflicts with Relationship Management. Negative Feedback Doesn't Motivate; Ignoring the Subject Element in Reviews Undermines Employee Attitudes. Here's a Proposal for an Alternative Review System That Takes into Account the Important Emotional Aspects. *T&D*, 57(9), 47-48.
- Sonnentag, Sabine (2002). *Psychological management of Individual Performance* (chap 18). New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.
- Stocker, Alan (2008). Help Make Your Employees Successful. *Fire Engineering*, 161(7), 65-75.

## APPENDIX 1

### EMPLOYEE SURVEY ON PERFORMANCE REVIEW IN THE CUMBERLAND TRAIL FIRE DISTRICT

Please respond to the following questions as appropriately as possible. All information will be collected and the results from the survey will be made available for your information. Please place the survey in the envelope, seal, and return as soon as possible. Thank you for your cooperation.

**Issue #1: Periodic performance reviews should be used in the fire service.**

- 1. Strongly Agree
- 2. Agree
- 3. Unsure
- 4. Disagree
- 5. Strongly Disagree

**Issue #2: Periodic performance reviews should be an important tool in career planning and professional development.**

- 1. Strongly Agree
- 2. Agree
- 3. Unsure
- 4. Disagree
- 5. Strongly Disagree

**Issue #3: Periodic performance reviews should be used as a chance to establish goals for the upcoming review period.**

- 1. Strongly Agree
- 2. Agree
- 3. Unsure
- 4. Disagree
- 5. Strongly Disagree

**Issue #4: Periodic performance reviews should be an opportunity for open discussions about all aspects of the CTFD.**

- 1. Strongly Agree
- 2. Agree
- 3. Unsure
- 4. Disagree
- 5. Strongly Disagree

**Issue #5: Periodic performance reviews should be completed by immediate supervisor.**

- 1. Strongly Agree
- 2. Agree
- 3. Unsure
- 4. Disagree
- 5. Strongly Disagree

**Issue #6: Employees should complete a self-evaluation before their formal performance review with their supervisor.**

- 1. Strongly Agree
- 2. Agree
- 3. Unsure
- 4. Disagree
- 5. Strongly Disagree

**Issue #7: Periodic performance reviews should be beneficial to the employee by providing positive feedback.**

- 1. Strongly Agree
- 2. Agree
- 3. Unsure
- 4. Disagree
- 5. Strongly Disagree

**Issue #8: Periodic performance reviews should be used by supervisors as an opportunity to criticize the employees and impose negative consequences.**

- 1. Strongly Agree
- 2. Agree
- 3. Unsure
- 4. Disagree
- 5. Strongly Disagree

**Issue #9: If a periodic performance review program were to be implemented, it should have influence from all ranks concerning the development of the system.**

- 1. Strongly Agree
- 2. Agree
- 3. Unsure
- 4. Disagree
- 5. Strongly Disagree

**Issue #10: How often should periodic performance reviews occur?**

- 1. Less than 6 months
- 2. Every 6 months
- 3. Every 12 months
- 4. Every 24 months
- 5. Longer than 24 months

**Issue #11: Do you feel comfortable that your immediate supervisor is qualified and sufficiently trained to conduct a performance review?**

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

**Issue #12: Would you be willing to participate on a committee to develop a periodic performance review program for the CTFD?**

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

## APPENDIX 2

### SUPERVISOR SURVEY ON PERFORMANCE REVIEW IN THE CUMBERLAND TRAIL FIRE DISTRICT

Please respond to the following questions as appropriately as possible. All information will be collected and the results from the survey will be made available for your information. Please place the survey in the envelope, seal, and return as soon as possible. Thank you for your cooperation.

**Issue #1: Periodic performance reviews should be used in the fire service.**

- 1. Strongly Agree
- 2. Agree
- 3. Unsure
- 4. Disagree
- 5. Strongly Disagree

**Issue #2: Periodic performance reviews should be an important tool in career planning and employee development.**

- 1. Strongly Agree
- 2. Agree
- 3. Unsure
- 4. Disagree
- 5. Strongly Disagree

**Issue #3: Periodic performance reviews should be used as an opportunity to establish goals for the upcoming review period.**

- 1. Strongly Agree
- 2. Agree
- 3. Unsure
- 4. Disagree
- 5. Strongly Disagree

**Issue #4: Periodic performance reviews should be used as an opportunity for open discussions about all aspects of the CTFD.**

- 1. Strongly Agree
- 2. Agree
- 3. Unsure
- 4. Disagree
- 5. Strongly Disagree

**Issue #5: Periodic performance reviews should be completed by immediate supervisors.**

- 1. Strongly Agree
- 2. Agree
- 3. Unsure
- 4. Disagree
- 5. Strongly Disagree

**Issue #6: You are sufficiently qualified and trained to conduct appropriate periodic performance reviews.**

- 1. Strongly Agree
- 2. Agree
- 3. Unsure
- 4. Disagree
- 5. Strongly Disagree

**Issue #7: Training of supervisors is necessary to conduct appropriate periodic performance reviews.**

- 1. Strongly Agree
- 2. Agree
- 3. Unsure
- 4. Disagree
- 5. Strongly Disagree

**Issue #8: Employees should complete a self-evaluation before their formal periodic performance review with their supervisor.**

- 1. Strongly Agree
- 2. Agree
- 3. Unsure
- 4. Disagree
- 5. Strongly Disagree

**Issue #9: If a periodic performance review program were to be started, there should be input from all ranks concerning the details of the system.**

- 1. Strongly Agree
- 2. Agree
- 3. Unsure
- 4. Disagree
- 5. Strongly Disagree

**Issue #10: How often should periodic performance reviews be conducted?**

- 1. Under 6 months
- 2. Every 6 months
- 3. Every 12 months
- 4. Every 24 months
- 5. Longer than 24 months

**Issue #11: Would you be willing to participate on a committee to develop a periodic performance review program for the CTFD?**

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

**APPENDIX 3****OUTSIDE DEPARTMENT SURVEY ON PERIODIC EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE REVIEW**

Please respond to the following questions as appropriately as possible. All information will be collected and the results from the survey will be made available for your information. Please place the survey in the envelope, seal, and return as soon as possible. Thank you for your cooperation.

**Issue #1: Does your department conduct periodic employee performance reviews?**

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

\*\*\*\*\* If you answered **No** to Issue #1, please stop your survey and return in the enclosed envelope. If you answered **Yes** to Issue #1, please continue with the following questions.

**Issue #2: How often are the periodic employee performance reviews conducted?**

- 1. Every 6 months
- 2. Every 12 months
- 3. Every 24 months
- 4. Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

**Issue #3: Who conducts the periodic employee performance reviews?**

- 1. Immediate supervisor
- 2. Chief Officer
- 3. Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

**Issue #4: Were the evaluators given specific training to properly conduct a periodic employee performance evaluation?**

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

**Issue #5: If the supervisors were trained in the proper procedures in conducting a periodic employee performance evaluation, who conducted the training?**

- 1. Training Officer
- 2. Chief Officer
- 3. Municipal Human Resources Staff
- 4. Educational Facility
- 5. Private Consulting Firm
- 6. Other, please specify