

Setting Work Expectations

How do expectations help?

1. Clarifying expectations at the *beginning* of a performance cycle has a stronger and more immediate effect on job performance than providing feedback after.
2. You cannot discuss performance in a vacuum. Unless you have some set of rules established before you play the game, you can't fairly and consistently keep track of runs, goals, fouls, etc.
3. The comparison of performance against expectations sets the basis for helpful feedback.

Work Expectations have FIVE PARTS

1. **Major Job Duty – major chunk of the job**
2. **Link to a Department Business Goal**
3. **Outcomes -- What is to be accomplished**

Outcomes are what you produce as part of your job – what you make. They define a result, not an activity. Results are things: Reports, Decisions, Programs, Plans, Repairs, etc.) They can be written as a noun + past tense verb and sound like a “done deal”:

- Decision made
- Complaint resolved
- Pothole repaired

4. **Performance Standards – description of work done in a *fully acceptable* manner; how well you need to do the job.**

Standards

- Describe the conditions that exist when the job is done in a fully successful manner (Not just “squeaking by”).
- Establish the criteria for acceptable performance -- How many, how well, by when?
- Answer “so that...” Example: “Complaints resolved *so that* complaints do not escalate.”
- Are set so that if everyone performs at this level your work unit will meet its objectives.
- Establish the expectations that are later used as measures for feedback and development.
- Identify the level of performance required to get the work of the unit done; what a supervisor could live with if everyone performed at this standard

When writing standards

- Write them for the critical or problematic parts of the job
- Base them on
 - Historical data – historically what has been the output
 - Targets in Service Level Agreements
 - Output required to generate revenue or meet deadlines

- Consider: quantity, speed, deadlines, accuracy, budget, use of resources, safety, legislative or regulatory requirements, teamwork, leadership, creativity, customer service, working with others, etc.
- Don't set standards based on the best performer. Generally, 80% of qualified, fully trained employees should be able to perform at the level described by the standard.

5. Resources – what I need in order to meet the expectations

Resources include whatever you need in order to succeed at your job: training, equipment, access to data, access to certain people, etc. This provides an opportunity for supervisor and employee to discuss the tools and resources needed to do the job and identify what resources are available.

How to Set Expectations

1. Supervisor and employee meet at the *beginning* of a performance cycle and jointly agree on major job duties, outcomes and performance standards.
2. Have the employee's position description and your unit's business plan and/or objectives. Confirm with the employee understands the tasks, responsibilities of the position. If the position description is out of date, this is a great time to revise it.
3. Together identify the key functions of the job, the 1 – 5 major chunks of the job.
4. For each function list the key outputs, the most important expectations.
5. Write the output as a noun + past tense verb. Examples: *decision made, complaint resolved, pothole repaired*. The output should sound like a “done deal.”
6. For each output describe the conditions that exist when the task is done fully successfully. What can be observed? What can be measured? Example: Decision made *so that...*
7. Invite the employee's comments and suggestions on the standards. Are they clear? Attainable?

Example:

Outcome:	Performance Standard:
- Phone calls returned	within 24 hours
- Budget prepared	by the deadline in the accepted format with justifications for forecasts exceeding last year by 10%
- Investigation conducted	so that no more than 10% of final determinations are overturned in appeal.
- Customer inquiries referred	to the correct department on the first attempt 99% of the time
- Pavement repaired	in the timeframe scheduled, using the correct materials, with no calls for re-work at least 90% of the time

Typical Questions

1. How many work expectations should there be for a job?

That depends on the complexity of the job. Look at the job description. Cluster the responsibilities into 3 – 5 major chunks (no more than 5). Those are your major job duties. Write expectations for each of them.

2. How many outcomes should there be for each major job duty?

Again it depends on the complexity of the job. One – three is typical.

3. How many standards should there be for each outcome?

At least one. Usually there are 1 - 3 standards per outcome.

4. Is it worth it?

Without expectations and standards, a conversation about performance is entirely subjective: what the supervisor sees as acceptable performance versus what the employee sees as acceptable performance. Taking the time at the beginning of a performance cycle to establish expectations makes the ending of the cycle, the performance discussion, much easier and subject to fewer surprises.

In addition, knowing what will be considered to measure or assess performance allows the employee to gather the data that substantiates acceptable performance him- or herself.

5. What do you do with jobs that can't be quantified?

It's not simply a numbers game. Completing a customer call in 15 minutes doesn't mean anything if the customer calls again with the same issue, hoping for a different answer. For standards not easily quantified, try to describe the impact of fully acceptable work. Example: decision not appealed, client follows advice, decision not overturned. in court. Or you can describe that appropriate procedure or protocol was followed.

Here are some examples:

Outcome	Performance Standard (conditions that exist when the job is done in a fully successful manner)
Budget developed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Approved before the start of the next fiscal year- Requires no more than 2 revisions- Uses City format- Incorporates cost reduction of 7% over last year
New process designed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Incorporates "voice of the customer"- Reduces cycle time by 50%- Reduces cost of the process by 40%- Fully implemented within 90 days

For some reason it is much easier to identify standards for someone else's job than for your own. Describe your job to a colleague. Try completing the sentence "It's been a good day when..."

SETTING WORK EXPECTATIONS WORKSHEET

Goals

Major Job Duties (big box) Outcomes (small)

2 1

3

Standards - how well I need to do my work

4

Resources - what I need to achieve this goal

5

WORK EXPECTATIONS ARE WRITTEN FOR THE POSITION NOT THE PERSON

1. MAJOR JOB DUTIES

- What you answer in a checkout line when someone asks “what do you do?”
- Major pieces of the position description

2. LINK TO DEPARTMENT GOAL

3. OUTCOMES

- What do you *make*? (Reports, Decisions, Programs, Plans, Repairs, etc.)
- A key output at a director or manager level may be a department objective

4. STANDARDS

- Write standards for the outputs *not* the activities or tactics
- Write standards for the critical or problematic parts of the job
- Base standards on
 - Historical data – historically what has been the output
 - Targets in the Service Level Agreement
 - Output required to generate revenue or meet deadlines
- Generally: 80% of qualified, fully trained employees should be able to perform at this level.
- Consider: Quantity, Speed, Deadlines, Accuracy, Budget, Use of resources, safety, legislative or regulatory requirements, teamwork, leadership, creativity, customer service, working with others, etc.
- Standards *de-personalize* the evaluation process.

5. RESOURCES

- What skills, equipment, access to people will help you achieve your goal