



A Ten-Minute Informative Communication of the
International Association of Conference Center Administrators



Summer 2004

Joint Performance Reviews

I sat at the 1997 Fall Conference in Auburn, Washington, listening to our Key Note speaker. I believe it was Dr. Allen Johnson from the Covey Leadership Institute. What my notes from the session show was his comment about including staff in the boss's performance review. My mind took that a little further and I thought that doing something jointly with all staff sounded a little crazy but fascinating. Then I said, "No, that really makes no sense." After further reflection, I began to get excited, saying to myself, "with the staff I have right now that might be a really productive and fun adventure."

When I returned home, I became more serious about the idea and crystallized my thoughts into a workable plan. Following through with this idea was now something to which I was committed, but I still realized that it involved a certain amount of risk. I had to take steps in the process that would minimize the risk.

The first step was to share the concept with the management staff, which was the group with which I would use this process. This included the Director (me), the Facilities Manager, the Food Service Manager, and the Program Director. We discussed it at a staff meeting and those involved bought into the process.

Then we needed a format or set of guidelines with which to work. It was fairly simple. Each of us, including me, was to evaluate each other staff person. I put together a very brief form that included the name of the person being evaluated, the person completing the form, and the date. Each staff person was to list at least three or four things that they thought each staff person did well (including themselves). Then each person was to list not more than one or two growing points for the person being evaluated.

All the forms were returned to me. Then I stapled all the forms for each person into a mini packet, which was given to them at the time of the review.

Finally, we spent a long morning together. Each person received the mini packet of performance reviews that was written for them. We talked about the reviews, with each person giving their own verbal support to what they listed and with discussion between all of us for each person.

Now comes the fun part (or was it?) Basically the discussions were very positive and productive. I often say that one plus one plus one plus one does not equal four. It equals something much more than four. Why? I guess to most of us the answer is obvious; as we bounce ideas off each other we think of other things that did not come to us on our own.

So, each person had a great deal of support. The Program Director might have told the Facilities Manager that they appreciated the quick response to a repair need in one of the cabins. Then the Food Service Manager responds with something like, "yes, and I appreciated your quick response a few weekends ago when the freezer was not working and I was trying to feed a large group. When we were finished, each person had received a bundle of support from those with whom they work on a daily basis. I could say a lot about this, but simply put, this side of the process was extremely beneficial to each one of us.

On the other side, that is the growing points, there was also mostly a very positive and constructive sharing of ideas that each person received very graciously. Perhaps it is obvious that this side of things also produced some tension. The primary area of conflict arose in one of the reviews between the Program Director and the Facilities Manager. I no longer remember what the original issue was. I do remember that for starters one of the two became a little defensive, which is not all that abnormal. I also remember, however, that at one moment when one of them shared a growing point with the other, the response was something to the effect that something the other did was causing them to act the way they did.

Wow! Now I was beginning to realize, and eventually, so did the two of them, that this is why there had been times when one or the other of them basically exploded emotionally at the other. What was so great with this process was that from that initial discussion, they moved to trying to listen to each other and to understand why each responded as they did. Eventually, they came to an understanding, though probably not a full acceptance, of each other and where the other was coming from in these situations that were less than healthy.

I would never suggest that from that time on, everything was rosy between the two. However, there is no doubt that this conversation with a couple of other observers enabled the two to better appreciate each other's perspective. Some of it simply had to do with the feeling that one was invading the other's space when, in reality, they needed to understand each other's job descriptions and responsibilities and to better understand how to approach their relationship from that perspective. The problems did not completely go away, but the frequency and intensity of the explosions definitely both diminished. Talk about a success story, after wading through the tension, this process absolutely had positive results.

In this case, what I first gained at one of IACCA's Fall Conferences bore great fruit. By the grace of God, I had the insight and courage to take the risk of attempting something that was not only new, but also carried some real risk with it. To conclude, I saw at least two major positives emerge from this process. First was the support that each person felt that was far greater than if I had done these reviews separately with each one. The second was the understanding and growth it produced for all of us and particularly for the two who had to confront a somewhat ugly past.

That was more than five years ago and I have not felt comfortable with this approach since – that is, until now. About two months ago I shared this possibility with my current Leadership Team at Camp Magruder, which includes seven of us in management positions. Initially, I had one very positive response. More recently, we discussed it in a meeting sharing our excitement about the possible process, our fears, and some ways we can make it work. We are now taking the first steps to embark on this process for ourselves.

From our sharing, I will do a couple of things differently this time. I will more intentionally screen the evaluations to be sure they are constructive. I will also summarize the evaluations, putting them all on one sheet for each person. I am again, nervous as well as excited about going through this process with a staff that I believe can make it a positive and growing process.



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