

*Lilly S.*



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# TAPES NEWSLETTER

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A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF THE  
PERSCOM EVALUATION SYSTEMS OFFICE

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## “BUILDING COHESION”

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# TAPES NEWSLETTER    BUILDING COHESION    JUNE 1996

On 30 June 1996, the third TAPES rating cycle for those in grades 13 and above will conclude. During the last three years, most have grown more comfortable and knowledgeable about the policies and procedures for TAPES. Many have come to understand and appreciate the importance of clear communications about performance expectations and ensuring that these expectations are directly linked to the organizational goals and objectives. A number of you have informed us that this awareness has been beneficial to the supervisors, employees and the many organizations which comprise the Department of the Army. Your responses to the survey (last page of the newsletter) continue to provide us with useful information and form the basis for a number of the articles we print. Some of your responses to the survey are shared in this issue.

## **NEW HOT LINE NUMBER**

Until further notice, questions on TAPES which cannot be resolved at the local level, should be referred to Mike McClure, Policy and Program Development Division, Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army, Manpower & Reserve Affairs, DSN 221-1335 or commercial, (703) 325-1335.

## **RECEIVING THE NEWSLETTER**

The latest way to receive the TAPES newsletter is via the Army home page webmaster which lists the TAPES newsletter in the subject index and is linked to PERSCOM home page. This latest method supplements paper copies, E-mail transmissions, the PERSCOM PROFS Bulletin Board, and the INTERACT Document Management Bulletin Board as avenues for receiving the newsletter.

## **WHICH COMES FIRST?**

Employees still serving a probationary period should receive their first Annual rating if the rating cycle ends and they have completed at least 120 days under an approved performance

plan (even if the probationary period has not ended). Keep in mind that ratings of Successful Level 3 or higher, given prior to the completion of the probationary period, do not preclude a later determination that the employee is performing at a lower level. Should this downward turn in performance occur, the rater should have sufficient examples of the deficiencies to support the lower rating and/or termination for poor performance during the probationary period. The servicing personnel office should be consulted immediately if the employee's performance falls below "Success" in any of his/her performance expectations.

## **A FRESH START**

Each new rating cycle should bring new and/or more difficult challenges to the rated individual (without them how can the organization and the ratee continue to improve?). With this in mind, ratees should not assume that they will receive the same rating year after year. Raters, however, should be aware that ratees, unless otherwise notified, will tend to assume that they are performing as well as they performed in the previous year. This is particularly true when the "new" plan offers no real change from the

previous plan. Remember, it's the rating chain that is ultimately responsible for ensuring the plan meets organizational needs and appropriately challenges the ratee. Raters who identify a downward turn in performance should immediately notify the ratee and discuss the matter. If the rater is now using a different measure from the one used last year, inform the ratee and make sure the change is documented as part of the plan. This early notice should help to prevent unpleasant surprises for either the ratee (lowered ratings) or the rater (formal complaints). (If the ratee's performance falls below "Success" the servicing personnel office should also be consulted.)

#### **ARE ALL THINGS EQUAL?**

When a performance plan contains sub-elements (sub-objectives or supporting tasks) to an overall performance expectation, the rater should inform the ratee of the relative importance of each of the sub-elements to the accomplishment of the overall performance

expectation. It is possible for a ratee to perform successfully in one or more of these components and still be rated for the overall expectation as "Excellence." This would be possible if accomplishments on the remaining components were considered to be at the "Excellence" level and that these components were considered of more importance than the ones rated "Success." It is also possible, that in order to receive an "Excellence" in the overall performance expectation, **each** component would have to be exceeded since each component was of equal value. Keep in mind that it is the rating assigned to the overall objective (Senior System) or the responsibility rating (Base System) that determines the overall performance rating.

#### **NO APPRAISAL DUE**

When a rating of record would serve no purpose (e.g., ratee retiring or accepting a position in private industry), the requirement to do an Annual rating is waived.



Mid-point counseling is a responsibility of the rater and a right of the ratee. It allows an opportunity to see that things are still on track; if not, there should still be time to make any necessary adjustments.

- The rated individual must have worked at least 120 days under an approved (initialed and dated by the senior rater) performance plan before an Evaluation Report can be prepared.
- It is the senior rater who makes a performance plan and a performance rating effective. The date the senior rater initials the performance plan is the day it officially goes into effect. The date the senior rater signs the Evaluation Report is the date the appraisal becomes effective.
- If the ratee has received a Special appraisal, it should be attached to the Annual.
- Performance award nominations must be submitted with a copy of the Evaluation Report for which the award is being granted.
- The ratee is the last one to sign an Evaluation Report, after discussing the appraisal with the rater.
- Performance plans for the Senior System must have each rated objective annotated with the appropriate performance level, e.g., E(Excellence), S(Success), etc. The annotated performance plan must be attached to the Evaluation Report in order to be accepted for processing by the servicing personnel office.

**The TAPES HOT LINE (DSN 221-1335/COM (703) 325-1335) is operational to respond to any questions which cannot be resolved.**

**????? QUESTIONS FROM THE FIELD ?????**

**Q:** Are there any grade level requirements for those who rate or senior rate civilians?

**A:** No. More often than not the rater or senior rater is "senior" to the rated individual; however, for civilians the rank is in the position, not the person. This means if an individual by position supervises the ratee, then that person is normally the rater and the rater's supervisor is normally the senior rater.

**Q:** How does TAPES compare with Dr. Deming's TQM philosophy?

A: Dr. Deming was not a fan of performance appraisal systems (he found them to produce such counterproductive results as fear, rivalry, politics, and to focus on short-term performance). He believed leadership was the appropriate substitute for these systems. Dr. Deming advocated that leadership should be carefully selected, and after assuming such positions, should become a colleague, who continually counsels and leads people. He advocated that leaders learn from and with their employees and that they should be able to identify performance which well exceeds the norm to the point that recognition is warranted. Dr. Deming also believed that those who fell below the norm should receive help. Dr. Deming was an advocate of management for the improvement of quality and productivity. Performance Management systems, to include TAPES, are designed to improve organizational and individual effectiveness. TAPES as a performance management system, requires that performance plans be focused on organizational goals and the employee's professional development needs. The intent under TAPES is that the ratee and rater form a partnership to meet the mission. Each performance system to include TAPES has allowed for the recognition of performance that exceeds expectations and assistance for those who are performing below the successful level. For more on Dr. Deming and his theories on managing for quality consult his book, Out of the Crisis.

Q: Can TAPES be used in a team setting?

A: Yes. Several organizations have been using TAPES in a team setting, i.e., the performance plans are developed with team objectives, but to be in compliance with the guidance from the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), at least one object has to be written for individual accomplishment (for most that objective addresses the individual's contribution to the team). **Team ratings cannot be substituted for the individual's rating of record (which is still required by OPM regulation), but team ratings may be used for other appropriate personnel purposes, e.g. training and awards.**

Q: The performance plan with my recommended objectives was returned to me with the initials and dates assigned by my rater and senior rater. My rater and I have not discussed this plan. What can I do?

A: Remind your rater that there are two required counseling sessions during the rating period, the initial to discuss the expectations recorded on your performance plan and the second around the mid-point of the cycle to assess how things have been going to that point.

Q: I thought only positive comments could be placed in the values section of an Evaluation Report. Can negative comments also be made?

A: It is true that the intent of the values section is to use it as an opportunity to state positive examples of the ratee's adherence to the Army's values and ethics. Since the vast majority of ratees receive good or better ratings, it follows that great numbers of ratees are showing positive adherence to the work related values. On the other hand, when the discussion of values during the initial counseling session does not result in the ratee's adherence, the rater must bring the matter to the ratee's attention and reinforce the discussion with specific examples of what is considered appropriated as well as inappropriate. The ratee should be left to understand that continued failure to adhere to the values could result in a negative comment in the values section of his/her Evaluation Report. Negative comments **should not** be placed on an Evaluation Report if the ratee has not participated in an initial discussion on the meaning of values and been warned at least once of his/her failure to show adherence.

Q: I received a very good rating this year, however, my rating chain used virtually the same verbiage as last year. I documented significantly different accomplishments from the previous year. Is using the same language considered appropriate?

**A:** It is important for the rating chain to understand that along with providing feedback to the rated individual, the Evaluation Report can be used to support other personnel processes, e.g. merit promotion and certain types of centralized selection boards. Each year brings new challenges and new accomplishments or levels of achievement. Each appraisal should speak to the most noteworthy accomplishments for the cycle and should never be taken so lightly as just copying words from one appraisal to another. The impression on those who read several years of reports for the same person and see the exact same language is that the rating chain cared little about distinguishing the ratee's achievements.

**Q:** It's well after my rating cycle has closed, I've turned in my list of contributions but have heard nothing yet about my performance evaluation. Can I ask for my appraisal?

**A:** You should ask your rater when the two of you might be sitting down to discuss your Evaluation Report. Army Regulation (690-400, Chapter 4302) requires that a copy of each employee's Annual Evaluation Report be submitted to the Civilian Personnel Office for filing within forty-five days of the end of the rating cycle.

#### **YOUR RESPONSE TO THE NEWSLETTER SURVEY**

**My thoughts on the modifications to TAPES under consideration are:**

- \* Get rid of 5 levels. Go back to 3 levels.
- \* I think the 5 rating levels should be retained; however, there should be decreased emphasis on giving the maximum rating in order to achieve retention points.
- \* I disagree with having the senior rater "weigh in" only when the rating level is other than 3. Although this would save time, it would entice raters to give a lot of "3's" so that their rating wouldn't be questioned and their superior wouldn't have to put forth effort. (Even average ratings need justification - no less or more than superior or fails require explanation.)
- \* I feel the rating levels should be reduced to two levels - level 3 and unsuccessful. This seems like the fairest system because it does not allow for the rating to depend on how tough or lenient the rater is. With two levels, you are either doing your job or not.
- \* I like the idea of just 3 rating levels rather than 5 as well as the elimination of the Senior Rater Profile.
- \* Going to a 3 level vs. 5 level system will "destroy" the TAPES usefulness as a performance measurement system. Ninety percent of employees will be forced into S-3 with no indication of their relative performance vs. their peers. Only the extraordinary "Super-Stars" will receive an S-1 and they will always be the same 1 or 2 people who are known to be the "Super-Stars."
- \* The senior rater profile is useless and should be eliminated! The senior rater should not be involved in the performance rating unless it is "Unsuccessful."

**What I would change about TAPES (and how) is:**

- \* Try hard not to be too bureaucratic; i.e. in spite of its benefits, it is pretty cumbersome. Try to streamline where possible, i.e., do away with senior rater profile, while keeping primary benefits (e.g. , forced face-face communications).
- \* Nothing!
- \* Provide mandatory training for raters and senior raters on how to make the system work for the betterment of the organization.
- \* Eliminate senior rater profile and comments on values.
- \* I would change the two systems into one system. It discriminates between two groups of employees.
- \* Go back to birth month for rating cycle. Current system is a burden in terms of workload.

**EXAMPLES FROM THE FIELD**

**BASE SYSTEM - COUNSELING CHECK LIST RECORD, KEY POINTS MADE:**

- Ensures TSP Tape mailed on Monday before payday.
- Forward all reports and vouchers bi-weekly to meet payday deadlines.
- Related importance of values in Part V to the responsibilities of the job.
- Maintain a safe, clean, and orderly work environment.
- Accomplish summer maintenance and special project within established time.

**SENIOR SYSTEM - SUPPORT FORM, PART IV:**

- Maintains a computer system/facility. Ensures that the computers and facilities are on line and ready for use 90% of the time during normal work hours.
- Clarify and disseminate procedures and responsibilities for critical supply and support operations involving the Supply and Services Division and its customers.
- Enhance the professional development of the staff by increasing course attendance of subordinates. Maintain a strong cross-training program. Recognize personnel performances.
- Answer ready reference questions, perform full range of circulation services, and assist patrons in use of classified and unclassified resources in all formats, accurately, and to patron's satisfaction or refer to Librarian.
- Develop and maintain databases for personnel tracking, new assignments, demographic data, trip rosters and student rosters.