

Letters

Performance Appraisal

To the Editor:

Dimity Berkner's article "Library Staff Development through Performance Appraisal" (*C&RL*, July 1979) was an excellent example of the best in library literature. She was both comprehensive and clear in bringing a wide range of current interdisciplinary resources to librarians for their consideration and use. Her proposed performance appraisal program is sound and well presented. The specifics described enable a library staff to study and modify the ideas in the context of their own library situation.

For librarians interested in linking library staff development and performance appraisals, I would like to add two comments that may be useful. Berkner illustrates the use of the individual appraisal to assist supervisors who guide staff to meet required levels of performance and to grow beyond those levels to prepare for new responsibilities and positions. In addition to this approach, collective performance appraisal information from the library's staff can present patterns of needs that can reveal organizational issues, trouble spots, or communication gaps. Also, performance appraisal findings for the staff as a whole can be the basis for establishing priorities for staff training just as they can be used with individual staff members to signal their training needs.

My second comment is that since the mid-1970s industry trainers and developers have made wide use of a technique called

Performance Feedback and Positive Reinforcement (PF/PR) as a means of linking management principles with training and development efforts. Although I personally do not recommend it or use this method, I raise this as a point of information and an indication that this technique might be used as a potential resource.

PF/PR is based on behavior modification (Skinner) precepts and, in industry, focuses strongly on improved productivity. The process requires specified levels of desired performance with feedback given in relation to the progress made toward that level and reinforcement as a routine and frequent support to appropriate progress made. Two points are important to note whether or not operant conditioning is a desirable method for staff developers. PF/PR emphasizes the need for appraising performance frequently, more than once a year. And it links appraisal with incentives that are meaningful motivators as perceived by staff members. *Training*, a magazine for staff developers, has an extensive resource list of books and films on this process in the November 1978 issue.

I would also like to underline the caution made by Dimity Berkner that performance appraisal is a time-consuming process. So is staff development, but an undeveloped and inefficient staff can be very costly. Staff development may be more of an investment than an expense, and thus doubly important to be done wisely and well.—*Barbara Conroy, Educational Consultant, Tabernash, Colorado.*

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