

# Alberta Clarion

Society of Local Government Managers

2006 Issue 3

## Poor Performance Requires Action, Not Evaluation

If you give an employee a poor performance evaluation, it begs an extremely important question: "What have you done about the poor performance besides fill in an evaluation form and put it in the employee's file?" The document itself accomplishes absolutely nothing and is a complete waste of time; it will not alter performance and as evidence for dismissal for cause, it has no legal validity on its own without proof of some other action to correct the poor performance. How can you give someone a poor performance evaluation if you haven't done anything else to try and rectify the behaviour? Why is the employee still on staff to be evaluated in the first place if the performance is poor?

Through out the years we have consistently referred to the importance of ongoing performance management in this newsletter. In our consulting practice we continually find that by far the majority of the issues that we run across are directly due to a lack of ongoing performance management; even in the face of poor performance evaluations.

There is the all too frequent case of the senior manager or business owner or politician who will not address performance issues, but will let the employee sit there with little or no responsibility until the

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## 2006 CLGM Awards

The Society of Local Government Managers awarded the professional designation "Certified Local Government Manager" to nine members at the Society's Annual Awards Ceremony & Banquet.

Municipal Affairs' Minister Rob Renner addressed the recipients of the professional awards on behalf of the Alberta Municipal Affairs; noting the important role that this society plays in the fabric of municipal government in Alberta.

Dr. Edd LeSage, Director of Government Studies, Don Johnson, President of the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts & Counties and Ric McIver, Director Cities over 500,000, Alberta Urban Municipalities Association offered congratulations to the recipients of CLGM awards.

Drs. Edd LeSage and Albert (Bert) Einsiedel Jr. both received Honorary CLGM Designations for their work in development of the professional education programs. John McGowan Sr and Bruce Moltzan each received "Fellow" designations. John and Bruce are both founding members of the Society and were instrumental in the organization, registration and development of the profession.

### The 2006 CLGM Recipients are:

- Theodore Tymchuk
- Kevin Cymbaluk
- Kathy Wolansky
- Ann Dechambeau
- Donna Rollie
- Leslie Fitzgerald
- John Maine
- Leo Ludwig
- Dianne Nemeth

Rodd Thorkelsson, Brownlee LLP presented the 2006 SLGM Award of Excellence to Frank Coutney, CLGM, County of Wetaskiwin's County Manager. Mr. Coutney received a cash award of \$3,000.00 to be used for a program of study and a keepsake award a bronze "Mountain View Buffalo" drafted by C, Martens, Lost Wax Bronze Inc, Coaldale Alberta.

**For more information on the "SLGM Award of Excellence" go to [www.clgm.net](http://www.clgm.net)**

## Poor Performance (continued from page 1)

employee finally realizes that they had better resign. We still cannot explain what the rationale for this is. Is it fear of admitting failure in hiring the employee in the first place? Is it the inability to be perceived by the rest of the staff as the "bad" guy? Is it the wish to avoid any severance package? Or is it part of the prevailing culture of not being prepared to take a firm stance with regards to the actions of others? Whatever the reason, it occurs quite frequently and is neither helpful to the organization or the employee involved. If there is a problem, it must be confronted and dealt with. Either the employee's performance improves or they should be terminated. Giving the employee a poor performance evaluation will not change anything. The other practice that frequently goes hand-in-hand with the poor evaluation is the withholding of any increase in compensation that would normally be due. This also accomplishes nothing.

There is also the pervasive opinion in many organizations that when you have an employee that is not performing well and you wish to terminate for cause, the first thing you have to do is to document the poor performance in an evaluation and then you can terminate if the performance continues. We frequently get enquiries from senior managers, business owners, and politicians, who wish to terminate an employee and ask us whether or not we have an appropriate performance evaluation form that they can use. In any court case for wrongful dismissal (or arbitration hearing in the case of a unionized employee), the first thing that the lawyer for the terminated employee will ask is, "when was the poor performance first brought to the attention of the employee?" If you cannot show that the performance issues were brought to the employee's attention at the time that they occurred and with appropriate ongoing follow-up, then you will always lose your case unless the employee was guilty of theft or some other overt problem. Performance evaluations that purport to document and prove poor performance will not hold up, unless there is ample evidence of progressive discipline which requires that the performance issues be addressed on an ongoing basis from the time that they become evident.

In other words, the actual performance evaluation is not required. What is required is attention to the performance issues, appropriate action to assist in their resolution, and, failing their resolution, progressive discipline through to timely termination. This is what you need in order to prove that you have tried to responsibly deal with the poor performance; not a performance evaluation form.

Let's use an analogy that most of us are familiar with; the raising of our children. When they exhibit poor behaviour, do we wait for the appropriate evaluation time or do we deal with the behaviour when it occurs? Do we ignore the behaviour because we don't wish to "hurt their feelings" or because we are not comfortable in dealing with it? We've all, unfortunately, seen the

results of such lack of responsible parenting. The same applies to being responsible for staff. If you do not accept that responsibility, the results are harmful to the employee as well as the organization as a whole and other well performing staff.

Performance "evaluation" has been a fundamental management principle for a long time. Most managers would never dream of saying that they don't believe in performance evaluation. Yet there have been many respected experts in organizational behavior such as Edwards Deming and Edward Lawler III who have been saying for a long time that performance evaluation is a useless and damaging practice. On the other hand, they point out the usefulness and necessity of ongoing performance management which necessitates proper recruitment and orientation, proper coaching and training, and progressive discipline, including timely termination, when necessary. It is interesting to note that the latest management "catchword" is "Hire slow; fire fast". Most managers do exactly the opposite. We have included a repeat of a past Book Review in this newsletter because "Abolishing Performance Appraisals" clearly articulates this whole issue and clearly details what is really required to successfully manage performance.

If respected organizational experts have been saying for many years that Performance Evaluations are useless, then why is the practice so ingrained in our organizational culture? Because it offers an easy out for dealing with difficult and sometimes emotional issues that we would rather avoid. We can hide behind the Performance Evaluation process. We can let everything wait until evaluation time. We can deal with the issues formally through an impersonal, bureaucratic and at arms length process rather than actually coming to grips with them in a constructive manner. Actually coming to grips with performance issues necessitates that we openly and honestly confront the employee with the issues when they occur and try to rectify behaviour through individual coaching and other forms of performance management. It is all too easy, however, to avoid such timely and personal confrontation, to avoid such difficult and emotional issues, and to hide behind the impersonal evaluation form.

It also takes our time which we think should be spent doing "management" work such as planning, directing, and organizing. Yet the biggest responsibility of any manager is getting things done through other employees. A manager's primary responsibility, therefore, is to manage the performance of those employees and to deal with any issues that arise. If the manager abdicates this responsibility, then they abdicate their position as a manager. It is cheaper to hire another "worker" without having to pay the management salary.

*Productive Workplaces*

## Deming's 14 Points for Management

"W. Edwards Deming is the internationally renowned consultant whose work led Japanese industry into new principles of management and revolutionized their quality and productivity." Dr. Deming is commonly regarded as the originator of Quality Management. The following is excerpted from his book, "Out of the Crisis", published by The M.L.T. Press in 1986 and from "The Deming Management Method" by Mary Walton, Perigree Books, 1986.

1. Create constancy of purpose toward improvement of product and service.
2. Adopt the new philosophy... Western management must... learn their responsibilities, and take on leadership for change.
3. Cease dependence on inspection to achieve quality... by building quality into the product in the first place.
4. End the practice of awarding business on the basis of price tag. Instead minimize total cost.
5. Improve constantly and forever the system of production and service, to improve quality and productivity, and thus constantly decrease costs.
6. Institute training on the job.
7. Institute leadership. The job of a supervisor is not to tell people what to do or to punish them, but to lead. Leading consists of helping people do a better job...
8. Drive out fear. Many employees are afraid to ask questions or take a position... The economic loss from fear is appalling. It is necessary for better quality and productivity that people feel secure.
9. Break down barriers between departments. Often staff areas... are competing with each other or have goals that conflict. They do not work as a team so they can solve or foresee problems.
10. Eliminate slogans, exhortations, and targets for the workforce... the bulk of the causes of low quality and low productivity belong to the system and thus lie beyond the power of the workforce.
11. Eliminate numerical quotas. Quotas take account only of numbers, not quality or methods. Substitute leadership.
12. Remove barriers to pride of workmanship. Abolish the annual or merit rating.
13. Institute a vigorous program of education and self-improvement. Both management and the workforce will have to be educated in the new methods, including teamwork and statistical techniques.
14. Put everybody in the company to work to accomplish the transformation. The transformation is everybody's job. ☐

## What Goes Around, Comes Around

His name was Fleming, and he was a poor Scottish farmer. One day, while trying to make a living for his family, he heard a cry for help coming from a nearby bog. He dropped his tools and ran to the bog. There, mired to his waist in black muck, was a terrified boy, screaming and struggling to free himself. Farmer Fleming saved the lad from what could have been a slow and terrifying death.

The next day, a fancy carriage pulled up to the Scotsman's sparse surroundings. An elegantly dressed nobleman stepped out and introduced himself as the father of the boy Farmer Fleming had saved.

"I want to repay you," said the nobleman. "You saved my son's life."

"No, I can't accept payment for what I did," the Scottish farmer replied waving off the offer. At that moment, the farmer's own son came to the door of the family hovel.

"Is that your son?" the nobleman asked.

"Yes," the farmer replied proudly.

"I'll make you a deal. Let me provide him with the level of education my own son will enjoy. If the lad is anything like his father, he'll no doubt grow to be a man we both will be proud of."

And that he did. Farmer Fleming's son attended the very best schools and in time, graduated from St. Mary's Hospital Medical School in London, and went on to become known throughout the world as the noted Sir Alexander Fleming, the discoverer of Penicillin.

Years afterward, the same nobleman's son who was saved from the bog was stricken with pneumonia.

What saved his life this time? Penicillin.

The name of the nobleman? Lord Randolph Churchill.

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### *2006/2007 SLGM Board:*

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Chair: Rob Stoutenberg, CLGM – Town of Stettler  
Vice-Chair: Duane Coleman, CLGM – Lakeland County  
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David Edey, CLGM – City of Edmonton  
Roelof Heinen – Public Member

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Tony Martens, CLGM – Mountain View County  
Harry Riva Cambrin, CLGM – MD Foothills

Executive Director/Registrar: Linda M. Davies CLGM

*"Working with you to provide professional local government management"*

Visit our web site [www.clgm.net](http://www.clgm.net)

# Hire Slow – Fire Fast

## Hire Slow

Rushing into a quick decision to fill a position is a bad decision. The value of spending time to hire is to save time and potential aggravation in the long term. Hiring an employee can be compared to making a major investment. Would you make a major investment without understanding what you are looking for and what you are getting? To increase your probability of making a good investment in the next employee you hire:

- Analyze and articulate what you are looking for, not only technical skills and experience, but also competencies and behaviours. What performance will be successful?
- Do not "wing" it - create a plan. Bring the prospective employee in to the work setting. Observe and get feedback on their reaction to the environment and potential coworkers. Develop meaningful interview questions related to what you are looking for.
- "Go deep" - ask probing interview questions to test the candidate's ability to do the job. Be rigorous in checking references. Ask the referees questions that are related to the work and the candidate's ability to do it. Above all, do not hire if there are no references.
- Never hire alone - create a panel of people you can trust to help you make the decision.

## Fire Fast

Hiring managers and supervisors need to make good employment decisions that benefit the productivity of their organizations. As diligent as you may be in the hiring process this responsibility means dismissing those individuals whose performance is contrary to organizational and individual performance objectives. If you just hired an employee it is your responsibility to help them succeed. If you discover the employee is not working out - act fast. It is time to fire if:

- You have determined that no amount of training, coaching or time will fix the problem and you have determined that there is an absence of skill, poor attitude, lack of common sense, poor fit with or unwillingness to work with the team, etc. The ingrained attitudes and behaviours of individuals can seldom be changed.
- They make rampant errors, other employees are complaining, there is low morale, "they just don't get it", or it is taking an inordinate amount of your time to manage them.

Take charge and act swiftly - do what is right for your organization. No matter how quickly you let the person go you will most likely hear "What took you so long?"

## The Ten Commandments

1. Thou shall not worry, for worry is the most unproductive of all human activities.
2. Thou shall not be fearful, for most of the things we fear never come to pass.
3. Thou shall not cross bridges before you come to them, for no one yet succeeded in accomplishing this.
4. Thou shall face each problem as it comes. You can handle only one at a time anyway.
5. Thou shall not take problems to bed with you for they make very poor bedfellows.
6. Thou shall not borrow other people's problems. They can take better care of them than you can.
7. Thou shall not try to relive yesterday for good or ill-it is gone. Concentrate on what is happening in your life today
8. Thou shall count your blessings, never overlooking small ones, for a lot of small blessings add up to a big one.
9. Thou shall be a good listener, for only when you listen do you hear ideas different from your own. It's very hard to hear something new when you're talking.
10. Thou shall not become bogged down by frustration, for 90 percent of it is rooted in self-pity and it will only interfere with positive action.

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## ***Certified Local Government Manager***

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*Society of Local Government Managers of Alberta*

Registered under the Professional and Occupational Associations Registration Act the Society is a legislative regulated body that issues the professional designation "Certified Local Government Manager" (CLGM).

There are many professional associations out there who are registered under the Society's Act.

For more information go to: [www.clgm.net](http://www.clgm.net)

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## The Last Word .....

Congratulations to:

To all the members who have received their professional designations. Please give them a call and congratulate them.

New Associate Member: Jayson Nelson, Mountain View County.

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