

An Employee's Appraisal

To the Editor:

I have recently been exposed, at great personal risk of contamination, to "the new Oregon system" of employee performance appraisal. I gratefully thank the supreme deity that I am not a systems analyst because if I were, I have no doubt that I would have regurgitated my morning bowl of Wheaties. Don't get me wrong! I can easily fantasize half digested Wheaties sitting most appropriately on top of "the new Oregon system." I am simply grateful that I didn't have two messes sitting in front of me.

For eight hours recently I was told why "the new Oregon system" was justifiable. I heard such statements as: "There will always be layoffs and pay raises and we need some measuring device to make these decisions. The new system will aid in removing dead weight from all departments."

"The employee now has a new bite in his merit rating. If he is dissatisfied, he now has a course of action to follow. This will stop some of the unfair supervisors from giving purely personality ratings."

"The new Oregon system is your program. It was your cries of dissatisfaction that resulted in discarding the old, unfair, biased, inequitable, worthless merit rating system and the establishment of the new Oregon system. The system is what you make it. Only you can apply the pressure that will change the system. It's your tool—use it!"

If they just gave me a tool, I don't think I will thank anyone. They might as well give me a rubber hammer rather than a wooden mallet to drive a steel nail. They have lessened the incidence of splinters, but still expect the nail to be driven. I don't think it can be done and I wonder why I am expected to try.

I was told that there will always be layoffs and pay raises, and therefore a merit rating system is required as a basis of decision. Yet I know that each department takes employees aside at pay raise time and says either:

(1) You don't get your raise this time because we can only give so many raises quarterly and so many people that deserve a raise were skipped last time that we decided to give the raises to them, but you will probably get your raise next time and we're really sorry but that is the situation, or

(2) You get your raise this time but you probably won't get one next time. We can give out so many raises quarterly and we had to skip some of your fellow employees this time and we will have to catch them next time to be fair, so you get one this time but don't really expect one next time. Please understand our situation.

Okay, I understand the situation. Our great fathers in the legislature decided they could get blood out of a turnip so they limited the quantity of the pay raises so the quality of work would increase as employees scrambled for the crumbs.

Okay, that's the situation, but don't tell me that I need the headaches of a "performance appraisal system" to determine my pay raise. What about layoffs? I've never seen a fair layoff that was based solely on all aspects of performance. Why not group all employees subject to a specific layoff, put their names in a drum, turn the drum a sufficient number of times and then select the person or persons to go. A lottery would remove the human bias present in the system. A lottery would protect the employee from a personality conflict with a supervisor and would protect a supervisor from any accusations of having a personality conflict with an employee. Rotate pay raises and use a lottery for layoffs—anything but a "performance appraisal system."

I'm told that the new performance appraisal system will get rid of the dead weight in all departments. Come on! If dead weight exists, there is only one thing that will remove it under any system. And that's a supervisor who: (1) has the ability to see an employee's deficiencies, and (2) has a greater sense of job responsibility than a sense of embarrassment. If the supervisor has those two qualities, then he or she will take the appropriate steps needed to remove the deficient employee from state service.

I was informed that it was my cries (as a state employee) that resulted in the end of the old merit rating system and the introduction of the new performance appraisal system. The tears still flow! They still flow because we—state employees—are saddled with essentially the same problems of the old system and we now know that our cries do no good.

Under the old system, the categories simply existed and we were unfairly judged as some fellow human being thought he saw us on a scale of one to 100. Under the new system, I can now write down those things on which I can be unfairly judged on a scale of zero to 15. It's stupid to think that people can fairly and consistently be judged by someone who spends 99.9999 per cent of the time being involved as teacher, confidant, arbitrator, granter of time off, sounding board for frustrated employees, friend, enemy, and just generally known as a supervisor. How can this person be objective .0001 per cent of the time as he or she makes out

From The Mailbox



a merit rating? It's impossible! Why try? Why not simplify rather than complicate? Why not make two categories: (1) satisfactory, and (2) not satisfactory.

Performance levels are not determined by a contract and appraisal system. They are determined in each individual by a lifetime of training, habits, attitudes, and that total culmination of personal experience that makes each of us unique.

This new system was not designed for me. It was designed for some concept of a dehumanized, robotized, clockwork mechanism that can be manipulated into greater levels of performance and duped into believing he has protection by the cobwebs offered. And that, folks, is my appraisal of the new performance appraisal system. If you and I disagree over the value of this system, imagine how two different supervisors might disagree over the value of the complex system known as a human being.

Michael C. Keller
Evergreen Chapter 28
Salem

CASE Candidates Opposed

To the Editor:

It is my understanding that the Executive Board of our Association decided that we, as a group, should lend support to certain candidates running for office in this state. If this is true, then I wish to formally request at this time that OSEA print in its newspaper my name as not backing the candidates listed in the September issue.

My first objection to the way this was handled stems from the fact that no one asked my opinion of these people. This matter seems to have been decided not by the membership but by a select few. I do not believe that my vote for an Executive Board member authorizes him to determine my political interest.

Secondly, just because a certain candidate has favorable views toward the programs of our Association does not mean that we should support him. He may have very unfavorable views regarding other more important issues that I may be concerned with. I should be the one to weigh these factors, not the Executive Board.

This particular instance leaves a bad taste in my mouth towards the Association. I admit that I am not the most active member and will probably not become that active in the Association. However, I am a candidate for the Unit Representation Committee in my agency. If elected to this position, I will raise the question as to the validity of making the aforementioned decisions for the group represented by the Association.

Gary Rudisill
Central Oregon Chapter 3
Prineville

Editor's Note: Delegates to OSEA's 1971 General Council, elected to represent the membership, passed a resolution directing the Board of Directors to create a political action arm for the Association. As a result, Citizen Action by State Employees came into being.

CASE is a voluntary, non-partisan group of state and other public employees whose function is "to raise and spend money for the support of political candidates favorable to the interests of state employees." It is independent of OSEA even though its Administrative Committee is composed of active OSEA members who are elected or appointed by the Board of Directors from a list of nominees submitted by the CASE membership.

Last month the Administrative Committee selected a group of 14 legislative candidates—seven Democrats and seven Republicans—to support in this fall's general election. The list was approved by the nearly 150 state and other public employees who make up the CASE membership and by OSEA's Board of Directors. The only way an OSEA member can have a voice in selection of candidates for CASE support is to join that organization. Membership costs \$10.00.

We call your attention to a statement made by Howard Walp, chairman of the Administrative Committee, at the time the list of candidates was sent to the CASE membership for approval: "We recognize that any state employee or member of CASE may find on the list a candidate or candidates whom he would not personally support. However, it is the hope of the Administrative Committee that it has recommended a list which, taken as a group, is fairly representative of the diverse views of state employees and, on that basis, can receive the full support of all of our members."

An Advertising Complaint

To the Editor:

In the months of May and June, 1971, Civil Service Systems advertised in your paper that they could give a discount to state employees. I contacted them and subsequently enrolled in their discount plan at a fee of \$15.00. I assumed it was endorsed by OSEA as did many other state employees.

We were told that we would be refunded the fee in full if we were not satisfied at the end of the year. At that time Bazar Stores were on the Civil Service Systems directory list and I told a CSS representative that it was the only store on the list that would interest me. I had been a member less than a month when I discovered that Bazar Stores had not authorized this.

About a month before the end of the year Civil Service Systems sent a new directory in which they stated that an insurance quote was a requirement to the guarantee. This was to be obtained from a new listing under a name which also bore a government connotation—U.S. Service Center. There was no stipulation like this at the time of enrollment.

The Portland Better Business Bureau had an article concerning Civil Service Systems in one of their recent newsletters. I enclose a copy.

In all fairness to your subscribers, a notice in the paper to the effect that OSEA does not necessarily endorse the businesses that advertise in its newspaper is suggested.

To date, Civil Service Systems has not refunded my money. I only hope this letter may prevent someone else from being taken in a similar manner.

Lucille Andersen
Portland Chapter 17
Gresham

Editor's Note: The only advertiser endorsed by OSEA is the Nationwide Insurance Company. Its ad clearly states OSEA endorsement (see page 12). All other advertising in this publication does not necessarily constitute endorsement by OSEA of the products or services advertised.

The newsletter published by the Portland Better Business Bureau which accompanied reader Andersen's letter had this to say about Civil Service Systems:

"Recent complaints from members of Civil Service Systems, a membership discount buying service which claims to offer reduced prices at various Portland business establishments, have remained unanswered. The complainants claim misrepresentation and failure to comply with the 'guarantee of satisfaction' they say was made to them at the time of purchase. Membership fees have varied from \$15 to \$19, according to these statements."

"Apparently the dissatisfaction results primarily from the fact that some of the firms that were purportedly to give the discounts state they are no longer participating in the program, and have not been replaced by other businesses. There have also been protests on this firm's use of a telephone listing under the name 'Veterans Benefit Program.' Individuals who have called this number, apparently anticipating it to be a veteran oriented group, say they were urged to buy memberships in Civil Service Systems."

We called the Portland telephone number—246-2921—listed for Civil Service Systems and got an answering service. We asked for the person in charge of CSS and was told his name is Steve Weidner. When we asked to speak to him, we were told he "was out of town." That's the same response we got to three other calls.

We then called the Consumer Services Division in the Department of Commerce in Salem. An employee, Marge Warkentin, said the division had received one complaint about Civil Service Systems which it turned over to the attorney general's office. We suggest that reader Andersen and anyone else who has a complaint against Civil Service Systems to get in touch with the Consumer Services Division (158 12th Street NE, Salem, Oregon, 97310, telephone: 378-4320).

No further advertising space in this publication will be sold to Civil Service Systems.

Your Comments Are Invited

If you have a comment about OSEA, The OSEA News, or any problem of particular interest to the OSEA membership, you can express it in the "Mailbox" columns.

Each letter must contain the writer's name, address and chapter number. The writer's name will be withheld from publication upon request and kept in strict confidence.

No unsigned letters will be published. Letters of excessive length will be edited as necessary to fit available space.

Send letters to The OSEA News, 1127 25th Street SE, Salem, Oregon, 97301.

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