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# 4

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## POSITION DESCRIPTIONS AND PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

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## Introduction

Communicating the duties and responsibilities of a position to an employee or prospective employee is an essential element in personnel management.

Setting standards for the performance of these duties and evaluating the actual performance are inseparable from developing job duties. This chapter discusses writing position descriptions, the development of objective performance requirements, and evaluation of employee performance. It contains a format for including all of the above tasks into one, simple operation.

## Written Position Descriptions

Communicating the duties, responsibilities, and performance standards of a position to the employee or prospective employee can be best done by a *written* job description. Verbal instructions cannot provide the mutual understanding that is provided by a written description of the duties and performance requirements.

## Uses of Position Descriptions

Written position descriptions assist in personnel management in a variety of ways, including:

1. Determining knowledge, skills and abilities necessary to perform the job
2. Establishing equitable and consistent salaries
3. Recruiting
4. Setting performance standards
5. Increasing communication between supervisors and employees
6. Making staffing decisions
7. Increasing productivity
8. Clarifying roles, responsibilities, and working relationships.

## Statement of Adequacy

The format of position descriptions varies widely among local, state and federal jurisdictions. There is no universal format, but a position description is adequate if it clearly states the principal duties, responsibilities, and supervisory relationships of a position. This does not preclude the necessity to identify required skills, knowledge, and abilities necessary for establishing qualification standards as discussed earlier in this reference book.

A suggested format for writing position descriptions is included as Exhibit 4.2 in this chapter. It is a format that combines both the duties themselves and the

standards by which these duties should be performed. Use of this format will save considerable time, and effort.

## Writing Better Position Descriptions

The following should prove helpful in writing brief, accurate descriptions. It is not intended to cover all aspects of writing position descriptions, but it should aid the writer in reducing the amount of time and paper involved.

There are 5 major don'ts in developing position descriptions:

**Don't describe the person occupying the position.** In preparing a position description, describe the position or the job to be done.

**Don't describe procedures.** It is not necessary to detail the step-by-step procedures in performing the duties of a position.

**Don't describe minor details.** Too much detail makes a responsible job appear to be loaded with low-level duties. All positions have major tasks and minor tasks. All engineers do some detailing, all supervisors do some work of employees they supervise, and in some places everyone makes coffee. Including all these duties could make minor duties in a position description appear to be major. A principal or major duty is defined as a duty, the successful accomplishment of which contributes significantly to the achievement of the job and district goals.

**Don't use technical terminology.** Do use lay terms. For example, an attorney would not "prepare tort actions under the doctrine of *Res Ipsa Logitur*." He would merely "prepare civil law suits."

**Don't write and write and write.** If the first four are observed, the fifth *don't* should not be a problem. The position descriptions will automatically be the desired length if only the major duties of the position are described.

## Getting Started

Writing the *first word* is often the most difficult part of describing the duties of a position. For a clue as to how to begin, one can usually look at the position's title or main mission. All mission verbs are action verbs, and it is best to begin each duty with an action verb. This cuts excess words and gives the reader an immediate and accurate understanding of what is being done and at what general level of responsibility. See Exhibit 4.3 of this chapter for a list of "action" verbs.

As an example of what is meant by cutting excess words, one could describe a duty by saying:

"It is the responsibility of the incumbent in this position to see that all engineering drawings are filed."

Naturally, since this description covers this position only, we know that duties of this position are all responsibilities of the position. We can skip those comments. We can also delete the reference to the incumbent, since we are writing about the position and not the person. It's much easier, as well as more understandable, to simply say:

"Files engineering drawings" or "Maintains files of engineering drawings."

It may be creative to write regarding a duty:

"This office is very unique in that it requires the incumbent herein to maintain its very responsible records according to standards prescribed by the Henderson Conservation District."

Creative narrative is not the goal. Stick to duties. The writer could have said:

"Maintain records according to district requirements." This does not mean that positions should be "played down" by over-summarizing or using small words. Just be concise.

## Keeping Position Descriptions Current

Position descriptions should be kept up-to-date to ensure high productivity and to maintain communications between employees and supervisors. Position descriptions should be dynamic and reflect changes in duties and responsibilities. A joint review by the employee and the supervisor should be made annually, or more often if necessary, to discuss changes in duties and responsibilities. An appropriate time for this review is in conjunction with the performance review, which is discussed later in this chapter.

## Sample Position Descriptions

Included at the end of this chapter as Exhibits 4.4 to 4.6 are sample position descriptions for district manager, district secretary, and district technician. The sample position descriptions and lists of duties should be used *only* as guides. Each employee should have a position description and corresponding performance requirements that are developed *expressly* for the position. A checklist for developing a position description is included as Exhibit 4.1.

## Performance Evaluation

All employees want and have a right to know what is expected of them in their jobs and how well they are performing. A performance evaluation based on

objective criteria, should help achieve peak performance from employees. Evaluating the performance of subordinates can be very rewarding and enjoyable but also very trying. It is perhaps the most important job a supervisor has to do.

## Benefits

The following benefits may be realized from a formal performance evaluation system.

1. Individual performance will improve
2. Supervisor-employee relationships will improve
3. Employee accomplishments and good work will be recognized
4. Personnel actions, such as pay increases, promotions, removals, and re-hires, will be based on sound, objective criteria and will be documented
5. Employees and supervisors will be more aware of job requirements and needed changes in job duties
6. Employees will be more aware of their supervisor's judgment of their performance
7. Training needs will be identified.

## Performance Standards

The standards by which an employee must perform each duty should be communicated to the employee in terms of quantity and quality. Any evaluation of performance should in turn be based on these objective, job related criteria. Objectivity is the basic and most essential element in setting these standards.

## The Importance of Objectivity

In the past, many performance evaluation systems contained such items to be appraised as initiative, leadership, loyalty, and dependability. Although we all want loyal and dependable people who are leaders and show initiative, there is an inherent difficulty in including these characteristics in an evaluation system; it is difficult to be objective.

This is not to say that leadership, loyalty, initiative, and other personal traits are not important and should not be considered. However, subjective measurements that tell what a person is or knows should not take the place of objective measurements that tell what a person *does*.

Over emphasizing objective or measurable elements can also lead to problems. If an effort is made to quantify all elements of performance, there is a danger of developing a cookbook approach to evaluation so that it ends up being little more than a checklist.

Human elements are important in performing a job well, but these are not always measurable. Nevertheless, performance rather than personality should be evaluated. Subjective elements, when evaluated, should be based on objective observations. If initiative is an important evaluation factor, examples should be given of required areas where initiative is expected. The evaluation of this factor should then be based on how well the employee performs these specific requirements.

## Setting Objective Performance Standards

Each duty that is developed for a position should have a corresponding standard by which it should be performed. This standard should be stated in terms of quantity and quality. Example:

**Duty.** Types correspondence, conservation plans, district newsletters, newspaper copy, various reports and other material necessary for the operation of the office.

**Performance Standard.** There should be no typographical errors. All final copies should be grammatically correct. All typing is to be completed by a specified deadline.

The following should be considered in setting performance standards.

1. Standards should be mutually agreed upon by supervisor and employee. It is absolutely essential that employees know and understand the performance standards against which they will be measured.
2. Standards should be realistic and achievable.
3. Standards should be set slightly above the average. They should be achievable but set to make the employee "strain" a little.
4. Standards should be flexible. It should be possible to amend the standard if unforeseen circumstances arise that make the standard unachievable.

## Formal Performance Review

Most supervisors are aware of the quality of an employee's performance, but this awareness is not enough. There should be a time when supervisor and employee get together for the specific purpose of reviewing performance. This periodic, formal review is essential in maintaining a high standard of employee performance.

Although evaluation of an employee's performance is a continuing process, a formal discussion with the employee should take place at least once a year. The

evaluation should be a culmination of numerous informal observations, checks and discussions made throughout the year. The formal discussion with the employee should take place just prior to, and be the basis for, decisions made regarding merit salary increases.

A formal review of an employee's performance should also take place at the end of any probationary period of employment. An example Performance Evaluation is included in this chapter as Exhibit 4.8.

## Who Should Perform the Evaluation

An employee's performance should be evaluated by the person who is most familiar with the employee's work and who was involved in setting the performance standards. In most cases this is the employee's immediate supervisor. In a situation where a district technician is under the technical supervision of an NRCS employee for maintaining standard specifications of the NRCS field office, the NRCS employee should contribute to the evaluation. The primary responsibility for the performance evaluation is the district manager's or district official's. Where district clerical staff work for both the district and NRCS, a mutually agreeable system for performance evaluations should be established by the district. Employee evaluations are the responsibility of the district board or manager, and should not be delegated to other agency personnel. Evaluation of the performance of a district manager should be the responsibility of the chairman of the district board or a designee.

## Steps in the Formal Evaluation

**Prepare for the discussion** - Effective evaluations don't just happen - they are planned. Gather facts, review the job description and performance standards, and decide what you want to accomplish.

**Pick a good time and place** - Arrange to hold the discussion where it will not be interrupted. Allow ample time for the discussion. Pick a time when both you and the employee can be relaxed.

**Open the discussion in a friendly and permissive manner** - Tailor the approach to each individual. Let the discussion develop naturally.

**Explain the purpose of the talk** - Once the meeting has been opened on a positive, friendly note, state clearly the purpose of the talk.

**Ask the employee to review their responsibilities** - It is not unusual that clarity is lacking concerning some aspects of the job. Ask the employee to give a

general review of their major assignments. Ask which assignment they consider the most important, which efforts have produced successes, and where problems have appeared. Encourage the employee to talk and don't interrupt unnecessarily.

**Discuss each job duty** - Review the performance of each job duty with the employee and let them know how well they performed each duty.

**Jointly develop the next year's performance standards** - This gets the employee involved and promotes mutual understanding. Make any needed adjustments in duties and responsibilities.

**Jointly develop plans for improvement** - Discuss with the employee ways in which performance can be improved. Discuss areas where additional training is needed.

## Guidelines for Evaluating Employee Job Performance

A supervisor may find the following suggestions helpful in evaluating an employee's performance.

**Don't rely on gimmicks.** Even the best performance evaluation form won't relieve the supervisor of the responsibility of making decisions about an employee's competence. The best way to judge competence is to work with the employee day by day, to make observations during moments of routine, and stress in a variety of assignments.

**Admonish when necessary.** Tell an employee when they have done well and when they have not. They won't resent correction handled in a natural manner. However, it is hard for both supervisor and the employee if this is lumped all together in a single, grueling session held once or twice a year.

**Be self critical.** Before an employee is admonished for inadequate work, ask yourself frankly, "Has leadership contributed to this deficiency in any way?" "Was too much expected?" "Did the employee understand the duty?" "Did the employee have proper training to do the job?" "Is the criticism absolutely fair, or is it influenced by bias?" Objectivity enables discussion of the employee's mistakes to be constructive. Willingness of the supervisor to accept accountability for mistakes will make the employee more willing to shoulder responsibility.

**Make sure the employee has the same understanding of the job that the supervisor has.** An employee's job performance cannot be judged fairly if they have not fully understood the duties of the position. Let the employee talk. It may be found that the employee was unaware of responsibility for certain job duties for which the supervisor claimed neglect.

**Get down to cases.** Vague generalities don't work. Be specific. Explain in precise language where the employee is falling short, and what can be done to correct mistakes. Make sure the employee understands precisely what standards he is expected to meet.

**Criticize the work, not the person.** Avoid being personal when discussing an employee's job performance. There are certain exceptions to this advice, e.g. if the attitude of the employee is affecting their job competence.

**Don't laugh it off.** Some supervisors try to hide criticism behind humor. This is a mistake. If confrontation is necessary to improve performance and competence then the seriousness must be conveyed as well. An employee's competence at the job is very serious both to the employee and to the supervisor. Supervisors who confront with constructive criticism will often earn the respect of their employees.

**Comment on improvements.** If an employee corrects a shortcoming that has been criticized, comment on the improvement. This will encourage the employee to continue in excellence and improve the response to future corrections.

**Don't be a debater.** The supervisor is the final judge of an employee's job performance. This doesn't mean to cut off all discussion. Let the employee state a point of view, and if correct, say so. Don't permit the discussion to turn into an argument.

**Don't Compare.** Comparisons are odious. This is especially true in discussing job performance. An employee may be willing to accept criticism of deficiencies, but they may be resentful if another individual is pointed out as an example to be followed.

**Emphasize strong points.** The skillful leader plays up the strength of subordinates. It's better for a worker to develop special talents and skills than to spend the entire time trying to correct weaknesses. Point out an employee's deficiencies and help try to minimize them, but keep things in balance. If concentration is entirely on the negative, little will be accomplished in developing the positive.

A checklist for performance evaluation is included in this chapter as Exhibit 4.7.

## The Value of an Evaluation Form

Because employee performance evaluations are important, use of an evaluation form is advisable to make the task as systematic as possible. Many supervisors are reluctant to conduct an overall review of performance, unless the completion of a form makes it necessary to do so.

Any performance appraisal form should be correlated with the position description.

## Analyzing Poor Performance

Many supervisors have had to face the problem of an employee performing at an unacceptable level. Such a situation is the true test of a good supervisor because the way in which the problem is handled may very well affect the life of the employee. The causes of poor performance are too numerous to detail, but they can be grouped into three categories: the employee, the supervisor or the situation. Determining the exact cause of poor performance and taking appropriate action are very important in maintaining the efficiency of district operations.

The following is a very general discussion of the causes of poor performance.

**The employee.** Outside forces, such as financial pressures, family or health problems can be responsible for poor performance. The cause should be determined and professional help sought if necessary. Perhaps the employee is careless or negligent. Perhaps the job itself is beyond the current capabilities of the employee. In such a case, additional training may be the answer.

**The supervisor.** Has the supervisor upheld their responsibility to the employee? Did the supervisor adequately determine training needs? Has the supervisor maintained a periodic check of the employee's performance and suggested improvements? Have the requirements of the position been adequately explained to the employee?

**The situation.** Do conditions exist on the job that preclude acceptable performance or are beyond the control of the employee? Were standards set too high? Does the job hold a challenge for the employee?

Regardless of the cause for poor performance, the reason should be determined and appropriate action taken.

Various chapters of this reference book deal with actions that can be taken to correct poor performance. These range from determining training needs and providing necessary training to disciplinary actions, including terminations. Any action taken should be based on an objective analysis of the causes.

**EXHIBIT 4.1**

**CHECKLIST FOR DEVELOPING A POSITION DESCRIPTION**

<b>ITEM</b>	<b>COMPLETED</b>
1. Assign responsibility for writing the position description to the district personnel manager or personnel committee.	_____
2. State title and purpose of the position.	_____
3. State duties of position by listing each major duty and its performance requirements.	_____
4. State who will provide supervision for the position. Remember to use position titles and not specific names.	_____
5. State how employee will be evaluated and by whom.	_____
6. Provide copies to the district board for approval.	_____
7. Provide a copy to the state conservation agency and/or grant funding source for review and comment.	_____

## EXHIBIT 4.2

## POSITION DESCRIPTION FORMAT

### **TITLE:**

The title should be based on the function of the position, i.e., an employee who is assigned all the manager responsibilities of the district and some secretarial and/or technical responsibilities should be called the district manager.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The introduction section should reflect broad general functional areas of the position for the district, i.e., management, secretarial, technician.

### **DUTIES & RESPONSIBILITIES**

This section should lay out, in broad terms, the duties and responsibilities of the position. The tasks should be unique to this position and should not reflect detailed action.

### **SUPERVISION**

This statement describes who supervises the employee. Also included are supervisory responsibilities of this position, if any.

### **PERFORMANCE REVIEW**

This section states who does the performance evaluation of this position, what is evaluated, and when.

**EXHIBIT 4.3****ACTION VERBS**

administers

answers

approves

assures

attends

calculates

checks

computes

coordinates

directs

ensures

files

instructs

leads

maintains

manages

operates

organizes

oversees

plans

posts

prepares

provides

selects

serves

studies

supervises

totals

transmits

types

*District Clerical Position***TITLE:**

District Secretary

**INTRODUCTION**

This position is that of a district secretary responsible for performing secretarial and clerical duties in the Henderson Conservation District.

**DUTIES & RESPONSIBILITIES**

1. Serves as receptionist to the district and NRCS office. Answers phone calls and meets the general public in a courteous and helpful manner.
2. Types correspondence, conservation plans, district newsletter, newspaper copy, various reports and other material necessary for the operation of the office. There should be no typographical errors, and final copy should be grammatically correct. All typing is to be completed by deadlines specified.
3. Maintains records of district business transactions on a daily basis. All financial records will be maintained in a neat and orderly fashion as established by the district treasurer. Prepares a monthly financial report in conjunction with the district treasurer.
4. Maintains accurate time and attendance reports on all district employees.
5. Maintains district and NRCS files according to established systems. All files are to be purged each September.
6. Maintains office supplies in sufficient quantities for office staff. Responsible for securing district office supplies at lowest possible price.
7. Performs other related duties as requested by supervisor.
8. All duties and actions taken by the incumbent of this position while on official duty will be performed in a safe and healthful manner and will be of a nature to reflect favorably on the Henderson Conservation District.

**SUPERVISION**

The incumbent of this position is under the direct supervision of the district manager. Additional assignments are given by other members of the district and NRCS office staff. Conflicts in assignments will be resolved by the district manager. The incumbent of this position does not supervise other employees.

**PERFORMANCE REVIEW**

Your performance of each duty in this position will be evaluated against the requirements developed for your position. A formal review will be completed by your supervisor on a yearly basis during the month of September and will be discussed with you. Your performance rating is an overall evaluation of your performance in the judgment of your supervisor. It will be the basis for any merit pay increases granted by the district board.

*District Manager***TITLE:**

District Manager

**INTRODUCTION**

This position is responsible performing management functions for the Henderson Conservation District.

**DUTIES & RESPONSIBILITIES**

1. In cooperation with various federal, state and local agencies assesses the need for conservation work within the district and recommends actions and programs to meet these needs.
2. Prepares a draft annual plan of work and a proposed budget for review by the district board.
3. Identifies sources and recommends actions to the board to secure operating funds for the district.
4. Identifies sources and recommends actions to the board to secure the needed personnel for district operations. Develops a yearly staffing needs inventory.
5. Maintains a cooperative relationship with all natural resource agencies operating within the district.
6. Supervises and directs the work of district personnel.
7. Initiates and directs a public information program through individual contacts, tours, newspaper, radio, TV, district newsletter, public appearances at civic groups, public schools, youth groups and other avenues.
8. Is responsible for the proper maintenance and use of all district equipment and facilities.
9. Coordinates requests for district assistance with the NRCS district conservationist and other appropriate resource agencies.
10. Keeps abreast of all federal, state and local laws that affect the conservation work within the district.
11. Maintains adequate records and prepares various reports for submission.
12. Keeps district board informed of actions taken, trends in conservation work that appear to be developing, and issues in which the district may have an interest or wish to become involved.
13. Compiles background information to facilitate the decision-making and policy-setting function of the district board.
14. Coordinates district involvement and assistance in a variety of programs and activities with the NRCS district conservationist, the state soil conservation agency and others.
15. All duties and actions taken by the incumbent of this position while on official duty will be performed in a safe and healthful manner and will be of a nature to reflect favorably on the Henderson Conservation District.

**SUPERVISION**

This position works independently of direct day-to-day supervision. Policy and program direction is received from the district board.

**PERFORMANCE REVIEW**

Your performance of each duty in this position will be evaluated against the requirements developed for the position. A formal review will be completed by the personnel committee of the district board on a yearly basis during the month of September and will be discussed with you. Your performance rating is an overall evaluation of your performance in the judgment of your supervisor. It will be the basis for any merit pay increases granted by the district board.

*District Technical Position***TITLE:**

District Technician

**INTRODUCTION**

This position provides technical assistance under policies established by the Henderson Conservation District.

**DUTIES &  
RESPONSIBILITIES**

1. Provides technical and engineering assistance to cooperators in assigned areas.
2. Collects soil and water samples as directed.
3. Provides technical information for district policy.
4. Develops and maintains resource inventories.
5. Assists with report writing and conservation plan development.
6. Prepares and presents conservation programs to schools and churches.
7. Prepares and presents demonstration plots.
8. Coordinates the district equipment rental program.
9. Maintains personal contact with district cooperators.
10. All duties and actions taken by the incumbent of this position while on official duty will be performed in a safe and healthful manner and will be of a nature to reflect favorably on the Henderson Conservation District.

**SUPERVISION**

This position is under the daily supervision of the district manager. This position provides daily technical supervision of subordinate technical staff.

**PERFORMANCE  
REVIEW**

Your performance of each duty in this position will be evaluated against the requirements developed for the position. A formal review will be completed by your supervisor on a yearly basis during the month of September and will be discussed with you. Your performance rating is an overall evaluation of your performance in the judgment of your supervisor. It will be the basis for any merit pay increases granted by the district board.

**EXHIBIT 4.7****CHECKLIST FOR PERFORMANCE EVALUATIONS**

<b>ITEM</b>		<b>COMPLETED</b>
1.	Develop objective performance standards in quantitative and qualitative terms. These standards should measure what the person does not know not what they are or know.	_____
2.	Each duty in the job description should have a corresponding performance standard.	_____
3.	Standards should be reviewed and agreed to by both the employee and the employer.	_____
4.	Establish when the performance reviews are to take place.	_____
5.	Evaluation must be performed by those most familiar with the employee's work. Whether it be the district manager, district personnel committee, or a combination of the above, a merit increase should always be based on an evaluation.	_____
6.	Performing the evaluation:	
	a. Prepare for discussion-review of job description, performance standards, and gather facts.	
	b. Arrange a time and place for the evaluation.	
	c. Open discussion in a friendly, comfortable atmosphere.	
	d. Clearly state the purpose of the meeting.	
	e. Ask the employee to discuss their responsibilities.	
	f. Discuss each job duty in detail, giving necessary praise and admonition.	
	g. Develop jointly, the next performance standards.	
	h. Develop jointly, plans for improvement.	
	i. Document the results of the evaluation and place a copy in the employee's file.	_____



**EXHIBIT 4.8**

**PERFORMANCE EVALUATION**

Employee's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Conservation District \_\_\_\_\_

Employee's Title \_\_\_\_\_ Period Covered \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

**PART 2**

<b>GENERAL APPRAISAL OF EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE</b>		
<b>COMPLETE ITEMS BELOW FOR ALL EMPLOYEES (highlight items needing improvement)</b>		E - excellent S - satisfactory I - needs improvement (enter 1)
Job Knowledge:	Knowledge of duties and responsibilities of position	
Productivity:	Amount of work generated and completed successfully as compared to amount of work expected of position	
Quality:	Correctness, completeness, accuracy, and economy of work - overall quality	
Initiative:	Self motivation - amount of direction required - seeks improved methods and techniques - consistence in trying to do better - responds to need for extra effort	
Use of Time	Uses available time wisely - is punctual in reporting to work - absenteeism - accomplishes required work on or ahead of schedule	
Planning	Plans and organizes own work - anticipates and prepares for future requirements - establishes logical priorities - maintains control of workloads	
Follow-up	Finishes all projects begun -leaves no loose ends - ensures assignments are completed in a timely manner	
Human Relations:	Establishes and maintains cordial work climate - promotes harmony and enthusiasm - displays sincere interest in assisting other employees and the public - tactful - diplomatic	
Adaptability:	Adapts quickly to new or different situations - flexible - willingness to accept change	
Oral Communications:	Speaks well - communicates thoughts clearly - uses proper grammar	
Written Communications:	Writes clearly and concisely - well organized train of thought - creative - neat - uses proper grammar, sentence structure, punctuation, etc.	

Additional Comments:

**EXHIBIT 4.8          PERFORMANCE EVALUATION**

Employee's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Conservation District \_\_\_\_\_

Employee's Title \_\_\_\_\_ Period Covered \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

**PART 3**

**OVERALL PERFORMANCE EVALUATION**

(check one)

- Excellent:** constantly achieves more than expected. Frequently demonstrates outstanding performance
- Satisfactory:** Normally achieves all results expected. Occasionally exceeds position requirements.
- Needs Improvement:** Not performing at minimum acceptable level.

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Additional Comments:

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Supervisor's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Supervisor's title \_\_\_\_\_

Employee's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date of evaluation \_\_\_\_\_