EVALUATING THE FIRE CHIEF

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HUMAN RESOURCE STRATEGIES
The Rave Review

Was it helpful?
What was the focus?
Did the review help the Fire Chief?
Did the review help the Board?
Did the review help the District?
Why Evaluate?

• What is the purpose?
  ○ Discuss performance
  ○ Meet contractual requirements
  ○ Celebrate accomplishments
  ○ Clarify Board’s expectations
  ○ Drive improvement
  ○ Establish goals
  ○ Improve Board and Fire Chief communications
  ○ Provide means for meeting needed improvements
  ○ Possible termination/severance
Monitoring Performance

- Strategic plan
  - 5 year (long term)
  - Current year (short term)
- Capital improvement plan
- Setting annual goals
- Looking at growth/development expectations
- Discussing continuing education requirements
Statutory Obligations

- Fire Board has duty to:
  - Appoint or hire the Fire Chief
  - Determine compensation and benefits

- Fiduciary duty -- owed by both the Board and the Fire Chief
Board Responsibility

- Fire Board has responsibility for
  - Vision/goal setting
  - Fire Chief contract
  - Fire Chief compensation/benefits
  - Job description
  - Setting goals/expectations
  - Establishing a performance management process
The Evaluation Process Should Be...

- A positive, objective process
- Structured communication between the Board and the Fire Chief
- An information tool to guide change
- A method for promoting goals, values, progress
- Performed in a supportive atmosphere
Timing Considerations

- Formal evaluation
- Informal updates/discussions
- Notification requirements for renewal/non-renewal of contract
- Budget cycle
Alignment Considerations

- With calendar deadlines
- With District goals/objectives
  - From strategic plan
- With Fire Chief contract
- With District policies
- With Board/Fire Chief working agreement
Identifying the Board’s Preferred Process

- Frequency
- Informal verbal conversation
- Formal written evaluation
- Combination
- Self-evaluation by Fire Chief submitted to Board
- 360 Evaluation by rank and file
  - Approach with caution!
  - Who is involved: Board, Fire Chief, Staff, Union
The Evaluation Process

- Compliance with the Brown Act (open meeting law)
  - Personnel Exemption allows for FC performance to be discussed in a closed session
  - Closed/executive session vs. Public Session -- FC choice
  - Provide 24 hour written notice to FC
- Individual Board members vs. Board as a whole?
- Compiling a written evaluation by the Board
- Administering the evaluation
Evaluation Instrument

- Consider a collaborative effort between Board and Fire Chief in developing the evaluation form
- Review with new Fire Chief
- Rating system defined
- Allow for written comments, not just ratings
- Performance standards
  - Set and used year to year
  - Aligned with job description
- Goals
  - Focus areas for Fire Chief
  - Set annually
Typical Performance Standards

- Leadership / Personal Initiative
- Board / Fire Chief Relations
- Communications
- Customer Service / Community Relations
- Management Effectiveness
- Administrative/Fiscal Management
- Human Resource Management
- Technical Expertise
Goals

- Set annually
- Review at annual performance evaluation
- Typically 3-5 major goals for the year
- SMART goals
  - Specific
  - Measurable
  - Attainable
  - Realistic
  - Timebound
360 Evaluation

- Fire Board driven, or
- Fire Chief driven (for self-reflection)
- Who will be surveyed?
- Questions to be asked?
- Random?
- Anonymous?
Self-Evaluation

Prior to Board conducting an evaluation, Fire Chief should provide self reflection on performance standards and goals

Can be presented to Board before or during the evaluation meeting

Helps Board understand what has been accomplished

Makes Board aware of obstacles that may have prevented accomplishment of goals
Well Executed Evaluation

- No surprises to Board or Fire Chief
- Celebrates accomplishments
- Reflects consideration of entire period being reviewed
- Promotes opportunity for growth with follow up and review
- Assures timely, fair, thorough review
- Ratings are supported by comments
Evaluation Pitfalls

- Focus on “latest” event -- “Recency Error”
- Failure to review the Board’s responsibility in attainment or non-attainment of Fire Chief’s goals
- Used to discuss District issues that should occur in open session
- Focus on emotion of the moment
- Fire Board not speaking as one voice
- Failure to follow policy
- Not putting agreements in writing
Summary

- Evaluation process should be designed to review and continually improve performance
- Instrument and associated use/timing should be fair, meaningful, and appropriate
- Focus on continued development
- Meet any contractual obligations