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History Rocks

Posted by [REDACTED] @ 2009-06-11 18:19:22

Tags: national history day, performance appraisal, history

Mood: contemplative

(U) An interesting quote

(U) As you are probably all tired of hearing, I'm still trying to finish up my article concerning the history of performance ratings/appraisals at NSA.

(U) I found this quote in an April 1950 AFSA memo on the purpose of efficiency ratings (what performance appraisals used to be called). The language struck me as a bit harsh, I don't think any manager would phrase things this way today. What do you think? The emphasis is mine.

(U) Per this memo, one of the purposes of efficiency ratings is to "provide a record for management to have facts upon which to plan personnel actions for development and advancement of able people and the correction or elimination of the unfit."

(U) In other news, I'll be out of the office tomorrow and Monday; on Monday I'm serving as a judge for the junior division National History Day contest at the University of Maryland.

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2503 [REDACTED] @ 2009-06-11 18:52:58

(U) I would agree that it is unlikely a manager today would use such phrasings, but personally I find it a rather refreshing bit of candor. Some people just don't work out, and it seems rather pointless to tiptoe around that fact.

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2504 [REDACTED] @ 2009-06-11 18:56:42

(U) "Elimination of the unfit" -- my favorite phrase of the day. ;-)

2505 [REDACTED] @ 2009-06-11 18:57:35

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(U) I personally have been in situations which I was unfit to tackle, and have had experiences both of honesty about it and of tiptoeing around it. I do like the candor better... but I can't say I haven't been grateful (as I'm sure my family would be) for all the second chances given. "Unfit's" not really a stigma, if you have the courage and are blessed with the opportunity to keep looking until you find a better fit.

2506 [REDACTED] @ 2009-06-11 19:04:58

(U) I think it smacks of the language of eugenics, and for that reason alone I shy away from it, though the underlying sentiment seems innocent enough.

2507 [REDACTED] @ 2009-06-11 19:10:41

"Assume Noble Intent"

Well, if I were a manager, and one of my subordinates was found to be unfit for a particular job, I'd expect to either correct (i.e., train or retrain) them or move them to a different job. Granted, "elimination" sounds a bit stronger than "transfer"!

2508 re 2507 [REDACTED] @ 2009-06-11 19:11:36

Re: *"Assume Noble Intent"*

(U) Yeah, I think it is the "elimination" that is what is bothering me. [REDACTED] is spot on as to why.

2509 re 2508 [REDACTED] @ 2009-06-11 19:19:12

Re: *"Assume Noble Intent"*

(U) Uh, is what not "that is what is". It has been a long, tiring day. I'd better check the last few pages that I've typed!

2510 [REDACTED] @ 2009-06-11 19:47:53

(U) Eliminating the unfit

(U) While the language does seem rather harsh, it's very much a military perspective on performance evaluations. Having worked in strongly military environments for the last 14 years, I gotta say that I wish we at NSA (or anywhere else in federal service, really) were better at following through on that seemingly negative aspect of appraising performance. I advocate 'telling it like it is' on evals, but find that I must use a reality filter to prevent hurting someone unreasonably in an inflated system.

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2511 re 2510 [REDACTED] @ 2009-06-11 19:50:32

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UNCLASSIFIED//~~FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY~~*Re: (U) Eliminating the unfit*

(U) I also remember hearing people discuss the "up or out" mentality, again with regard to performance evaluations, not all that long ago.

2513 [redacted] @ 2009-06-12 11:11:58

Performance Ratings/Appraisals

Sounds like you are going to have an epic on your hands!! It'll be a trip down Memory Lane for some folks and an eye-opener for the younger crowd. I agree with some of the comments about the infelicitous language - wonder if they actually were any more direct and successful in dealing with "unfit" people than seems to be the case these days?
(Or do I just not know what goes on around me - quite likely!)

2514 [redacted] @ 2009-06-12 12:47:29

(U) You mean at one point in history the government could actually fire people? Wow...

2516 re 2514 [redacted] @ 2009-06-12 13:29:09

(U) Don't kid yourself; we still can.

2521 [redacted] @ 2009-06-12 15:10:24

(U) Harsh depends on perspective....

(U) Someplace in my basement at home are the evaluation forms used for US Navy enlisted personnel during my early service (1977 until about 1980 or so).

On the far left of those forms...the "bad side" of where the scoring marks were indicated with an "X"...

The scale was 1 (of 4).

The categorical adjective was "Misfit".

No, mine didn't have any marks in the Misfit column...although not for lack of trying when I was an E1 through E3.

"Unfit" doesn't sound so bad:-)

2522 re 2510 [redacted] @ 2009-06-12 17:05:38

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UNCLASSIFIED//~~FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY~~*Re: (U) Eliminating the unfit*

I remember coming to NSA as a USAF enlisted person in 1975. At the time, we got Airman Performance Reports with a 1-9 rating system. If you didn't perform up to your boss' standards, they would rate you 7 or less, and your chances of getting promoted were pretty much over. On the flip side, I would watch civilian employees who weren't performing get shuffled from one position to another or one office to another, to avoid having to face the situation. I would much rather someone tell me the truth than dance all around it.

2523 re 2516 [REDACTED] @ 2009-06-12 17:08:19

We still can --- AND DO

Without going into details, I was involved in having someone removed from government employment for cause only three years ago. The amount of time, effort and documentation to do it was incredible, but it was the right thing to do.

2524 re 2514 [REDACTED] @ 2009-06-12 17:24:26

(U//~~FOUO~~) I know of two people who lost their jobs here due to security issues. One was a British internee who had married an American and had applied for U.S. citizenship. That cost him his clearance. I don't know the details of the other. It is hard to learn people's stories when they don't show up for work anymore.

(U) During a three-year illness that diminished my productivity, I was put on the fast track to being fired. I tried an experimental method of treating my illness and recovered in time to save my job.

(U//~~FOUO~~) I mentioned this to John Taflan when he was Chief of Human Resources and he disagreed about the fast track to being fired. He said, "So far this year [August], about ten employees have been placed on PIPs and only two have been removed. The others have passed their PIP and are still working here so this is really not a program to eliminate people. It is a program to help people improve."

2531 re 2523 [REDACTED] @ 2009-06-12 20:36:08

Re: We still can --- AND DO

(U) This is primarily what I'm referring to. I know of specific cases where it's simply absurd how hard it is to do what everyone knows is the right thing to do.

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