

U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board
2016 Merit Principles Survey
Path L (Leadership)

Leadership Demographics

- Are you responsible for supervising Federal civilian employees?
- Approximately how many civilian employees do you directly supervise (no intermediate supervisor between you and them)?
- What is your grade level?
- Have you ever served on active duty in the U.S. Military?
- What is your supervisory status?
- If you are a member of the Senior Executive Service, are you:
 - Career SES
 - Non-Career SES
- Where do you work?
 - Headquarters
 - Field

Being a Supervisor

- When you first became a Federal civil service supervisor, were you told that you would have to serve a probationary period?
- Was your performance during your probationary period as a supervisor actually used to decide if you should continue in a supervisory role?

Managing Performance

Please indicate which of the following statements comes closest to describing your viewpoint.

- To me, poor performance by a subordinate means...
 - Performance that is less than excellent.
 - Performance that is below the average performance of employees with similar duties.
 - Performance that needs substantial improvement before it could be called fully successful.
 - Failure at any work task.
 - Failure at a work task that is critical to success in the position.
 - Failure at multiple work tasks that are critical to success in the position.
- Approximately what percentage of the employees that you currently supervise directly are less than fully successful without outright failing at any critical elements of the job?

Performance Management: Standards

Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements for positions where you have performance appraisal responsibilities.

- The performance standards for my subordinates accurately reflect the critical elements necessary for success in their jobs.
- The performance standards for my subordinates have measurements that I can use accurately to determine success in the critical elements.
- I use performance reviews to make meaningful distinctions between subordinate employees with differing levels of performance.
- If too many of my subordinate employees were outstanding, I would be forced to distribute the ratings so that some got lower ratings than outstanding.
- I am held accountable for ensuring that successful employees receive recognition for their good work.
- If my subordinate employees are outstanding, I can reward them appropriately.
- Most of my subordinate employees have a good understanding of their own individual strengths and weaknesses.
- I often don't realize how much a particular employee is doing until he or she tells me about it during an official appraisal communication (e.g., mid-point review, employee list of contributions for appraisal form).

- I often don't realize the obstacles my subordinate employees have faced until after the particular task has been finished or has failed to occur on time.

Performance Management: Appraisals

- If you could choose for your entire workforce, how many formal levels would you want the system to have?
- How many levels were in the performance appraisal system for the last cycle in which you issued an appraisal of record?
- To what extent does your agency's performance appraisal process help you to identify...
 - ...the training needs of your employees.
 - ...which employees ought to be rewarded.
 - ...the degree to which your employees ought to be rewarded.
 - ...which employees ought to be moved to positions that better match their strengths.
 - ...which employees ought to be retained in a reduction-in-force.
 - ...which employees ought to receive a within-grade- increase (WIGI).
 - ...whether a formal performance improvement plan is likely to assist a subpar employee to become fully successful.
 - ...which employees ought to be removed for poor performance.
- Do you currently have any employees whose performance you feel is not at an acceptable level of competence?

Appraisal Process

- The performance appraisal process...
 - ...ignores performance management of good performers by focusing too much on identifying poor performers.
 - ...ignores performance management in favor of creating documents to justify personnel decisions.
 - ...is necessary to ensure that I have conversations with my subordinates about their performance.
 - ...is a good use of my time as a supervisor.
 - ...is a good use of my employees' time.

Poor Performance

Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements.

- A person who fails in one aspect of the job tends to fail in most aspects of the job.
- It is easy to identify why a poor performer is not doing well.
- It is easy to identify how a poor performer can improve his or her performance.
- It is easy to improve the performance of a poorly performing employee.
- It is easier to remove an employee for misconduct than for poor performance.
- I think that agencies should reassign poor performers to other positions if they seem more likely to succeed elsewhere.

Resources

Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements.

- My agency has realistic expectations about what my subordinates can accomplish.
- My work unit(s) has/have the resources they need to effectively accomplish their mission(s).
- My subordinates have reasonable workloads.
- My subordinates have all the tools that they need to accomplish their tasks effectively.
- We sometimes hire the wrong people.
- I am confident that I would be allowed to hire a new employee to replace someone removed for poor performance.
- I am confident that I would be allowed to hire a new employee to replace someone removed for misconduct.

Training

- I receive adequate training about...
 - ...how to discuss performance expectations with subordinates.
 - ...how to discuss performance deficiencies with subordinates.
 - ...my options for addressing poor performance in a subordinate.

Perceptions

Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements.

- My supervisor has a good understanding of the performance levels of my individual subordinates.
- As long as my office succeeds overall, my supervisor does not care about the performance of individual employees.
- My subordinates have a good understanding of how well each of their peers is performing.
- If one of my subordinate employees performed poorly it would negatively affect the ability of other subordinates to do their own jobs.
- If a supervisor in my organization failed to address poor performance by a subordinate, it would affect the morale of that supervisor's other subordinates.
- If a supervisor in my organization failed to address poor performance by a subordinate, there would be negative consequences for that supervisor.

Poor Performer Activities

- Have you ever directly supervised any employees who met the definition of poor performer (a person who failed to meet established performance standards in one or more critical elements of the employee's position)?
- Approximately how long ago was your most recent direct supervision of a poor performer?

Poor Performance: Reasons

For your most recent poor performer, please indicate the extent to which you think each of the following played a role in the poor performance.

- The employee did not understand what was expected from him/her.
- The employee did not understand how to do the work.
- The employee lacked needed resources or tools.
- The employee was given more work than he/she could handle.
- The employee was distracted by matters in his/her personal life.
- The employee engaged in misconduct (e.g., AWOL, abusive treatment of customers or co-workers).
- The employee was the target of an interpersonal workplace conflict (e.g., bullying, harassment, discrimination).
- The employee was not suited for that particular type of job.
- The employee was not interested in doing the necessary work to succeed.

Poor Performance: Results

For your most recent poor performer, please indicate the item that best describes what happened to the employee.

- Employee remained in the organization and performance is currently fully acceptable or better.
- Employee remained in the organization and performance is currently less than fully acceptable.
- Employee is no longer in the organization (e.g., resigned, removed, retired, transferred).
- Did something happen other than the results listed above?
- (If) You have indicated that your most recent poor performer currently has less than fully acceptable performance. Please indicate which of the below best describes the situation.
 - The employee is currently on a formal performance improvement plan that includes reasonable assistance to improve and a warning that a failure to improve may result in demotion or removal.
 - The employee is currently on an informal improvement plan.
 - We attempted an improvement plan for this employee in the past, but the employee is not currently on an improvement plan.
 - We have not attempted an improvement plan for this employee.
- Do you believe that this approach was in the Government's best interest?
- Do you believe that this approach was in the public's best interest?

- (If) You have indicated that your most recent poor performer is no longer in the organization. Please indicate which of the below best describes the circumstances under which the employee departed.
 - The employee chose to leave the organization (e.g., resigned, retired, got another job elsewhere).
 - The employee was moved by management to a different position in the same agency (e.g., promotion, demotion, reassignment).
 - The employee was removed for conduct-related reasons.
 - The employee was removed for performance-related reasons.
- Do you believe that this outcome was in the Government's best interest?
- Do you believe that this outcome was in the public's best interest?

Poor Performance: Improvement Approach

For the most recent poorly performing civilian employee that you have supervised, please indicate the extent to which you found that each approach below was successful in causing the poor performer's performance to improve to an acceptable level.

- Discussed with the employee possible reasons for the poor performance.
- Asked the employee what you could do to help the employee improve.
- Orally provided additional communication about expectations.
- In writing, provided additional communications about expectations.
- Discussed with the employee possible negative consequences if performance remained inadequate.
- Met more frequently with the employee to provide feedback and coaching.
- Monitored the employee's work more closely.
- Changed the employee's work assignments to other, less needed work.
- Changed the employee's work assignments to other, equally or more needed work.
- Reduced the work quantity or quality expectations required of the employee.
- Paired the employee with a better performer to serve as a mentor.
- Put the employee under an informal plan to improve performance.
- Put the employee under a formal performance improvement plan that included assistance to improve and a warning that a failure to improve could result in demotion or removal.
- Gave the employee a low performance appraisal rating.

Performance Improvement Period

Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements.

- Using a PIP would help me to feel better about any adverse action I may later take against the employee in question.
- Using a PIP would help me to persuade others that an adverse action has become necessary.
- Approximately how long ago was your most recent use of a PIP for a subordinate?
- In my experience...
 - ...I wait longer than I should to start a poor performer on a formal PIP.
 - ...other supervisors wait longer than they should to start a poor performer on a formal PIP.
 - ...I often use an informal opportunity to improve before putting in place a formal PIP.
 - ...higher-level supervisors are supportive of efforts by lower level supervisors to give a poor performer a meaningful PIP.
 - ...the extent to which a PIP leads to better performance depends heavily on the employee's personal characteristics (e.g., conscientiousness, agreeableness).
 - ...the extent to which a PIP leads to better performance depends heavily on the tasks being performed.
 - ...a PIP is useful when the employee has a knowledge deficiency (e.g., they are missing information or education).
 - ...a PIP is useful when the employee has a skill deficiency (e.g., they do not know how to apply knowledge to the task at hand).
 - ...poor performers see the PIP as a genuine effort by management to help the employee.
 - ...an employee who improves during the PIP will often have deteriorating performance once the period is over.
 - ...poor performers make a serious effort to use the PIP to improve their performance.
 - ...poor performers see the PIP as a warning sign causing them to voluntarily leave the work unit in question.

- ...the PIP often results in the employee improving to an acceptable level or better.
- ...the tasks that a supervisor must perform to place an employee on a PIP use a reasonable amount of the supervisor's time.
- ...the use of a PIP helps ensure that employees are treated fairly.
- ...human resources staff provide competent assistance regarding PIPs.
- ...supervisors receive timely training to help them effectively implement a meaningful PIP.

Managing Conduct

Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements.

- It is easy to identify why an employee engages in particular misconduct.
- It is easy to identify how to help an employee improve his/her conduct.
- It is easy to get a misbehaving employee to end his/her misconduct.
- Suspending employees for misconduct is harder than it should be.
- Demoting employees for misconduct is harder than it should be.
- Removing employees for misconduct is harder than it should be.
- Employees should be protected from erroneous discipline (i.e., not punished when innocent of charges).
- Employees should be protected from improper discipline (i.e., not punished for an improper reason such as discrimination or retaliation for reporting wrongdoing).
- Knowing that the employee can grieve or appeal a serious adverse action makes me feel more comfortable about taking such actions.
- Federal employees have too many rights.
- I think that some supervisors do not manage their employees' conduct because the supervisors want to avoid conflict.

Ability to Act

- If a subordinate employee engaged in serious misconduct are you confident that you would be able to remove that employee?
- To what extent would the following pose a challenge in your attempts to remove an employee for serious misconduct?
 - How well I understand the process to accomplish this
 - The level of proof required by law
 - The quality of service provided by my human resources office
 - The degree of support given by managers and leaders above me
 - My agency's culture regarding removing people for misconduct
 - The degree to which I am comfortable taking a person's job away from him/her
- If a subordinate employee was deficient in a critical performance element after completion of a PIP, are you confident that you would be able to remove that employee?
- To what extent would the following pose a challenge in your attempts to remove an employee for poor performance after a PIP?
 - How well I understand the process to accomplish this
 - The level of proof required by law
 - The quality of service provided by my human resources office
 - The degree of support given by managers and leaders above me
 - My agency's culture regarding removing people for poor performance
 - The degree to which I am comfortable taking a person's job away from him/her

Level of Certainty

- In general, how certain do you need to feel that a conduct charge is proven before you will propose or decide to suspend an employee?
- In general, how certain do you need to feel that a conduct charge is proven before you will propose or decide to remove an employee?
- In general, how certain do you need to feel that a charge of failing a critical performance element is proven before you will propose or decide to remove an employee?

Managing Conduct: Removal

- Have you ever proposed the removal of any employees for misconduct?
- Approximately how long ago was it that you most recently proposed the removal of an employee for misconduct?
- For the most recent conduct-related removal that you proposed where the agency has made its final decision, which of the below best describes the outcome?
 - Employee is no longer employed by the agency.
 - Employee is still employed by the agency.
- (If) You have indicated that the employee is no longer employed by the agency. Please indicate which of the below best describes the circumstances under which the employee departed.
 - Employee was removed.
 - Employee resigned.
 - Employee obtained a different Federal job.
 - Employee retired.
- Do you believe that this outcome was in the Government's best interest?
- Do you believe that this outcome was in the public's best interest?
- (If) You have indicated that the employee is still employed by the agency. Please indicate which of the below best describes the outcome.
 - Employee was permitted to remain in the same position.
 - Employee was suspended, demoted, or reassigned.
- Do you believe that this outcome was in the Government's best interest?
- Do you believe that this outcome was in the public's best interest?

Managing Supervisors

- Do you supervise employees who supervise other civilian employees?
- Approximately how many civilian employees are under your authority, including those who are supervised by people you supervise?

Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements.

- If one of my subordinate supervisors had a poor performer, I think the subordinate supervisor would let me know about it.
- I hold my subordinate supervisors accountable for the performance of their employees.
- I hold my subordinate supervisors accountable for the conduct of their employees.
- I am held accountable for ensuring that my subordinate supervisors meet their office performance goals.
- I am held accountable for ensuring that my subordinate supervisors address any individual poor performers.
- I am held accountable for ensuring that my subordinate supervisors address any individual misconduct.
- When I want to communicate expectations to employees who work for my subordinate supervisors, I usually do so through the subordinate supervisor.
- I am involved in setting performance expectations for employees who work for my subordinate supervisors.
- It is harder to manage the performance of a supervisor than it is to manage the performance of a nonsupervisory employee.
- Approximately how long ago was it that you most recently managed a supervisor whose subordinates included at least one poor performer?

Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements.

- My subordinate waited longer than he/she should have before telling me there was a poor performer.
- My subordinate kept me informed about efforts to improve the poor performer.
- My appraisal of my subordinate fully reflected the extent to which he/she properly addressed the situation with his/her poor performer.

Skills and Tasks

- How challenging do you find each of the following?
 - Establishing performance standards for subordinates that cover all critical elements of the jobs.
 - Establishing in subordinates' performance standards clear measurements for success in each element.
 - Communicating with employees about how they can improve their performance.
 - Addressing performance that does not improve.
 - Providing meaningful recognition for good performance.
 - Finding ways to increase employee engagement.
 - Managing employee morale.
 - Managing office interpersonal relationships.
 - Ensuring that higher-level supervisors appreciate what my subordinates have accomplished.
 - Getting enough employees to accomplish the work.
 - Getting enough resources to give my subordinates the tools to accomplish their work effectively.
 - Managing employee conduct to prevent serious misconduct from occurring.
 - Addressing serious misconduct that has occurred.
 - Managing employee training.
 - Creating recruitment plans to identify the best candidates for particular jobs.
 - Getting a pool of quality candidates.
 - Ensuring that subordinates have accurate position descriptions.
 - Paying employees an amount that is appropriate for the work they do.
 - Ensuring that employees do not experience unlawful discrimination.

Human Resources: Responsibility

- When the circumstances permit or require it, which of the following are you responsible for?
 - Staffing/Recruiting Decisions
 - Determining Subordinates' Duties
 - Managing Subordinates' Duties
 - Addressing Subordinates' Conduct
 - Relationship with a Union or Professional Association of Employees
 - Authorizing Subordinates' Training
- Do you have at least one subordinate to you who is not part of an HR office but whose official duties include advising you on HR issues (shadow HR)?
- What percentage of your total HR services come from the shadow HR? (The total would include advice and processing of the full range of HR functions, such as staffing, classification, management-employee relations, labor relations, and training.)
- For which of the following do you frequently consult with shadow HR staff?
 - Classification (position description)
 - Staffing/Recruiting
 - Training
 - Labor Relations
 - Management-employee relations (includes addressing conduct and/or performance issues)
 - My own personal issues not related to my employees

Human Resources: Shadow HR

Please indicate the extent of your agreement with the following statements.

- My shadow HR is/are ...
 - Knowledgeable about the principles behind HR.
 - Knowledgeable about relevant laws, rules, and regulations.
 - Hard-working.
 - Responsive.
 - Given too much work with insufficient resources.
 - Committed to my organization's success.
 - Effective in this aspect of his/her job.

- Effective as a consultant on HR issues.
- Essential to the success or failure of my office.

Human Resources: Points of Contact

- Are you permitted to directly contact someone in the HR office when you need help with an HR issue?
- I know the person to contact for help in the following HR disciplines:
 - Classification
 - Staffing
 - Training
 - Management-employee relations
 - Labor Relations
- If you needed help in one of the above disciplines for which you do not already know who to contact, how difficult do you think it would be to find the person responsible for helping you?

Human Resources: Issues

- When communicating with HR (the office that officially provides you with HR advice and services), what percentage of your time is spent on each of the following types of issues?
 - Classification
 - Staffing/Recruiting
 - Training
 - Management-employee relations (includes addressing conduct and/or performance issues)
 - Labor relations
 - My own personal issues not related to my employees

Human Resources: Staffing

- In the past 2 years, have you used HR's staffing services (includes recruitment actions as well as reassignments or promotions)?
- The HR person most responsible for helping me with actions involving staffing is...
 - Knowledgeable about the principles behind effective recruiting.
 - Knowledgeable about the relevant laws, rules and regulations.
 - Hard-working.
 - Responsive.
 - Given too much work with insufficient resources.
 - Committed to my organization's success.
 - Effective in this aspect of his/her job.
 - Effective as a consultant on recruitment actions.
 - Essential to the success of my office.

Human Resources: Classification

- In the past 2 years, have you used HR's classification services (position descriptions, including designating the title, series, and grade of a position)?
- The HR person most responsible for helping me with classification is...
 - Knowledgeable about the principles behind classification.
 - Knowledgeable about relevant laws, rules, and regulations.
 - Hard-working.
 - Responsive.
 - Given too much work with insufficient resources.
 - Committed to my organization's success.
 - Effective in this aspect of his/her job.
 - Effective as a consultant on HR issues.
 - Essential to the success or failure of my office.
- The role of classifying job duties into different pay grades should be to:
 - Properly classify positions at the appropriate grade level.

- Attract excellent job candidates.
 - Reward high performing employees.
- In order for a position to be properly classified at a certain General Schedule (GS) grade, it must meet the statutorily defined level of complexity and responsibility of that grade.
 - To what extent are standardized pre-classified position descriptions or job duties used by your organization?
 - To what extent does your servicing human resources office provide you assistance in classifying positions?

Human Resources: Performance Management

- In the past 2 years, have you sought help from HR regarding a subordinate's performance?
- The HR person most responsible for helping me with performance-related issues involving subordinates is...
 - Knowledgeable about the principles behind good performance management.
 - Knowledgeable about relevant laws, rules, and regulations.
 - Hard-working.
 - Responsive.
 - Given too much work with insufficient resources.
 - Committed to my organization's success.
 - Effective in this aspect of his/her job.
 - Effective as a consultant on HR issues.
 - Essential to the success or failure of my office.

Human Resources: Conduct

- In the past 2 years, have you sought help from HR regarding a subordinate's conduct?
- The HR person most responsible for helping me with conduct-related issues involving subordinates is...
 - Knowledgeable about the principles behind effectively addressing conduct issues.
 - Knowledgeable about relevant laws, rules, and regulations.
 - Hard-working.
 - Responsive.
 - Given too much work with insufficient resources.
 - Committed to my organization's success.
 - Effective in this aspect of his/her job.
 - Effective as a consultant on HR issues.
 - Essential to the success or failure of my office.

Human Resources: Labor Relations

- In the past 2 years, have you sought help from HR regarding a labor relations issue (unions)?
- The HR person most responsible for helping me with labor relations is...
 - Knowledgeable about the principles behind effective labor relations.
 - Knowledgeable about relevant laws, rules, and regulations.
 - Hard-working.
 - Responsive.
 - Given too much work with insufficient resources.
 - Committed to my organization's success.
 - Effective in this aspect of his/her job.
 - Effective as a consultant on HR issues.
 - Essential to the success or failure of my office.

Human Resources: Training

- In the past 2 years, have you sought help from HR regarding training issues?
- The HR person most responsible for helping me with training issues is...
 - Knowledgeable about the principles behind the effective selection and use of training.
 - Knowledgeable about relevant laws, rules, and regulations.
 - Hard-working.

- Responsive.
- Given too much work with insufficient resources.
- Committed to my organization's success.
- Effective in this aspect of his/her job.
- Effective as a consultant on HR issues.
- Essential to the success or failure of my office.

Human Resources: General Support

- Who is the employer of the individual most responsible for helping you with the following issues?
 - My agency
 - Contractor
- Staffing/Recruiting
- Position descriptions (classification)
- Performance-related issues involving subordinates
- Conduct-related issues involving subordinates
- Labor relations
- Training

- Where is the HR office most responsible for helping you with the following issues?
 - Staffing/Recruiting
 - Position descriptions (classification)
 - Performance-related issues involving subordinates
 - Conduct-related issues involving subordinates
 - Labor relations
 - Training

Human Resources: Compliance

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:

- The people providing me with HR services comply with the laws, rules, and regulations related to HR.
- The people providing me with HR services know how to find creative solutions within the law.
- The people providing me with HR services have a too-narrow interpretation of the law.
- I understand the laws, rules, and regulations related to HR.
- The laws, rules, and regulations related to HR are too complex.
- I wish Congress and the President would simplify the HR laws.
- I sometimes hesitate to tell HR staff what I really want because they may tell me that there is a rule that prohibits it.

Human Resources: PPP Reporting

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:

- I know what the 13 prohibited personnel practices (PPPs) are.
- I know how to avoid committing any prohibited personnel practices.
- If a supervisor tried to do something that is a prohibited personnel practices, my HR specialist would figure out that the supervisor was trying to commit a PPP.
- If a supervisor insisted upon doing something that is a prohibited personnel practices, my HR specialist would report he supervisor to someone in authority.
- I think HR specialists should report supervisors who try to commit a prohibited personnel practice.

Human Resources: Performance Deficiency

- If an employee was deficient in a critical performance element, I would not be able to remove him or her because...
 - ... the laws require that I do too much work before I can remove a failing employee.
 - ... the laws require too much proof of the employee's failure.
 - ... my HR staff wouldn't give me the necessary help to do the action correctly.
 - ... managers and leaders above me wouldn't support the action.

Human Resources: Challenges

Please indicate the extent to which the following factors cause difficulties for supervisors.

- Complexity of HR policies and procedures.
- Rigidity of HR policies and procedures.
- Lack of sufficient staff resources in the HR office.
- HR staff's excessive concern with the rules and procedures.
- HR staff's concern with results.
- Lack of sufficient knowledge in the HR staff.
- Lack of customer service by HR staff.

Human Resources: Outcomes

- To what extent are you satisfied with the outcomes that you experience in the following HR areas?
 - Classification (position descriptions)
 - Staffing/recruiting
 - Training
 - Management-employee relations (includes addressing conduct and/or performance issues)
 - Labor Relations
 - My own personal issues not related to my employees

Human Resources: Supervisory Training

- To what extent...
 - ...were you trained to become a supervisor prior to your first supervisory position?
 - ...was supervisory training provided after you first became a supervisor?
 - ...does the profile of your office or your position affect the quality of the HR service you receive?