

Evaluation of the Chief Executive: How Am I Doing?

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Selection of the person to lead your ministry is the most important decision your Board will make. After this large investment of time and effort to find the right person for your ministry, you want to ensure that the selected leader of your ministry is given every opportunity to reach her/his full potential during her/his tenure. One specific opportunity is an annual performance evaluation.

Evaluating the chief executive (in our sponsored ministries this person may have one of a number of titles: Administrator, Director, Executive Director, Head of School, Principal, President) is a primary responsibility of the Board. The rationale for regular assessment lies in the need for a periodic review of the goals and objectives of the ministry. Because the chief executive is central to the success or failure of the organization, assessing her/his performance is inextricably linked to evaluating the organization's performance as a whole. To these reviews should be added appraisal of the Board's performance.

The Board then should look at evaluation as a threefold process, incorporating evaluation of the chief executive into the annual review of the ministry's performance and of the Board's performance. Out of this organization-wide review should come goals and objectives for the coming year.

Methods of Assessment

There are many ways to undertake assessment of the chief executive. Your Board may want to focus on two methods: continuous observation and annual evaluation.

1. **Continuous observation** of the chief executive by Board members, particularly the Chair, is a natural process for members who are actively involved and work closely with the chief executive in committee and Board meeting tasks. If things begin to go wrong, it is relatively easy to identify the cause and make corrections.
2. **Annual evaluation** is a formal and documented review conducted generally by a Board committee that reports on the evaluation to the entire Board. Because the chief executive works for the full Board, all trustees/directors should have an opportunity for input into the process. One way to obtain their input is for the evaluation committee to circulate a questionnaire to trustees/directors asking specific questions about the chief executive's performance during the past year. The chief executive submits a self-evaluation. After all responses are collected and analyzed, the Chair discusses these responses with the chief executive and solicits her/his feedback. Once the performance review

is completed, job performance objectives are set for the following year. The results of the whole process are summarized and circulated to the full Board for review and discussed at the next meeting of the Board. Frequently compensation for the next year is determined at the conclusion of the evaluative session. The chief executive should receive written results of the performance review, including approved performance objectives for the following year.

Assessment Traps

Seven common errors in assessing the chief executive's performance have been noted.

1. **Halo effect:** preoccupation with one outstanding quality
2. **Tendency** to rate personality traits above performance
3. **Subjectivity:** substituting personal likes and dislikes for objective appraisal of performance
4. **Leniency:** reluctance to rate unfavorably
5. **Severity:** inclination to rate as unfavorably as possible
6. **General tendency:** avoidance of judgment by picking middle ground/average
7. **Dramatic incident effect:** judgment based on a single incident, ignoring total performance

Performance evaluations can produce dynamic outcomes for your ministry. You will have not only a deeper, reality-based understanding of your mission, values and effectiveness but also a defined plan to apply what you have learned for the future. If done well, an evaluation can improve the confidence, support, growth and working relationship between the Board and the chief executive.

Cardinal Rules for Assessment

- Do it.
- Do it in a caring and sensitive way.
- Make it a constructive endeavor for the chief executive, the Board, and the ministry.