No Appraisals? OK. But How Will You Keep It Fair?

By Liz Weber, CMC, CSP

I've recently had interesting conversations with a few organizations that want my company to work with them in developing their leaders. That's great but we're running into an initial roadblock as each company's leadership team has basically said, "We're hearing more and more that performance appraisals are a thing of the past. They're demoralizing, time-consuming, and ineffective. No one here likes to do them, so as a leadership team, we've decided we're not going to do them anymore." That's fine. And by the way, that's very trendy.

However, let's think about the reality of this type of personnel management strategy. If you as a leadership team decide to no longer use an objective performance review system that aligns performance to your organization's values and goals, how do you plan to ensure there are no surprises for your employees or management team? How do you plan to keep things fair? By keeping things fair I mean, what's your plan to ensure:

- your employees *know clearly and specifically what is expected of them* (What's expected of them not only before they were hired, but while they're on the job, and also going forward)?

- your leadership team is *continuously* providing feedback to employees on what each employee and team is doing well to drive the organization forward and what areas are starting to be a concern?

- your human resources team *has the appropriate and adequate documentation* to address any legal actions that may be taken by disgruntled or terminated employees?

If you are one of the fortunate few organizations that has an established culture where every employee just "gets it," and knows and does the right things day in and day, you may not need a performance review and planning system. However, if your organization is like most, you probably deal with personnel "issues" small or large on a regular basis. So my question to you is: *Are you eliminating performance reviews because you really don't need them, or are you eliminating them because as an organization and leadership team, you've never created and used them effectively before?* If your organization views them as punitive, you've not managed their use correctly. If your organization views them as a collaborative planning and development tool, why are you doing away with them?

So again, if you don't want to use performance appraisals, fine. But what's your plan to keep things fair?