

NSPS training answers employees' questions

By Jessica Walter, APR, DDC Public Affairs

As Defense Distribution Center employees prepared for the transition to a new performance-based personnel system earlier this year, a two-day course helped to promote understanding of how they will be affected.

About 517 DDC employees transitioned to the National Security Personnel System, or NSPS, in February.

The intent of NSPS is to ensure Department of Defense jobs are filled by qualified personnel and to offer flexibility for employers to develop and retain the best qualified workforce.

The training sessions, held November through January, gave employees an opportunity to find answers to questions about performance assessments, job objectives and reward methods.

In one class, nearly all participants had been employed by the federal government for more than 20 years, and this is the first major change to the personnel system during that time.

The most noticeable change, and the cornerstone of the new system, is the routine feedback between supervisors and employees, says Dr. Thom Bettinger who leads DDC's transition management efforts related to NSPS.

"Under a pay-for-performance system like NSPS, it is imperative that supervisors and employees are engaged in discussions regarding expectations and priorities," said Bettinger.

The new system consists of five phases: plan, monitor, develop, rate, and reward.

In the planning phase, supervisors work with employees to identify expectations that are aligned with the organization's mission. Those expectations are then translated into measurable job objectives that describe

what the employee is expected to achieve.

The second phase is monitoring and it includes feedback between supervisors and employees regarding progress toward achieving job objectives.

The development phase allows employees to improve their performance by seeking opportunities to build upon their skills.

During the rating phase, supervisors assess employees' performance relative to success in reaching job objectives and provide written recommendations for payout distribution from the pay pool.

In the final phase, the pay pool panel reviews recommendations to ensure fairness and approves the ratings and payouts.

Many of the employees attending the training course were pleased by

the level of involvement they will have in the process which will include an opportunity for employees to write a self assessment of their performance.

"NSPS helps to remove some of the subjectivity from the performance appraisal process," said Annie Gensler of DDC's Systems branch.

Darlene Ferrante, DDC's human resources account manager, of the Defense Logistics Agency's Human Resource Center in New Cumberland, Pa., says it's important for employees to remember how crucial self assessments are in the appraisal process.

"This is your opportunity to provide additional information for the evaluation of your performance," Ferrante emphasized.

Ferrante cautions employees not to be hasty in completing a self assessment. "Take your

Helpful NSPS Websites

DOD Civilian Personnel Management Service www.cpms.osd.mil/nsps

- Frequently Asked Questions
- Conversion Calculator
- iSuccess training course for writing job objectives and self assessments

DLA Human Resources www.hr.dla.mil

(click on NSPS in top right corner)

- Link to MyBiz/My Workplace (to build Performance Appraisal Applications)
- NSPS Newsletters

time and really think about your accomplishments and how they connect to your organization's overall mission."

She suggests collecting records of success throughout the year – items that demonstrate your ability to complete job objectives, the challenges you may have faced, and how you overcame the challenges.

Some attending the course, however, say they will need to get more comfortable with the idea of highlighting their successes.

"I believe documenting performance is the hardest part," said Gensler.

"We don't usually record our successes because it's just what we're expected to do," said Lois Gabela, formerly of DDC, who now leads DLA's Base Realignment and Closure retail integration project for DLA Information Operations, or J-6. "We don't think of it as something you talk about."

For many, the class also demystified the pay pool process.

"Pay pools are comprised of supervisors who review employee evaluations to make sure the same standards for evaluating performance are applied," explained Ferrante. "They also ensure that payouts are consistent with the performance ratings."

"The pay pool serves a critical purpose in ensuring a higher level review takes place to preserve fairness and equity," added Bettinger.

DDC will conduct a mock pay pool in May to test the process and identify any areas for improvement.

Ferrante and other members of DLA's human resources centers have been attending lessons-learned sessions with other agencies to find the best ways to complete the transition.

"This requires a shift in thinking by most employees, but, in the long run, I think it will prove beneficial for both employees and the organization overall," said Ferrante.

Glossary of NSPS Terms

Appraisal - The review and evaluation of an employee's performance.

Appraisal Period - The period of time established under a performance management system for reviewing employee performance. (Under NSPS, the performance rating cycle is typically Oct. 1 through Sept. 30.)

Base Salary - An employee's pay before any deductions and exclusive of additional pay of any kind.

Bonus - An element of the performance payout that consists of a one-time lump-sum payment made to employees. It is not part of base pay.

Competencies - The measurable or observable knowledge, skills, abilities, behaviors, and other characteristics that an individual needs to perform a particular job or job function successfully.

Job Objectives - An expression of performance expectations in the performance plan that are linked to the organization's goal(s) and mission(s). Job objectives are used to communicate major individual, team, and organizational responsibilities, contributions, and the related outcomes expected of you during the appraisal process.

Pay Pool - The organizational element/units or other categories of employees that are combined for the purpose of determining performance payouts. Each employee is in only one pay pool at a time. Pay pool also means the amount designated for performance payouts to employees covered by a pay pool.

Pay Pool Manager - The individual designated to manage the pay pool, resolve discrepancies, and ensure consistency; acts as the approving official for ratings, shares, and pay out distribution.

Pay Pool Panel - Usually senior management officials, including the pay pool manager, of the organizations or functions represented in the pay pool that assist the pay pool manager in the exercise of his or her responsibilities.

Pay Schedule - A set of related pay bands for a specified category of employees within a career group.

Performance Indicators - The general descriptions of levels or thresholds of your performance used to measure, evaluate, and score the achievement of your objective(s). The performance indicators are developed by the Department of Defense and are provided at Level 3 and Level 5 for each pay schedule and pay band.

Performance Share - A unit of performance payout awarded to an employee based on performance. Performance shares may be awarded in multiples commensurate with the employee's performance and contribution rating level.

Promotion - The movement of an employee from one pay band to a higher pay band on a permanent basis.

NSPS - National Security Personnel System. The human resource management system established under 5 U.S.C. 9902(a). It does not include the labor relations system established under 5 U.S.C. 9902(m).