

Performance Review

by Tom Tomassi

Happy New Year & Welcome Back!

At the Demand Setting Meeting held in December, we spent the better part of an hour discussing the Performance Review that the college is in the process of implementing. If you recall, the issue was quite charged and questions were asked regarding the local union's position on this issue. For those of you who follow our newsletter on a regular basis, you are probably aware of the fact that the local union does *not* favour this process for many different reasons. At Union College Committee, the college administration, brought forward their plan and the union expressed many concerns regarding the plan. Every time the college has brought this issue up, we have categorically rejected the process. The main reasons for our rejection was that the process in itself was not comprehensive and too one-sided.

Some of you may recall in the early 1990s the union local and the college administration engaged in a three year process to create an evaluation tool that would reflect on all aspects of the work done at the college. Should any deficiency have been discovered during the process, there was a way to address it, be it faculty performance, administration performance, physical plant, etc. The college, in fact, did implement this process for a three year

period and it then unilaterally decided that the process was too cumbersome and they stopped administering it. During our discussion at Union College Committee, we often suggested to our counterparts at the table that if they wished to resurrect that tool, we would work together with them in streamlining it and implementing it. They showed no interest whatsoever in moving in that direction.

The George Brown College Faculty Performance Review Project, distributed to all of us through the Human Resources Department outlines what is involved and it also attempts to answer the questions that we have raised at Union College Committee. The paper itself extremely simplifies the union's concerns regarding this process and does not do justice as to the reasons why we are opposed to Performance Review. The College administration describes this process as being a collegial exercise. However, they are calling it *Performance Review*, which in itself contradicts the collegiality of the process that they are envisioning.

The first concern that we have addressed with the college was, in fact, that the language within the Collective Agreement allows the administration of the college to withhold the annual increment past the mid point on the salary grid, on the basis

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of performance. That is a fact. The college responded by saying that this is not what they are going to use this process for. The reality is that should any of our faculty be negatively affected by this and have a step increase withheld, that individual's only recourse would be to file a grievance. At the hearing of said grievance, the arbitrator would not look at the college's intentions as evidence, but rather at the language of the Collective Agreement to render its decision. Based on this, I must exercise due diligence and inform all of you that by engaging in this process, this negative outcome *could* be the result for some of us. The college reinforces this fear by stating that they will not guarantee that engaging in this process will not result in the withholding of the step. Prior to the Performance Review, the college had no tool to create this possible outcome. Although the college is making an attempt to separate Performance Review from Performance Management, they are, in fact, one and the same. Performance Management *can* be a direct result from a negative Performance Review.

The second issue that Human Resources is attempting to clarify for you on our behalf deals with faculty members contributing to the evaluation of other faculty members. I would assume that this exercise engages faculty in what is referred to as the Learning Squares. In moving in this direction it isn't a choice for us as faculty to invite or not invite a colleague into our class for feedback, but it is part and parcel of the portfolio that the college wants us to create. The union local has some real concern with the fact that colleagues, although chosen by the individual, are asked to do this. It is not done on a voluntary basis, but rather it must be done as part of the process. I must caution all of you about this, because, during my time here at the college, I have experienced what harm this process can cause. It has happened

that great friendships have been totally destroyed and the environment in which we have had to work has been poisoned.

The third issue deals with appropriate feedback. I would venture to say that there are as many styles of teaching as there are faculty here at the college and that style is a direct result of our knowledge and experience. In delivering our material we must constantly be cognizant of the fact that not all of our students learn the same way and that changes in the delivery mode must be made on a regular basis in order to capture all of our students. There is a relatively hard line regarding the way the college expects us to deliver our curricula and over the past few years we have been moving towards the same type of delivery that universities have. The one major issue that I believe has bearing on feedback has to do with the fact that university professors enjoy the luxury of academic freedom, where we do not.

Yes, it is true that we have raised the question about appropriate feedback in light of the fact that many of our front line administrators have no experience in the educational field. The way the college is planning to address this, is by providing chairs and faculty with classroom observation training on how to provide this feedback. This is a major concern to me. I am also concerned with faculty being able to provide feedback to other faculty. Although we provide feedback to our students everyday, you would agree with me, that providing feedback to a colleague is a totally different concept.

We have expressed concerns with respect to front line administrators walking into our classrooms uninvited. Why should they? Although the college does not agree with our view, our local has always maintained that unless the chair/director is investigating a complaint, they really have no right to interfere with the delivery of our curricula, as that is clearly

defined as being our responsibility. The involvement of the chair/director, as we see it, is to assign, schedule and then allow us to discharge our functions.

The paper goes on to say that the chair will respectfully arrange an appropriate time to attend class and also goes on to say that by attending these classes, they will have a better understanding and appreciation of faculty's work. I take quite an exception to that statement and so should you. It takes a long time and a lot of work and patience to develop the skills necessary to understand the classroom dynamics required to be able to deliver curricula in such a way that all of our students become engaged in the learning process. In my humble opinion, it would take quite some time for front line administrators to recognize and appreciate the different styles of teaching, let alone content and sequence and all other dynamics that are applied in the delivery.

The fourth issue that Human Resources is trying to address talks about the union's concern that the college will use this process to 'get rid of faculty'. That seems like a very simplistic statement, although at the end of the Performance Review process, if it is negative, that could be the outcome. Our main concern was that the administrators at this college could use this tool as a control mechanism. We have discussed with the college the fact that if they really and truly believe that this process is designed to promote excellence in teaching and learning and to foster a learning community, which benefits all of us in the long run, especially our students, then why are they calling it a Performance Review? We have suggested to them at the table many times, that if, in fact, what they are planning to achieve is excellence in teaching and learning, we will sit at the table with them and partner an endeavour to produce a streamlined,

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all-encompassing process that addresses, not only the ability of faculty to excel, but also that of all employees who direct and assist in the process.

Although I have no control over what the administration does, (as none of us do, since they have the exclusive right to manage), I take exception to the fact that they are directly talking to you regarding how the union local feels and what our concerns are about this issue. My suggestion to all of you is that when you are asked to engage in this process, if it is on a volunteer basis, you need not volunteer. If you are coerced into doing so, please notify the union local. If you feel vulnerable when the chair makes a classroom visit, ensure that you have

either a steward in the classroom at the same time, or a trusted colleague, so that you have another opinion that may or may not concur with that of the chair/director regarding that classroom visit. The college has also made a statement that all of us will be going through this process over the next three years. That to me indicates that the word *voluntary* is only used for the purpose of *when* we will be participating, since eventually we will all be required to do it.

Lastly, it is very important that you be given the appropriate time to do this work. The college has offered (and has in place) 3 teaching hours per week for one semester to produce the portfolio. I believe that in order to do the things they ask you to do in this portfolio, that you require more

time than 3 hours. I would suggest that you indicate to your chair that you will keep track of time and unless the college is willing to pay you for the extra time, once you put in your 45 hours, that is the end of the project. Please *do* keep track of your time and if you have any differences of opinion with your administrator, please let us know and we will counsel you as to what the next steps should be.

I said it at the beginning and I am saying it again—we do *not* agree with the college that this is the way to move forward to create a better teaching and learning environment. We believe that the time and resources that are allocated for this project could be more wisely invested—perhaps in hiring new full time faculty. *Wouldn't that be a novel idea?* ▼

THE GREEN CORNER



Green Babies?

No, this issue's Green Corner is not about aliens. It's about how to start your children on the green road (and hopefully keep them there).

(This one's for you JP)

New born feeding

Breast milk is best. However if you are feeding formula from a bottle remember a few things: Use a glass bottle with a clear silicone nipple. Avoid plastic bottle liners. Use powdered formula and filtered tap water. Make sure the water is fluoride-free.

Baby Food

If you make your own baby food you will know exactly what your baby is eating. Of course, use glass jars for storage. For those times that you and baby will be out and about, you can

use biodegradable containers that will biodegrade within 90 days. These containers can be found at Ecoproducts.com.

Diapers

Babies leave a rather large carbon footprint in the form of the many diapers they use. There is a lot of debate about which are less harmful to the environment—cloth (reusable) diapers or disposable ones. Check out gDiapers.com for a third (and very interesting) alternative.

Body Care Products

Be careful. *Gentle or natural* doesn't necessarily mean it is kid-safe. Check CosmeticsDatabase.com to see if the products you are using are okay.

Hand Washing

Frequent hand washing reduces illness and also reduces your child's exposure to chemicals.

Cleaning

Use greener cleaning solutions (see *The Vocal Local* Volume 1, Number 2).

Recreation Time

Limit the numbers of hours that your child watches television. Children will become much smarter if you play games with them. Reading aloud to children develops their listening and reading skills. (At the same time, reading aloud activates *your* prefrontal cortex and develops *your* brain.

For more ideas and tips on making green choices for your children, go to:

BLULOW.com

ewg.org/babysafe

http://infantstoddlers.suite101.com/article.cfm/environmentally_friendly_babies

Studs Terkel

by Tula Connell/AFL-CIO/CALM

What bitter irony—Studs Terkel, who gave voice to working people throughout his life, died just days before the historic U.S. presidential election.

Barack Obama's win would have been a sweet vindication for Terkel, whose affinity for workers promises to be reinstated in the policies of the new U.S. administration.

Terkel, 96, was renowned for his compilations of oral interviews with famous and mostly not-so-famous Americans. He talked with thousands of people about their experiences on the job, serving their country in World War II, their perceptions of race and most recently, the challenges of growing old and facing death.

One of his most famous books is *Working*, in which more than 100 Americans share their hopes, dreams and daily struggles on the job.

In April 2006, Terkel received the Lifetime Achievement award from the workers' advocacy organization, American Rights at Work. After accepting the award, Terkel said, "What brings workers together can be a belief, a hope of improving the climate and community at work—the spaces

where so many of us spend so much of our lives. Respect on the job and a voice at the workplace shouldn't be something Americans have to work overtime to achieve."

Born Louis Terkel, he grew up in the 1920s and 1930s in an environment filled with workers, union organizers and other progressives who gathered in the lobby of his parents' Chicago rooming house. Terkel ultimately turned to documenting oral interviews in a series of books.

In *Working: People Talk About What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do*, Terkel elicited first-hand experiences of workers as varied as bus driver and strip miner, policeman and film critic.

Blacklisted in the 1950s by the House Committee on Un-American Activities, Terkel went on to win a Pulitzer Prize in 1985 and a National Humanities Medal from President Bill Clinton in 1997.

Terkel, has been called a "guerilla journalist" and a man "whose name is synonymous with Labour Day," sprinkled his conversation with references to the ancient Greek mathematician Archimedes and American revolutionary Thomas Paine—yet had the unique ability to engage people in a way that drew forth the hopes, dreams and heartfelt experiences of everyday people. ▼

Drug Cards

You should have recently received a memo, dated December 15/08, from HR with the subject line 'Important Notice Regarding Your Benefit Coverage'. This memo asks that you complete the attached Dependent Certification Form and return it to HR by January 23/09. It is important that you complete, sign and return this form as soon as possible. If you haven't received it, call HR at ext 6778 to request a copy. This information will be used to issue new drug cards that will include coverage for you and your dependents.

The card is a Pay-Direct Drug Card for full time and partial load academic employees. It eliminates the need to submit paper claim forms to Sun Life. You will only have to pay the 15% coinsurance for each prescription. Until the new Drug Cards are ready, eligible employees will continue to have their claims paid using the paper claim process.

You should be receiving more information about the Drug Card in the near future. ▼

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The Vocal Local is a publication of the George Brown College Faculty Union, OPSEU Local 556. It is intended to provide information and stimulate discussion among its members. We invite your participation and welcome your contributions. We reserve the right to edit for libel, length and clarity.

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