Employee Performance Evaluations

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Abstract

This research project was initiated in order to identify, correct and improve on any deficiencies within the current Performance Evaluation program of the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office. Through research and evaluation of different Employee Performance Evaluation programs, a core competency based evaluation system was chosen as a base to build upon. A survey was presented to the entire workforce of the Sheriff's Office in order to obtain valuable feedback needed to produce a fair and effective evaluation program. The results of this feedback indicated the majority of the employees felt the current program was outdated and needed improvement. Employees also indicated they wanted an equal and impartial evaluation process by which pay raises, promotions and transfers could be justified based upon related data.

Introduction

Beginning in February 2009, the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office began the long, tedious process of rebuilding the trust and confidence of the community the agency serves due to the indictment and prosecution of a former Sheriff and other command staff members.

Through this reconstruction process, the Governor appointed an interim Sheriff, who provided excellent leadership and mentored a command staff in making critical changes that would mold and shape the agency into a more professional, accredited and transparent agency, worthy of the trust and confidence from the community it serves.

After the election of a permanent Sheriff and the replacement of several key personnel, many of the programs of the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office were updated or eventually replaced. One of the programs that attempted to be updated and reutilize was the Employee Performance Evaluation Program. This program software was originally purchased at a seminar and not utilized for several years. This program was brought on line but was outdated and proved to have several flaws and problems.

One of the problems with the program was the fact it was software based and required Information Technology support from the vendor. The Human Resource department attempted to build a Performance Evaluation program using a Job Task Analysis format. This system required supervision to rate an employee on approximately one hundred assorted job tasks, where in the course of an evaluation period the employee may only be performing a fraction of those job tasks. This method was not an effective format for providing a fair evaluation of an employee's performance.

The next attempt, using the existing software, was to build a Performance Evaluation program using Core Competencies. This was very problematic as well, in attempting to use the data comprised from the "Job Task Analysis" and merging that data with the Competency Program within the same software. The Human Resource department worked tirelessly with the tech support from the vendor for several weeks and at a very high cost; however the system would not accept the established data.

At this point, it was very late into the evaluation cycle and with no functional system in place an alternative plan was made to complete the evaluation cycle. The Human Resource department created a simple Word document using the established Competencies and this was used as an alternate to the failed program.

Realizing the need to find a better program we began looking at other alternatives. After several months of vendor presentations and webinars the agency decided on a web based program that appeared to meet requirements and allow for the use of established criteria but also allow for the input of new criteria as needed.

The agency has now created a development committee that consists of supervisors that are both sworn and civilian. This committee was tasked with establishing the employee competencies and the descriptions of those competencies.

It is the goal through this research paper to identify key components and use established methods and objectives, in order to help create an employee performance appraisal system that can be utilized in identifying strengths and weaknesses of the work force. This appraisal system should help the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office meet the ever changing climate of personal and community needs. Law enforcement is an ever changing science that requires constant monitoring and self evaluation.

Literature Review

In 1968 Congress passed the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act. This was the first time federal funding was provided though the law Enforcement Education Program (LEEP). This funding was designed as a grant and loan program to offset college education expenses for police officers. This legislation was developed in part after the release of The President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice 1967. The commission called for a more educated police force. (Kimmel, 1996)

Police in the 1960's were responding to society's rapidly changing culture with little to no formal education. This was creating a noticeable negative image of Law Enforcement as illustrated in media reports and television. Many scholars and Police Administrators agreed this was due to poor quality of personnel. It was argued that many of these problems could be solved by recruiting better educated persons, particularly college educated graduates. (Kimmel, 1996)

As early as 1920 it was identified that many police problems were one of personnel. Most police officers did not finish high school and scored well below average intelligence. They received little or no training, earned in adequate salaries and stayed on the job into their 60-70's. Many were unqualified for the job. Research suggests that higher educated police officers provide many benefits. Better educated officers are able

to better handle difficult situations with greater creativity and innovation. College educated officers tend to be less authoritative and less cynical. Studies show that college educated officers have fewer citizen complaints, shorter responds times, fewer injures and accidents and are less likely to be assaulted, make more arrests and engage in more frequent detection practices. (Kimmel, 1996)

Educated police officers do in fact place a higher value on the importance of a higher education. The marriage of research and practical experimentation will be one main result of recruiting educated police officers, which in short will increase police performance and the possession of a college degree with further criminal justice effectiveness.

This further enforces the idea that police officers with formal education will perform better in most work environments and provide the employer with the qualities they want in order to provide the service required to meet the changing needs of the community in which each officer serves. (Kimmel, 1996)

Performance Evaluations

In order to better understand what organizations are looking for in Employee Performance Appraisals or Evaluations, we must first look at some of the characteristics that make up a "good cop". Some of these characteristics are dependability, honesty and intelligence. Other qualities include being goal-oriented, well organized and emotionally stable. All of these are good foundations on which to build. Those who are careless, irresponsible and low achievers should not be considered as viable candidates for law enforcement. Those should be "weeded-out" in the selection process. These employees will affect the organization negatively in the long term, both in capital cost and moral dissention. (Sanders, 2008)

Historically, performance appraisals have been one of the problematic areas of Human Resources management. All parties involved, supervisors, employees and HR managers typically are not satisfied with the organization's employee appraisal system and view the system as either futile, or worse, a destructive influence of the employee supervisor relationship. (Coutts & Schneider, 2004)

This is very true of police organizations in the United States where surveys typically show dissatisfaction with such employee appraisals, yet most are very reluctant to abandon performance appraisals as they are an essential tool for the Human resource management. (Coutts & Schneider, 2004)

Opinions vary as to the overall purpose of formal employee appraisals and if they are a valid indicator of personal decisions and feedback to employees. Moreover, a performance appraisal is a vital component in the mechanism for evaluating the extent by which an employee's day to day performance is linked to the goals and objectives of the organization. (Coutts & Schneider, 2004)

Five Key Components to Effective Performance Appraisals

The first factor is to ensure the appraisal system focuses on performance variables as opposed to personal traits. The use of personal traits in such appraisals could be biased based upon the relationship of the appraiser with the employee and the

experiences with that employee. In addition personal traits assessments lend little value to diagnosing and designing developmental plans to address dependencies identified with employees. In several court tested cases, appraisals should be based on behaviors rather than traits. (Coutts & Schneider, 2004)

A second factor is for an employee appraisal to be effective; employees must believe they have an opportunity for meaningful input into this appraisal process. This input can range from having the option to challenge or rebut the evaluation one receives to judging one's own performance through self appraisal, regardless of the nature of the employee input. It is clear that giving employees a voice in their own appraisals enhances the perceived fairness of the process; this in turn increases the likelihood that employees will accept the appraisal system as a legitimate and constructive means of gauging their performance contributions. (Coutts & Schneider, 2004)

One of the critical objectives of performance appraisals is to provide feedback that will foster employee growth and development. A third and very important factor of performance appraisals relates to the frequency and nature of supervisor feedback. To be most effective, a continuous performance-based feedback process should exist between supervisors and subordinates and should include a two-way communication between the supervisor and employee. Similarly in providing feed back to employees, supervisors should allow employees the opportunity to share their insights and evaluations concerning their own performance. This should create an environment of trust and make communication between supervisor and employee effective and constructive. (Coutts & Schneider, 2004)

Fourth, effective performance appraisals should provide the opportunity for the supervisor and employee to promote the achievement of individual and organizational goals. That is, an effective performance appraisal serves to clarify performance standards and expectations and agreed upon goals. In addition, performance appraisals should be an important component of both an organizations succession planning program and the individual employee's career self management. (Coutts & Schneider, 2004)

Finally, like any other system, performance appraisals will only be as effective as the relevant skills and knowledge of those responsible for using it. The vast research literature on performance appraisal rater training has focused on several training issues, including improving rater's observational skills, reducing judgmental biases, and providing objective, meaningful and constructive feedback. (Coutts & Schneider, 2004)

Nearly a half a century of research has identified factors that contribute to effective performance appraisals, but despite recognizing these important components, dissatisfaction with performance appraisals as a whole is somewhat the norm. With respect to policing, the widespread dissatisfaction raises questions about the extent to which police organization incorporate the recognized key components into their evaluation appraisal systems. That is, although police organizations constantly seek better ways to evaluate employee performance and recognized studies examine the different rating scale formats for police officer appraisals, the extent to which organizations actually apply available research knowledge in their appraisal practices remains to be seen. (Coutts & Schneider, 2004)

Community Policing and Performance Evaluations

In almost every police organization the focus is Community Policing. This is not a new concept as it is where most law enforcement agencies began many years ago. But due to rise in crime and the advances in technology, agency heads, sheriff's and councils attempted to solve crime in alternative ways, but the proven method has and always will be basic policing of a specific community. Community policing entails a fundamental change in the role and responsibilities of the police. Police are no longer just "crime fighters". We are problem solvers, community organizers, planners and mediators. The following are some steps many agencies have taken to revise performance evaluations that better conform to a Community Policing oriented organization. (Chandek, 2000)

Decide on the purpose of the evaluation: Typically evaluations have been viewed as administrative tools that can also support guidance, counseling and research. The Community Police mindset adds changes to include a way to gauge, socialization, show documentation and provide system improvement. (Chandek, 2000)

Identify Performance Criteria: Create a job analysis by identifying tasks that officers do in the community. After identifying tasks regularly performed by officers, it will be necessary to identify activities that might be performed to accomplish those relevant tasks. There are no set rules only that the job analysis must be accurate and reliable. (Chandek, 2000)

Define Effective Behavior: In a Community Policing environment this may be no easy task as the definition will vary depending on the activity. The definition will change within each organization. Effectiveness requires realistic expectations regarding what the police are capable of achieving, a consideration of the interests to be served and an understanding of the short and long term impact of certain activities. (Chandek, 2000)

Decide who should be evaluated: Traditional performance evaluations have measured the individual police officer performance with the assumption that officers work alone. This might be difficult as many officers could be responsible for one geographical area. In this situation a division of group might require evaluation as a group or division in order to obtain accurate data. Group members should assess the progress the group is making as a whole towards its stated goals and objectives. Work group members should rate their own performance in relation to the group – providing an indication of how their performance might be improved to further the attainment of the group's goals and objectives. Performance evaluations used in this manner can facilitate teamwork, foster "ownership" of an area, and encourage officer and work group growth through continual self-evaluation. (Chandek, 2000)

Decide who will participate in the evaluation process: As the landscape of the community policing community changes, organizations may have to conduct more frequent evaluations and also include the officers themselves into the process. The use of officer self-assessment evaluations will allow supervisors to gain useful information

they might not otherwise obtain. Another option used by some organizations using the community police philosophy is called 360 degree feedback. This includes individuals below, equal to, and a higher rank provides evaluations of an employee's performance. By involving more individuals in the evaluation process, it is more likely to obtain accurate assessments of employee performance. This would provide the department with an important opportunity to learn how officers are (or are not) being supported in their community policing endeavors by their supervisors, and by extension, the department at large. More specifically supervisors can learn the type of resources and support officers need to perform effectively in a community policing environment. (Chandek, 2000)

In researching Performance Evaluations, there appears to be several models that all have different themes and concepts yet the following article targets some of the primary problems and issues that plague Performance Evaluations, as they apply to the Law Enforcement Profession. There appear to be two schools of thought when it comes to performance evaluations. The first believes they are a great management tool that helps agencies achieve their goals by improving and working the employees. The second believes the opposite; they feel performance evaluations hinder the agency instead. They view performance evaluations as a control measure, a tool out of touch with teamwork, and a vehicle that hinders innovation. (Chandek, 2000)

Problems with Performance Evaluations

Often performance evaluations are boss driven, controlling and dependence building devices that stifle the motivation in employees. Agencies often use performance evaluations as a form of documentation to help with disciplinary actions and legal challenges dealing with employee terminations. We often read an evaluation that was an inaccurate picture of twelve months worth of work. Does the evaluation include the following: Does the narrative section include important details like completed schools or courses, receiving letters of appreciation, and outlining future goals? (Murgado, 2012)

Another common school of thought for performance evaluations is to connect them to something with meaning and value such as pay increases. You need a certain score from the performance evaluation to be eligible for a pay raise. It might be a great tool for management, but in reality, pay raises are usually a question of budget and not performance. Accountability, measuring work product, and attitudes are subjective and not objective. Some supervisors will evaluate employees simply on their numbers or stats. This will not accurately identify the quality of work over the quantity. If an officer is doing their job correctly then their overall numbers should take care of themselves. We all realize that good statistical numbers make us all look good, but a lower crime rate within a community is what makes the citizens happy. (Murgado, 2012)

Unless performance evaluations are being tied to raises there seems to be apathy by some supervisors when evaluation time rolls around. Supervisors play a critical role in how performance evaluations are viewed and they have an enormous say so in the future of their employees. (Murgado, 2012)

Documentation

Documentation is the key to any good performance evaluation. You must document the good and the bad. No one incident (unless extreme), will make or break an evaluation. However, it's the patterns that are created by an officer's work that will. Documentation works for the officer as well. All officers should keep notes on themselves so they can compare what they think they have accomplished with what their supervisors write. It is wise to have each employee send a list of significant accomplishments or major incidents to the supervisor in order to remind and reinforce the evaluation process. This way the supervisor gets a better picture of the employee to present into the performance evaluation. (Murgado, 2012)

Conclusion

Throughout all the research and articles available and proven techniques used in many areas and by many different professions, a basic theme is obvious.

An employee evaluation is only as good as the information available to be evaluated. In order to obtain an accurate and fair evaluation, the process must be a 12 month evaluation period and not a specific rating period. Employees and supervisors must keep daily or weekly notes on the progress or deficiencies of themselves or employees in order to get the best and accurate view of the work each employee brings to the organization. A daily note or weekly note in a planner or in a web based system takes only a few minutes but will reap great benefits when evaluation time domes each year.

In law enforcement we all know that if it's not written down it is very difficult to prove it occurred. So documentation is the key to a good evaluation and also communicating deficiencies and or problems to the employee in a consistent manner will let the employee know their progress and also give up to date feedback and information should the employee be transferred or change jobs within the evaluation process.

Evaluations are no replacement for good supervision; they are just another tool in our tool box to help produce the best employee possible.

Now that we have identified several different methods and examples of Employee Performance Evaluations, the next step is to gather input from a specific group of individuals in order to determine what employees want to see from an employee performance evaluation. Using the above research information a survey will be accomplished to gather more accurate data and employee feedback.

Methods

There are three main goals needed from the research of this study. The first goal was to obtain critical information that can be used to determine the effectiveness of employee performance evaluations.

The second goal was to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the agency as related to employee performance evaluations. This information will allow each employee the ability to give and receive effective feedback to ensure a consistent means of positive communication.

This type of positive communication should lead us to our third and also the ultimate goal of this research, which is to create a fair and accurate evaluation program that will give honest feedback to the employee, supervisor and administrator as to where each employee skill levels currently are. This feedback will also help enhance the employee's ability to grow to their maximum ability, in order for each employee to reach the level of service they wish to achieve for themselves, the agency and the community.

An employee survey was accomplished through the use of an inter agency web based program known as Power DMS. This program has the ability to gather input from each sworn and non- sworn employee of the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office. The target of the survey was all 343 employees of the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office. The survey consisted of ten questions which included yes or no choices, open ended answers and also included multiple choice answers. A time frame of three weeks will be used for deployment of the survey. Each employee had the option to answer any or all of the ten questions to include a narrative question at the end of the survey.

Each person responding to this survey was an appropriate target as each employee has a vested interest in the future of the agency and to the future goals of the individual employee.

The design of this study was to gather recommendations, suggestions and direction as to the course the employees of the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office wished to take in establishing a better Employee Performance Evaluation program.
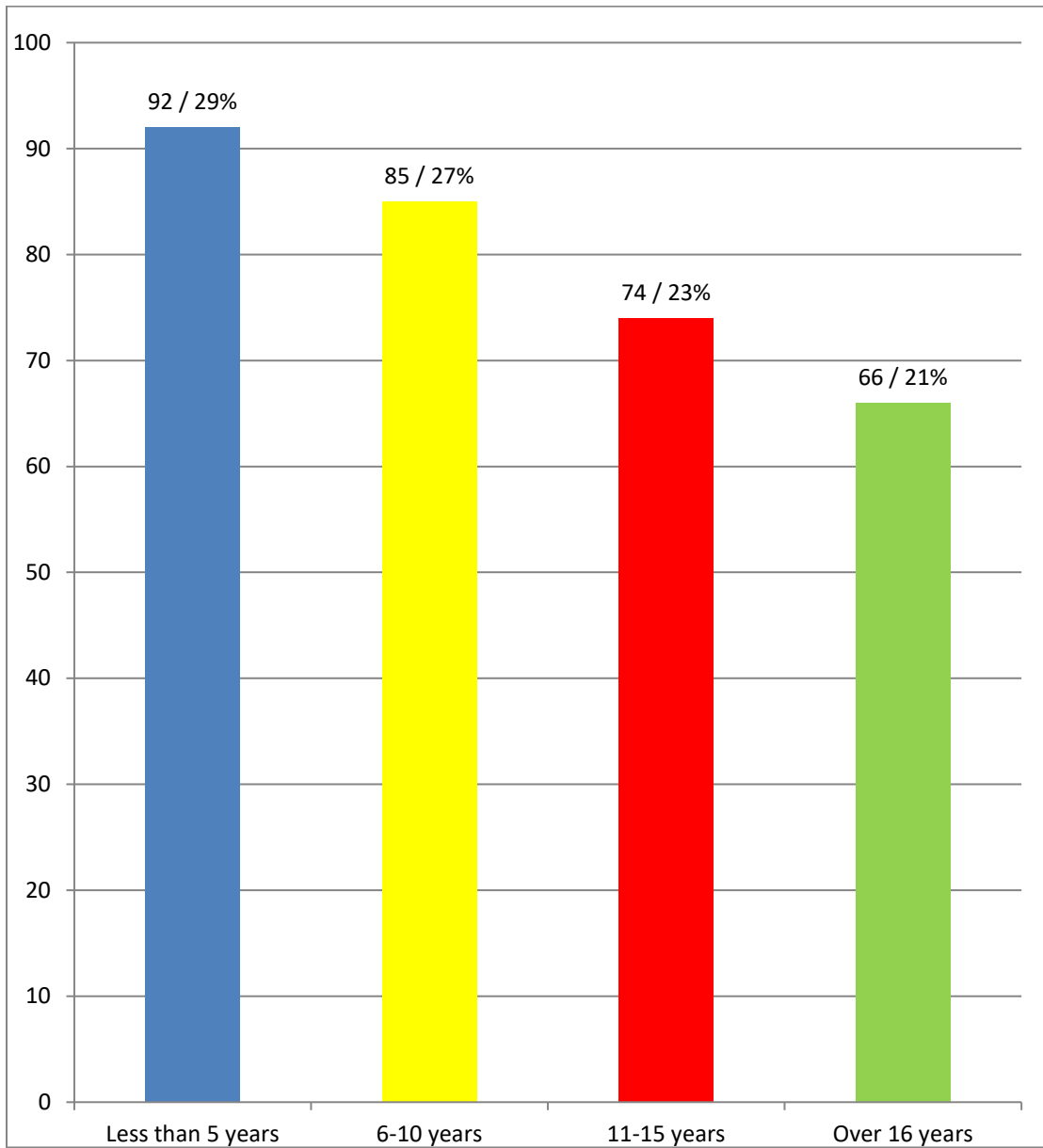
Results

The following are results of a ten question survey provided to all 343 employees of the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office. Surveys were posted for completion on the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office Intranet system training module (Power DMS). This survey was posted from May 23, 2013 to June 5, 2013.
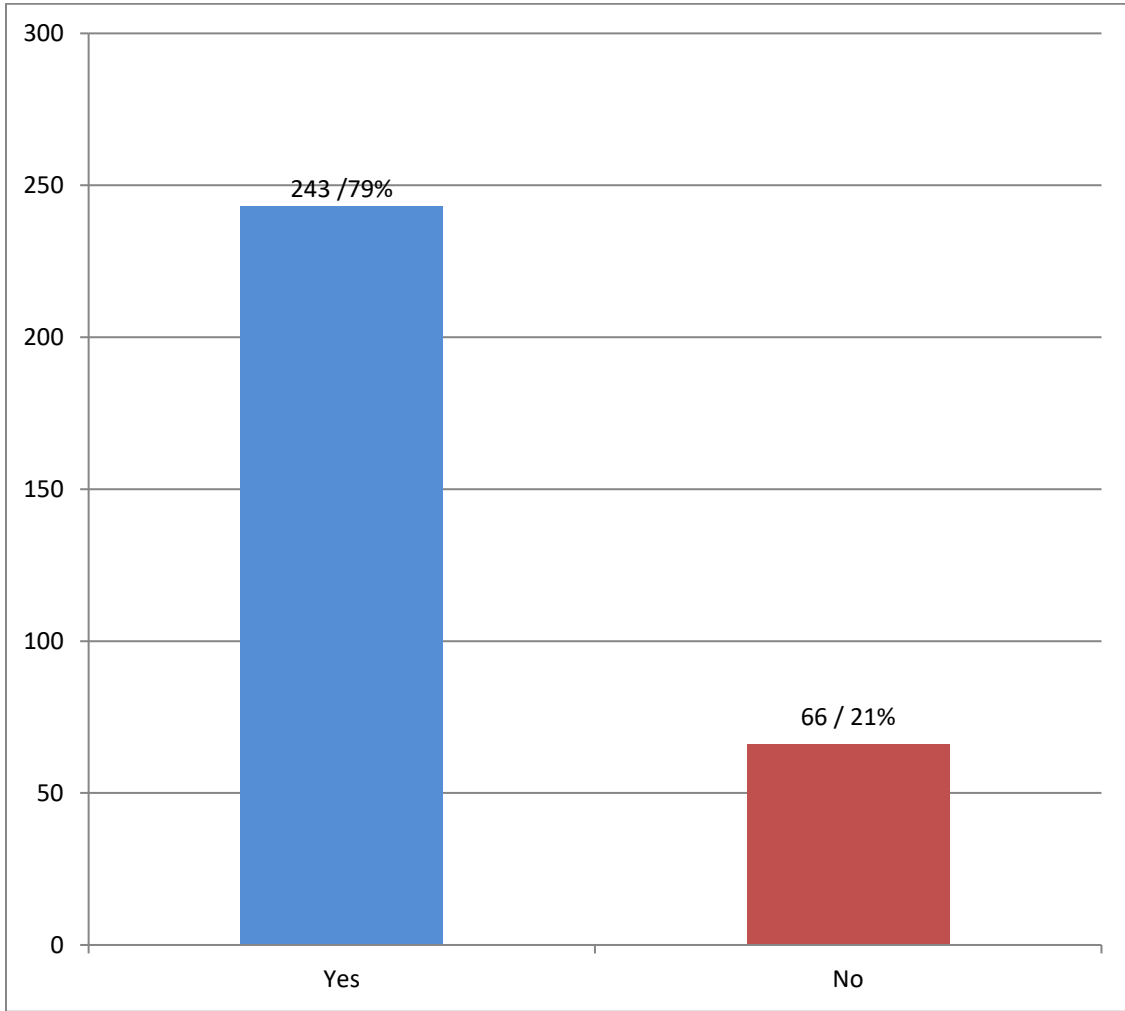
1. How long have you been employed with the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office.
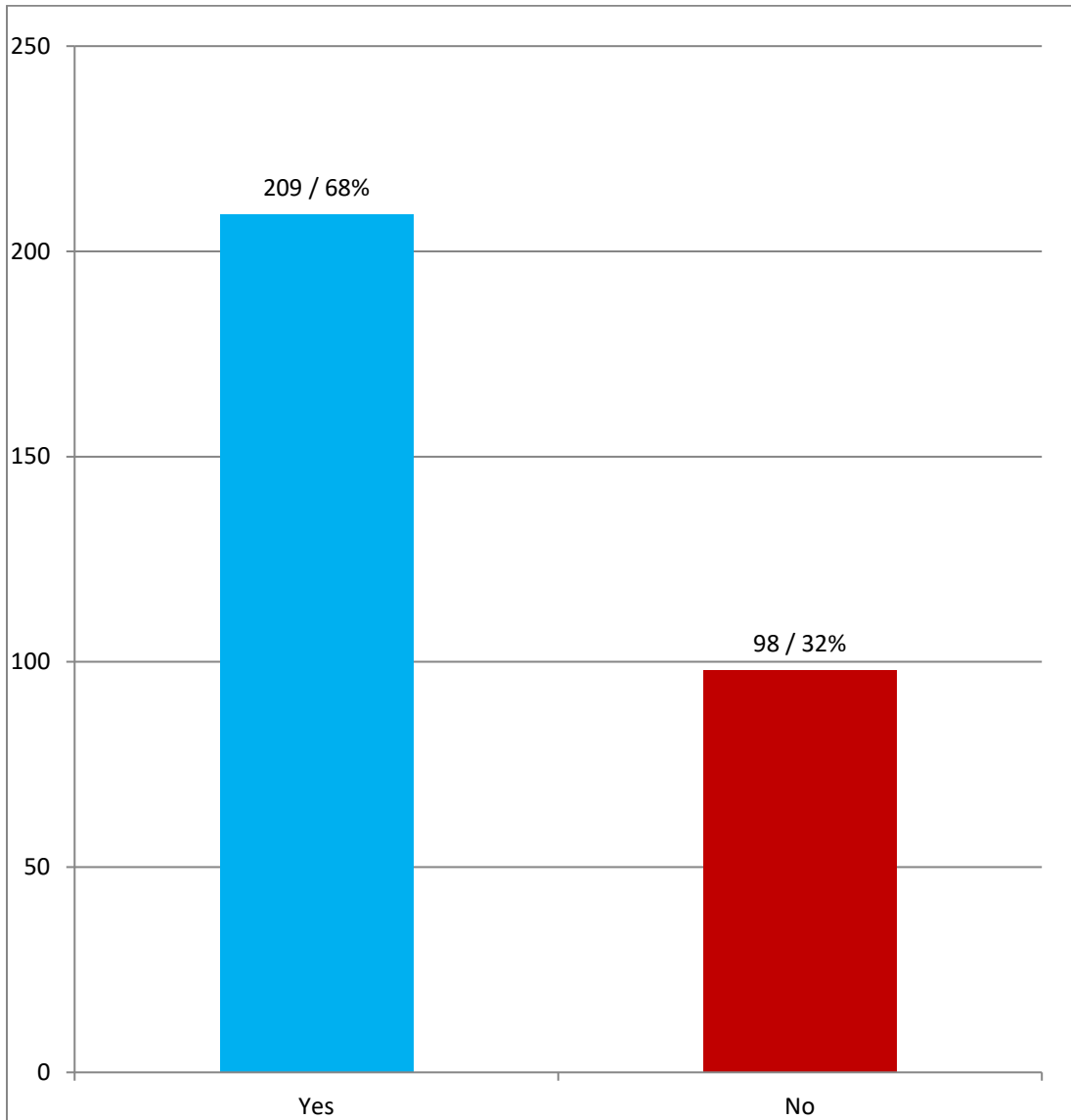
317 of 343 answers = 92% return

2. On past employee evaluations from the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office, do you feel you have received valuable feedback results from these evaluations?
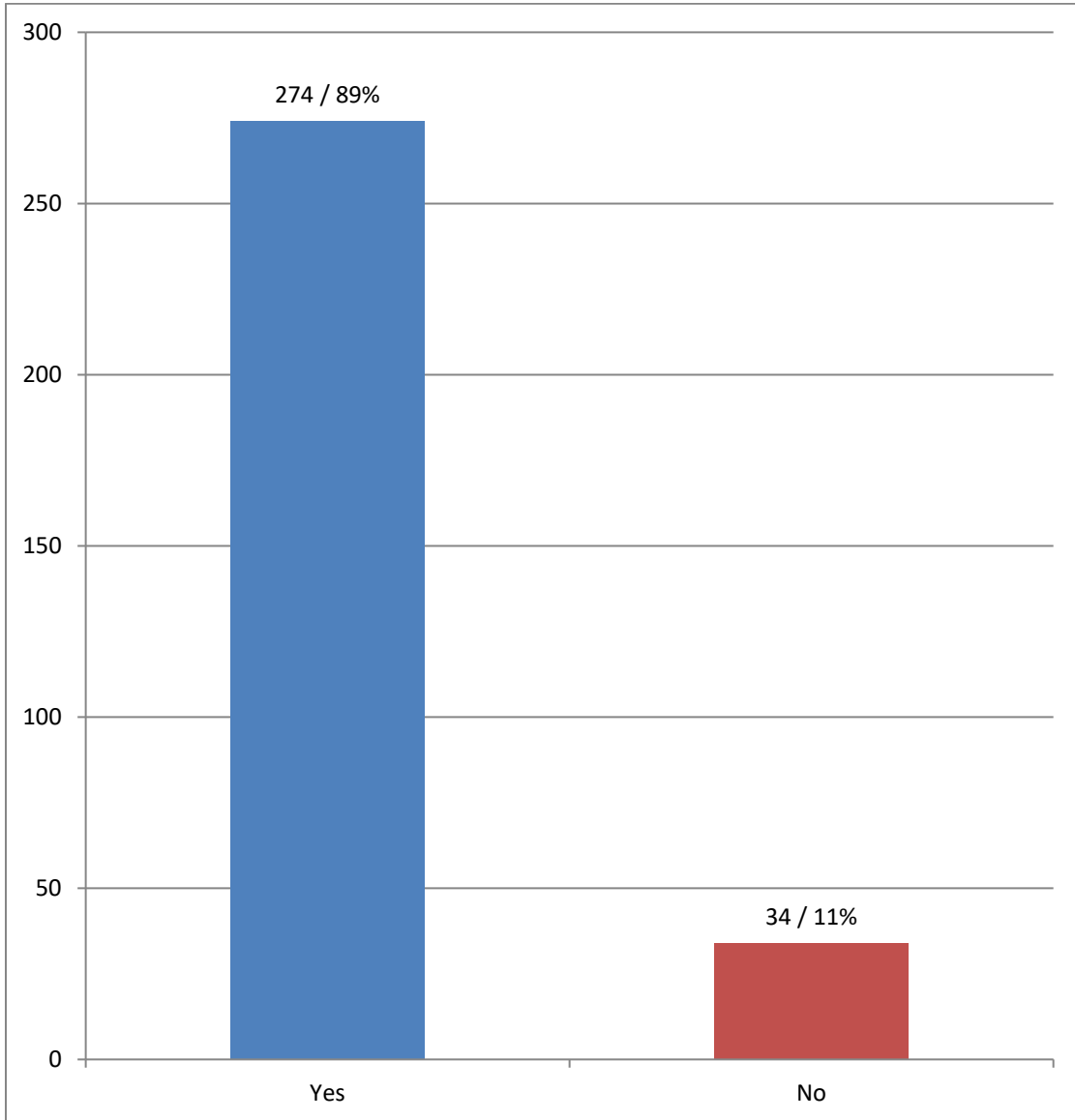
309 of 343 answers = 90% return

3. Do you feel the results of past evaluations have affected your career in a positive way?
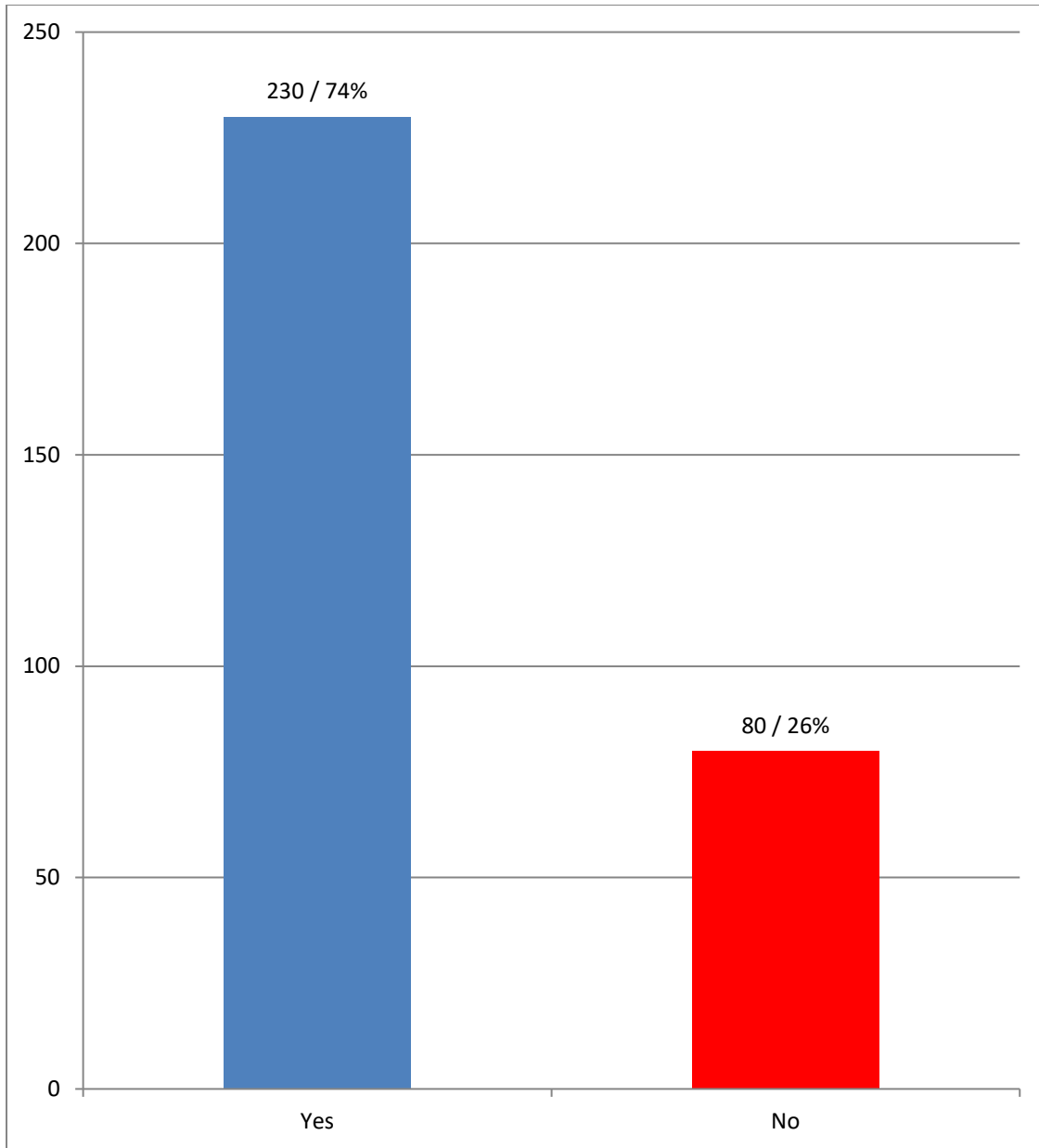
307 of 343 answers = 89 % return

4. During your last evaluation, do you feel you received an accurate rating from your supervisor?
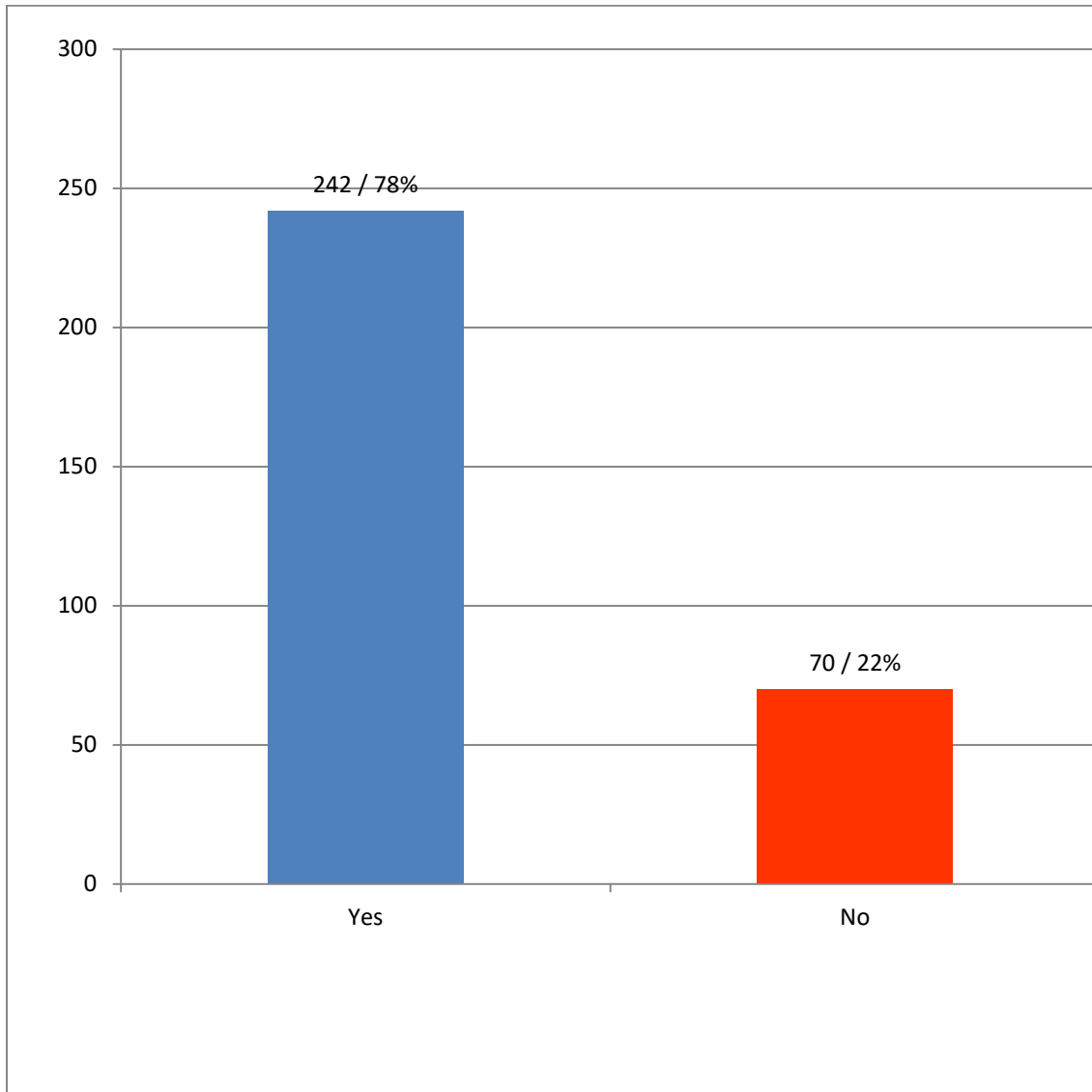
308 of 343 answers = 90% return

5. Would you be willing to participate in an individual (self) evaluation?
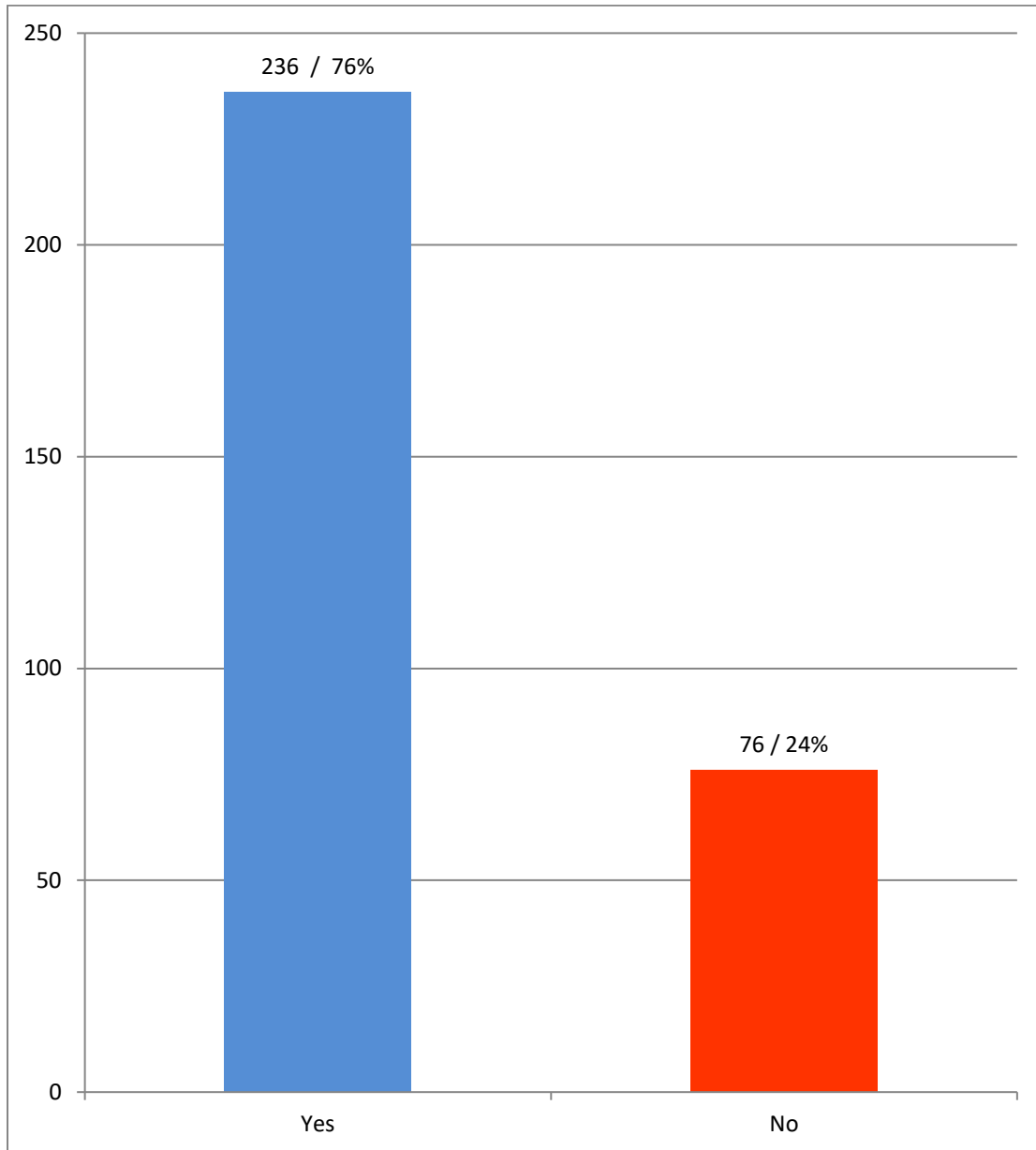
310 of 343 answers = 90% return

6. 360 Degree Evaluations use direct feedback from subordinates, supervisors and peers, would you be willing to participate in such an evaluation?
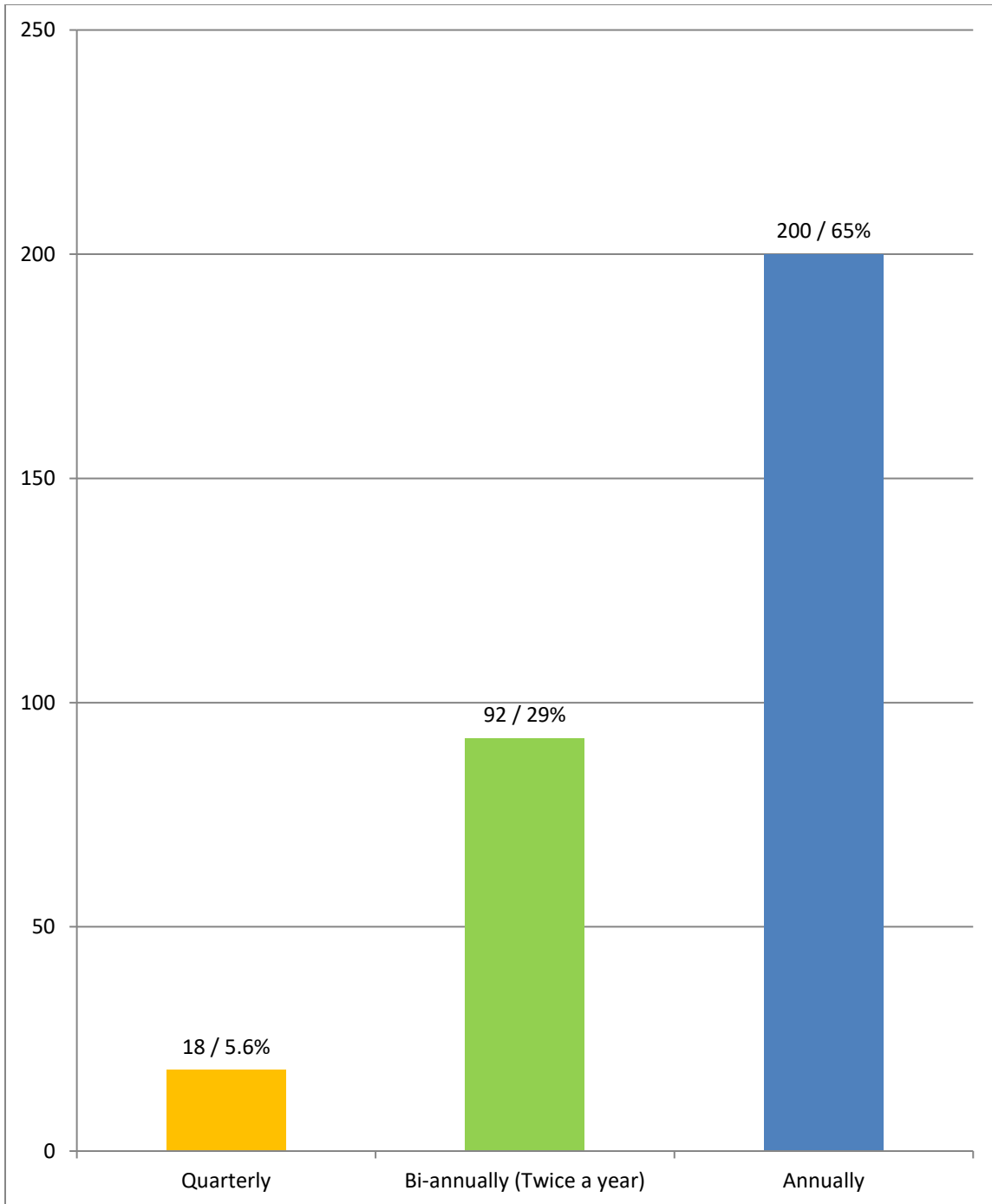
312 of 343 answers = 91% return

7. Would you like to see pay raises attached to the results or employee performance evaluations?

312 of 343 answers = 91% return

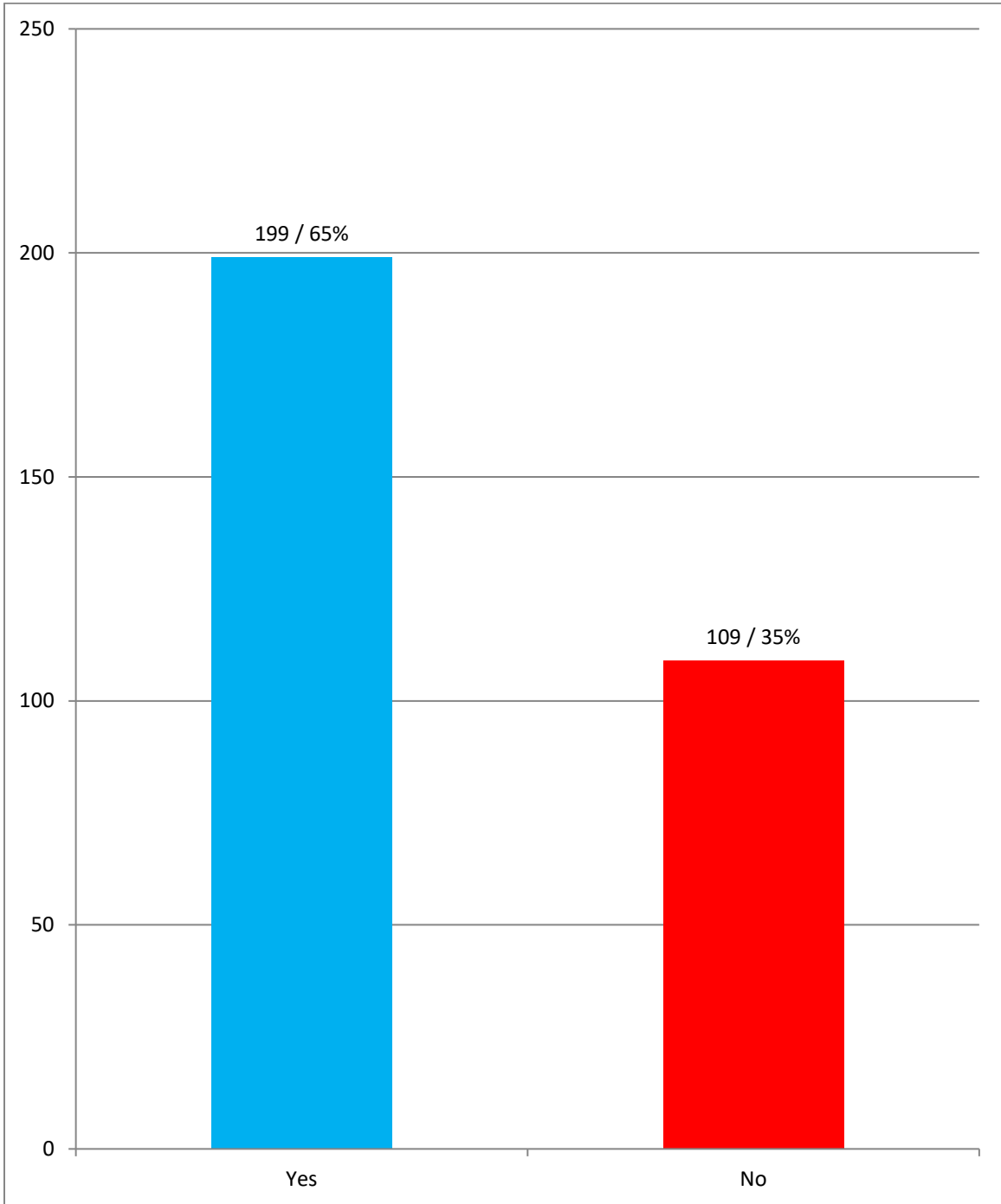8. How often would you prefer to be evaluated?

310 of 343 answers = 91% return

9. Do you believe your performance evaluations have led to improved performance?

308 of 343 answers = 90% return

10. What changes, if any, would you make to our current evaluation process?

All answers fall into one of the following comments.

214 of 343 answers = 62% return

- No changes needed
- Simplify evaluation, employee (meets standard or does not meet standard)
- Improve the evaluation process
- Evaluation completed at end of FTO training
- Complete division transfer evaluations
- Supervisor training for the evaluation process
- Unit specific evaluations
- Complete annual evaluations with periodic reviews
- Complete bi- annual evaluations
- Concentrate on core competencies
- Give five point scale to core competencies
- Use five core competencies verses three core competencies
- Evaluate quality of work as well as quantity of work performed
- Give purpose to evaluation process by incorporating raises or promotions
- Give no raise considerations to evaluations
- Complete supervision/ peer evaluations (360 degree)
- Maintain folder within evaluation program to document progress throughout evaluation period
- Performance evaluations serve little purpose without reward
- Eliminate favoritism
- Shorten overall evaluation, too long
- Begin improvement plan to assist employee in personal growth

Discussion

The results of this study and survey indicate several important facts about the employees of the Okaloosa County Sheriff's office. The majority workforce of the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office has less than fifteen years of experience. This indicates we are at a critical time of transition from the old school veterans to a younger more modern era of workers. Our employees feel they are being evaluated fairly and accurately by their supervision in regards to employee evaluations. The employees also put great meaning into the results and use them to grow personally and professionally.

OCSO employees are also open minded and willing to learn more about themselves and their peers. Our employees have so much confidence in their work product and abilities they are more than willing to have them scrutinized for the

possibility of increase pay benefits. This displays self- confidence and pride, both in your agency and personally.

The new OCSO Employee Performance Evaluation Program is a web based program provided by NeoGov. This system will allow for great flexibility and customization but also has a choice of core competency standards that are used in many diverse professions.

Several suggestions were made by employees in question 10 identifying ways the OCSO can improve employee evaluations. Most all of these suggestions were addressed as the OCSO Evaluation Development Committee sought out the best product. The following is a resolution to many of these suggestions:

- The program has moved away from job tacks to core competencies, which gives the rater the ability to accurately target the employee's talents.
- The program has expanded rating choices from three to five, this allows the rater more flexibility to better define the work of the employee.
- Each of these five rating has an assigned score to equate where the employee rates within each core competency.
- Evaluations will be completed annually with an added employee folder where progress reports can be documented throughout evaluation period for better overall effectiveness.
- Supervisors will be provided adequate and complete training of new program.
- In the future this new evaluation program could be used as a gauge for pay increases, incentives and promotion.
- Customization of the program by NeoGov allows for changes to be completed as required.
- Finally, this program will enable the rater and employee an avenue which they can create a success plan for the individual employee to archive their personal and professional goals.

The research in this study suggests several different types of evaluation plans that are being used within the Law Enforcement profession; however the reoccurring theme that appears in each type of evaluation is consistency, and accurate documentation of what the employee does or does not do over the entire 12 month evaluation period. This appears to be the best teller of facts which will give the clearest picture of the employee's work ethic and performance capabilities. The ultimate goals of an affective Employee Performance Evaluation are:

- Keep it simple
- Make it fair and accurate
- Constantly document employee actions, (wins and the losses)
- Eliminate any personal feelings, grade on performance

Recommendations

There were no big surprises found in the results of this study, its use and findings did reinforce what the employees' of the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office are seeking in an effective evaluation system.

I feel the agency has implemented a good product that will meet the requirements we wanted to achieve in the beginning of this study.

Captain Larry Ward has been in law enforcement for 23 years with the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office. He began his career in the Sheriff's Posse in 1989, was hired as a part-time deputy in 1990 and began work full-time in 1992. He was promoted to Corporal in 1997, where in addition to his supervision duties he also worked as a Field Training Officer. In 2001 he was promoted to Sergeant serving as shift supervisor until being promoted to Lieutenant in 2005. He has also served as team leader of the Crisis Negotiations Unit. He was promoted to Captain in July 2011 and currently serves as District Commander for District One in Okaloosa County Florida.

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Appendix A

The Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office has initiated a new Employee Performance Evaluation Program. Your input is very important so please take a few minutes to complete this survey.

1. How long have you been employed with the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office.
   - Less than 5 years
   - 6-10 years
   - 11-15 years
   - Over 16 years

2. On past employee evaluations from the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office, do you feel you have received valuable feedback results from these evaluations?
   Yes
   No

3. Do you feel the results of past evaluations have affected your career in a positive way?
   Yes
   No

4. During your last evaluation, do you feel you received an accurate rating from your supervisor?
   Yes
   No

5. Would you be willing to participate in an individual (self) evaluation?
   Yes
   No

6. 360 Degree Evaluations use direct feedback from subordinates, supervisors and peers, would you be willing to participate in such an evaluation?
   Yes
   No

7. Would you like to see pay raises attached to the results or employee performance evaluations?
   Yes
   No

8. How often would you prefer to be evaluated?
   - Quarterly
   - Bi- annually (twice a year)
   - Annually

9. Do you believe your performance evaluations have led to improved performance?
    Yes
    No

10. What changes, if any would you make to our current evaluation process?
    (Narrative answer)