

Tell me more about performance reviews



The Art of Performance Reviews

Tips for Before the Review

From concerns about giving honest feedback, to handling the extra paperwork, to dealing with challenging employees: performance reviews can stir up a range of emotions including anxiety, fear and dread. The good news is it doesn't have to be this way: with careful preparation and a focused, strategic approach, performance reviews can be a positive and constructive.

Review Realities

Before you begin the process, it's vital to recognize what's fact and fiction so you can encourage the process to flow as smoothly as possible.

Fiction: Managers and people leaders only need to provide feedback once a year.

Reality: This is simply the time you "formally" sit down to assess the employees' strengths, challenges and help determine the direction of their role. Feedback should, in fact, be provided throughout the year. Most employees actually *want* your ongoing input to gauge how they're doing. Help staff stay motivated by pouring on the praise for a job well done and by offering **constructive** insights when work falls short. After all, it's very hard to improve on a job if the employee has no idea what the expectations are.

Fiction: Performance reviews are the time to clear the air about issues that have been bugging you over the last year.

Reality: If you've worked on sharing feedback with workers throughout the year, there shouldn't be any "surprise punches" during the course of the meeting. Unloading issues that have been welling up over the past year may make workers feel under attack, causing defensiveness. This often results in a "fight or flight" response where the employee either argues the point or shuts down and stops listening.

Fiction: The review is your chance to talk.

Reality: A good review is always a focused *dialogue* where both manager and employee can discuss strengths, areas for improvement and set future goals for the employee and team. It should involve a structured conversation where you and the employee offer feedback and insights on past work—citing specific examples—and set individual and team goals for the future.

Observe and assess. You may be so busy with your own daily work that taking the time to view, review and adequately assess an employee's performance may not seem like a pressing issue—especially if that worker is doing well. But this is precisely the kind of knowledge that keeps teams working at an optimal level. It will help you provide specific examples to employees so they have a better understanding of what they're excelling at and areas where improvements are possible.

Give time to prepare. Let the employee know approximately a week to 10 days in advance about the performance review. If workers need to fill out any paperwork or a questionnaire, it's also the time to provide them with it. If it's the employee's first appraisal, or if the process has changed, clearly outline what he or she can expect in terms of:

- What will be discussed
- The length of the meeting
- What the employee is expected to do to prepare for the meeting



Keeping your ear to the ground not only helps you stay connected to workers but also allows you to handle any concerns that arise before they become major issues.

These tips will help me support my staff



Peak Performance Reviews: Tips for Managers and People Leaders

During the Meeting

Depending on the personalities, relationships and issues involved, the performance review may generate some anxiety for both the employee and manager, even if the feedback is overwhelmingly positive. As the reviewer, you can have a huge impact on keeping the meeting relaxed and productive by:

Outlining expectations both before the meeting and again when you sit down for the formal appraisal. Opening the discussion with a very direct summary of what will take place puts the employee at ease and establishes the order of the discussion. For example: "What I'd like us to do today is go over your responsibilities, review your achievements over the last xx months, discuss your strengths and together, outline areas where there's room for improvement." Keeping things professional and structured ensures the meeting stays focused and productive.

Sharing your vision—for the individual, the department and how it feeds in to the organization. Go over your expectations for the position and help the employee recognize the important role he or she plays within this vision.

Discussing strengths and offering up praise. Feeling appreciated can have an incredibly positive impact on the employee's efforts and loyalty towards your team and organization. Don't be shy about giving praise when it's due and, even in cases where there may be some tension, be sure to reinforce what the worker is doing *right*. Providing *specific* examples shows the employee you've noticed their efforts and gives deeper insight into how he or she is positively contributing to the organization.

Addressing areas for improvement constructively. This is usually the point in the meeting that causes the most stress for everyone involved. Put a positive spin on weaknesses or shortcomings by examining them as "areas for development." This keeps the atmosphere optimistic and focused on *improving* outcomes. If a specific incident or behaviour is causing concern, confirm the information with the employee to ensure there is no confusion or misunderstanding about what took place.

Again, it's vital to keep feedback on this very *specific* and to cite examples where steps could have been taken or handled differently. Vague, emotional negative feedback is not only hard for employees to decipher, but can also lead to frustration and job apathy.

Keeping unspoken cues positive. You might be verbally saying you're open to new ideas, but if you're arms are folded and legs are crossed, your body language is probably sending a very different message. Show you're *actively listening* by sitting forward in your chair, making eye contact and nodding when you agree with what's being said. Avoid pen tapping (which may be read as impatience) and any other distracting habits (foot tapping, doodling, etc.) so that you can give the employee your undivided attention.

Discussing performance goals. Ask employees to bring three to six of their own performance goals—both short and long-term—to the meeting for discussion. Review these goals together and decide whether revisions are needed. Goals that are SMART—specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely—empower and motivate workers in a way that undefined, overly-lofty goals cannot.

Reviewing next steps and thanking the employee for his or her time.

Preconceived ideas about performance reviews are challenging roadblocks to overcome. But by proactively addressing concerns, offering up ongoing feedback throughout the year and staying focused on SMART goals, you can foster a meaningful, constructive process. One that encourages honest reflection, deals with issues in a respectful, open way and creates a successful path for your employees, team and organization.

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Please call your EAP or consult with a professional for further guidance.

Post Performance Review

Once the performance review period is complete be sure to:

Put your words into action. If you've promised to look into further training for an employee, or to make other changes within your work group, it's time to put these steps into place. After all, actions not only speak louder than words, they also demonstrate your support of your team.

Touch base informally daily, weekly or monthly (whatever your schedule allows) to ensure employees are working towards their goals and to provide any insight or support needed to achieve them. Keeping your ear to the ground not only helps you stay connected to workers but also allows you to handle any concerns that arise *before* they become major issues.

If you have any questions about this topic, or if you wish to discuss a personal situation you may be experiencing, we invite you to contact your EAP. All contact between you and your EAP is completely confidential.

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