

Volume	4	Managing a Company
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Key Word Tags	Continual Feedback	

PERFORMANCE REVIEWS COMMENTS

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Quick Summary: Make performance reviews a continuous, thoughtful process for everyone's benefit.

Abstract:

To be both fair and effective, performance review preparation needs to be far more thoughtful than simply filling in the blanks on a standard form. In addition to the formal process that occurs annually as dictated by many corporate policies, employee feedback should be occurring on an almost continuous basis. Given the proper approach, the entire performance review process can become a continuous, meaningful process with visible rewards for all those involved.

Effective performance reviews need to consist of more than simply filling out a standard form that can be downloaded from the Internet or, more probably, has been provided by the H/R department. The following is a non-prioritized list of concepts that should be considered to make the most out of this important task.

1. Once a year is not enough, many organizations require annualized, formalized performance reviews that follow prescribed guidelines that become part of an employee's permanent record. This practice is important and should certainly be considered part of the review process, but only part of it. Employee performance should be constantly monitored with feedback, both positive and negative, occurring as soon as possible from the observation as possible. At a minimum, short, informal monthly reviews should be held. Five, ten or perhaps fifteen minutes is all that it should take unless there is a significant issue that needs to be addressed.
2. We naturally recall recent events with much more detail than past ones. It is, therefore, important to track items that should be discussed during the periodic performance reviews. An elaborate system is unnecessary; only a memory-jogging summary is necessary. A note placed in an employee's file or a simple, per employee electronic record could be used to help remind the manager of past events.
3. To avoid overall generalizations, provide specific feedback on sighting names, dates, places, and events. Not only will specific feedback help establish dialogue, but it will also help to ensure that the issue is placed in proper perspective. For example, is the issue an isolated occurrence or is it a pattern of positive or negative behavior? Did it have major or minor consequences or none at all?

4. Virtually all of us do things for a reason. Be sure to understand the root cause or motivation behind the issues being addressed. An excellent starting point is to assume that any negative issue was the result of poor communication with the employee.
5. The manager is at fault if there are any negative surprises during a performance review. A performance review should be nothing more than a review of past activities and results along with constructive plans for the future. Employee surprises mean that a manager has not been doing their job of keeping the employee informed of any issues that have occurred.
6. Unlike the statement made by financial institutions, past employee performance IS indicative of future results unless changes are made. Those changes can vary in scope, time, and involvement but are seldom made during the review itself. Invariably, they require a specific action plan, with metrics and milestones, and the accompanying feedback.
7. During a review, neither the employee nor the manager should broadcast to the other. Instead, both parties should speak and listen equally. Both parties need to test each other for understanding constantly. It is natural for one to begin thinking about their response before the other person has finished talking. Divide issues into “bite-size” communication pieces and allow for comments to sink in.
8. Reviews, by their very nature, are opinions. Be willing to cede points of contention and move on. Remember the saying, “If two people always agree, one is redundant”. Some level of disagreement is healthy and often is due to a different perspective or interpretation of facts.
9. As described in the article in this series “*Performance Review Contents*”, an effective performance review requires both the employee and the manager to assess the employee’s performance independently. Once completed, both parties should review the other’s assessment and focus on the differences.
10. A numeric scoring method should be used to ensure consistency in evaluations. One such method is described in the “*Performance Review Contents*” article referenced above. Avoid using an overall summary numeric rating. Using one simple number such as 3.2 or 2.7 to evaluate a person is dehumanizing. Some companies aggravate this situation by using the simple composite number to determine salary increases. Managers, afraid of “penalizing” an employee, may inflate their scores to avoid this situation. Consider, for example, an employee who is relatively new to a job and shows great promise but has not yet acquired all of the skills to deserve a higher rating. Should that individual’s salary increase be hindered accordingly?
11. Except for a severe office fire, the imminent appearance of a tornado, or global thermal nuclear war, do not allow anyone or anything to interrupt a performance review session. Also, be sure to allot ample time so neither party has to look at their watches for fear of being late for another event. All interruptions or distractions send a message to the employee that this activity is not important enough to you for you to provide your undivided attention. Even if you offer an apology and the employee responds with “I understand”, what they are really saying is that they understand that other activities are more important than they are.

12. Accept people as they are. Different individuals measure success in different ways. Do not try to change them. A quotation, with many variations, describes four kinds of people. The version from Mary Kay Ash is listed below:

There are four kinds of people:

1. those who make things happen.
2. those who watch things happen.
3. those who wonder what happened.
4. those who don't know that anything happened.

Today's business culture places a premium on the first category, but the reality is that individuals in all four categories are present everywhere. Not everyone can be the captain of the ship. There is a need for individuals at all levels, duties, and responsibilities. Respond to (not judge) them accordingly. This does not mean that a manager must accept substandard work from an employee. Their performance must be judged based on an expected standard for the position.

13. Develop a rank order of all employees in a group or department. Before actually listing the employees, develop definitive criteria and apply it evenly. Keep the list private, for your use only. When developing performance reviews, carefully consider each person's rank order and your review.

14. Get in the habit of asking yourself, "How is he or she doing?" in virtually every employee encounter. After objectively answering that question, think of what you can do to help the person improve or thank them for their efforts.

15. Visibly show gratitude. Don't just think it, show it.

Although the items listed above may seem to be common sense and obvious, it may be wise to review the list before preparing reviews for each person to help avoid any conscious or unconscious biases you may have. For the manager, a review may be "just another task", but it is much more important and personal for the employee being reviewed. Put yourself in their shoes before you simply "turn the crank" and fill out the required form.