



## Unit 3

# Effective Performance Reviews

### Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Recognize the importance of having a performance review process for employees.
- ✓ Understand how to work with employees to set performance standards and goals.
- ✓ Develop skills in observing, giving feedback, listening, and asking questions.
- ✓ Identify an effective interview process and have the opportunity to practice the process in a supportive atmosphere.
- ✓ Make the performance review legally defensible.

## Unit 3

# Effective Performance Reviews

## Performance Appraisals Done Well

When did you have your last performance appraisal? Do you recall whether you took some time to prepare your own comments and feedback for your boss? How did it feel to get it all finished up?

*In this session, we'll review the value of performance appraisals, how they fit into the organization, and what they mean to different stakeholders.*

### What are Performance Appraisals?

The idea of performance appraisals is not new at all, but our approach has to be both interesting and motivating in order to get people to do them, and to do them well. There are managers, supervisors, and front-line employees who grumble as the time for appraisals approaches, and who procrastinate about doing them in order to avoid what many of them perceive as additional work or tedious meetings.

Instead, we advocate that you use the appraisal as a time to share highlights of the evaluation period (usually six or 12 months) and to adjust any goals as needed, while working toward the future. Avoid the trap of doing appraisals at the last minute because you have to, and prepare for them throughout the appraisal period so that you don't have to spend hours at a time writing to prepare for a short meeting. This practice will also help you to remember what happened throughout the appraisal period, so that you do not mistakenly mention things from a previous period, or fall into remembering just what has happened immediately before the appraisal takes place.

### Building Trust

Trust is another important component of the performance appraisal: the more trust there is between employees and the organization, trust between employees and their supervisors, the more trust there will be in the appraisal process.

What is trust? Trust is the conviction held by the employee that you genuinely want to help them.

What develops trust between employees and supervisors/managers? In general, trust is highest when these elements are present:

- Good working relationship
- Well-defined roles
- Specific feedback
- Honesty
- A low tolerance for political manipulation

## Errors We Make

We're all human! Whether it's a conversation you have with someone at work or at home, we can make mistakes. We also know that we like some people more than others, and have more in common with certain people.

*In this session*, you'll explore some errors that are commonly discussed within the field of human resources, and that you want to avoid in your own PA's.

### Three Slippery Areas

There are more ways that we can have a negative impact on evaluations, including our tendency to stereotype. Within organizational behavior, the most typical of these areas are:

#### Leniency or Stringency

This is a tendency to rate candidates too harshly (so that none of them will ever be able to meet your demanding criteria) or being too easy on them (so that all of them pass with flying colors). Think of how you rate employees who belong to a poorly performing team: do they all rate poorly by association? Also, sometimes we compare employees to ourselves and say things like, "Gee, when I was doing this job I did it a whole lot better than you do."

#### Halo/Horn Effect

This tendency has been researched extensively. This is a tendency to rate someone high on all factors (the halo) or low (the horns) because of a global impression you are hanging onto. Likewise, compatibility is the tendency to rate people who are like us higher than their performance indicates. We also tend to rate people who do well in conversation, who are attractive, or well educated, or attended the same school we did, as higher than their performance justifies. Sometimes we also do this when we give a lot of weight to someone's credentials, even though they may not have done anything for us yet.

#### Error of Central Tendency

This is our tendency to give average marks to most candidates. Sometimes the rater works on a "no news in good news" basis, and if there have been no complaints filed, they will evaluate accordingly. This also occurs where there are no clearly defined performance standards and we are not certain what would define outstanding performance. Other times, raters are concerned about consequences for giving employees high or low ratings: we sometimes have to explain these ratings to HR or a VP, so we avoid it.

#### **What might be some solutions for the error of central tendency stereotype?**

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## Types of Performance Reviews

Options! So many options! Some of us have had performance reviews that were 30 seconds long and delivered with a paycheck, while others have had two hour meetings that were rich with insight and feedback as well as engaging conversation.

*In this session, you'll consider the best type of performance review for your organization.*

### Choosing What Works

There are several types of performance appraisal, and you'll need to work with the one that best fits your organization. Depending on how things are, you might organize the consistent formal appraisal three years in a row, and then have something different, such as a 360 degree review every fourth year. We'll discuss the different review types here.

#### Formal, Annual, or Semi-Annual Review

Our commitment to our people has to be that we will complete an annual review at minimum. Many companies also do a formal mid-year review, which helps to verify that everyone is on track, allows for an easy process to reflect changing priorities, and gives the supervisor and employee a clear picture of where everything is at. This is a common type of performance review, usually supported by some kind of form where both parties sign off that the information has been shared and understood (even though the employee may not agree with it).

A formal review can also take place after professional development training or a course has been completed, and could include on the job testing.

#### Probationary Review

When a new employee is hired, there is often a three- or six-month probationary period. The probationary period should be completed with a formal review so that the employee understands how they are doing, what shortcomings or challenges they are exhibiting, and confirms the supervisor's expectations. This review is also a key part of your defensibility strategy, since it allows the supervisor to document that the employee has completed orientation and is producing satisfactory work, or that there are deficiencies present (which will be supported with additional proof).

## Informal Review

This is a meeting that takes place in between the formal reviews. Depending on your work you may meet with employees monthly or even weekly during intense periods. An informal review can include a meeting, recognition for something well done, or a quick memo or e-mail with feedback. Even though it is informal, it should always be documented briefly by the supervisor. This kind of ongoing review also means that the employee is not going to be surprised nor put off by the formal performance review process: they already know where they stand.

## 360 Degree Performance Review

This is a very comprehensive review, and is used in many circumstances. With increasing use of remote or virtual teams, supervisors may not be as familiar with an employee's work as they were when everyone was located close together. Instead of gathering feedback from one manager, the feedback is gained from a group who are more like a committee than a single reviewer.

The 360 degree performance review provides a more comprehensive view of employee performance, and increases the credibility of the appraisal since it involves people who are very aware of the individual being rated. It enhances employee development by soliciting feedback from peers, customers, subordinates, and also importantly includes a self-assessment. One goal of this process is to identify any gaps between a self-appraisal and the perceptions of others. The self-appraisal component is very positive for people who tend to rate themselves very harshly, since it provides them with perceptions that other people hold.

It should be noted that the process is not always successful. A culture of fairness and constructive feedback must be established and supported for the 360 degree performance review process to be effective. If there are a lot of staff who are unhappy in their jobs or there is low morale within the organization, some staff can become clear targets of their peers or subordinates and the process is ruined.

All employees must be assured that results are kept confidential. Responses should be gathered by the human resources department to maintain confidentiality, both to protect the identity of participants and to encourage their honest feedback, and to avoid having the employee see just by whom, and how, they have been individually rated. To think of the 360 process in a visual form, consider a full circle of people that the individual being rated has business interactions with on a regular basis:



## Winning Performance Appraisals

There are lots of reasons that people do not enjoy the performance appraisal process. If you ask your colleagues they may give you a couple of very popular replies, such as:

- Criteria to measure is often vague or ambiguous
- Criteria are not specifically related to the job
- Feels like a test to write out forms rather than conduct an honest, meaningful performance appraisal

**What can you do to ensure the process is professionally and meaningfully conducted?**

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## The Performance Management Process

The performance management process is not a single annual event, but a process that cycles around each year. Information is gathered by employees and their supervisors so that they both remember highlights of the review period.

*In this session,* you'll read about the four steps of the process, which will be further explained throughout the remainder of this course.

### The Four Steps

There are four steps in the performance management process:



The spectrum moves from least structured on the left to most structured on the right.

Even before setting goals with employees, those very early days of an employee's employment with an organization are setting the stage for performance management. Defining your expectations of the new employee sets the stage for goal setting and future discussions.

### Least Structured: Goal Setting

Goal setting should take place throughout the organization, and in stages, from the top down:



### Most Structured: Performance Reviews

The performance review is the most structured element of the performance management process and covers a longer period of time. Feedback skills are tremendously important, and they are invaluable throughout the entire process.

The perfect performance review form has not yet been invented. Most organizations that have performance appraisal systems in place are constantly modifying their form, with an eye to improving it, and keeping it as simple as possible for people to work with. In some cases, this means a couple of pages, and in organizations that are heavily project driven, it can mean 20 pages and more.

There should be room on your form for looking at the past, as a review of the appraisal period, certainly, but there should also be time and space devoted to the future.

## Sample Performance Appraisal Forms

Use the space below to record your thoughts on each form.

Sample Number	Liked	Didn't Like
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		

# Goals with SPIRIT

There are many methods for writing goals, and the SPIRIT acronym is one of our favorites. What's important is to set goals, write them down so that you can remind yourself what is important, and to be flexible so that you can revise them as needed.

*In this session, you'll flex your goal setting muscle by looking at the SPIRIT goal model and applying it to your career and life goals.*

## Identifying Dreams and Setting Goals

Establishing clear goals, in writing, is the responsibility of managers and their superiors, and of managers and their staff. For work-oriented goals, this should occur at least annually, and be reviewed at least every six months. They must be aligned with the company's mission and strategic plan.

Everyone should also have personal goals, and they can follow the same strategy that we will outline here. The next ingredient to achieving our goals is attitude. It is our attitude that directs us to pursue, achieve, and then live our goals. The final key in reaching our goals has to do with the way that we write them down (or draw them if you prefer a visual component).

### Identifying Your Dreams

Dreams may not factor much into goals set by our managers, but the truth is that we all have dreams, and these are the things that drive our personal goals. It's important that managers and supervisors set their own goals, and it is equally important that they consider the entire person that works for them when setting goals with, and for, their direct reports. Let's start with your dream. Consider the things that are important to you in terms of where you may want to set some goals. Some ideas:

- Career (responsibilities or a specific position, promotions, lateral moves to gain experience... or maybe even your own business)
- Income
- Relationships (marriage, children, family, friends)
- Things to learn
- Hobbies to take up
- Volunteer activities or charities to support
- Recreational activities
- Home, vehicles, or other possessions to purchase
- Places to travel to
- Spiritual
- Health (examples: lose 20 pounds, exercise more frequently)
- Educational
- Behaviors and habits to develop or change

These areas should tie in with your personal vision of your future. If not, evaluate that vision. Does it really reflect who you

are?

Since we are focused on the performance appraisal process, let's look at some dreams when it comes to work. Specific dreams might include:

- Organize my cubicle, again, and for the last time.
- Bring my lunch to work four out of five days per week.
- Complete the manager's series of workshops so I am ready for that promotion to director when Robin retires in four years.
- Attend the industry conference every year for the next ten years.

Now, clearly some of these are achievable in the short term while others will take longer. Some will obviously take more work than others, but they won't change from their dream state unless we sit down and set some concrete goals about how to achieve what we want. Bigger goals need to be broken into smaller goals and then we can work on them each week.

Added to my dreams up above, my supervisor wants me to include the following goals in my performance appraisal this year:

- Complete courses 1, 2, and 3 of the manager's series
- Meet with each of my 20 direct reports every month in an informal one-on-one meeting
- Increase the productivity of my team from 72% to 85% in the next 12 months

## Setting Goals with SPIRIT

Each objective should be broken down into several small, achievable goals that will help you get where you want to go. Good goals should have SPIRIT!

### Specific

Be specific about what you want or don't want to achieve. (Using what you want is best, though not always possible.) The result should be tangible and measurable. "Hold regular meetings" is pretty ambiguous; "Hold 20 meetings per month (one per person) with my direct reports" is specific.

### Prizes

Reward yourself at different points in the goal, particularly if it's long-term. If your goal is to complete three courses, for example, you might treat yourself at the end of each course. If the courses are long, then do something at the end of a group of modules or lessons.

### Individual

The goal must be something that you want to do. If your boss wants you to increase productivity and you're not interested, you're not going to want to work towards the goal. Find something about the goal to anchor yourself. Look how excited the team will be, what the increased profits to the company will be, or the recognition for yourself. Then, link it to your own motivation to get it done.

### Review

Review your progress periodically. Does the goal continue to make sense? Are you stuck? Do you need to adjust certain parts of it? Do you need help?

**Inspiring**

Frame the goal positively. Make it fun to accomplish. You could make a poster of the end result, frame it, and post it on the wall. Our minds respond much better to excited, positive language than to negative language.

**Time-Bound**

Give yourself a deadline for achieving the goal. Even better, split the goal into small parts and give yourself a deadline for each item so you can check them off in turn.

**Use the space below to sketch out a goal with SPIRIT.**

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My Dreams and Goals

**In the large space, draw one or two life dreams. In the top small space, list a few objectives to support your dreams. Then, use the bottom small space to list some specific goals for the objective that you want to achieve next.**

<b>Dreams</b>	<b>Objectives</b>
	<b>Specific goals (SPIRIT)</b>



## Putting it All Together

**How can your dreams and goals guide your day-to-day planning and prioritizing?**

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## The Performance Management Cycle

Like so many other things about work, performance management works in cycles, usually a year at a time. This allows for planning, implementation, and follow through that can be tracked and measured.

*In this session, we'll see how the cycle looks visually, and then over the next several sessions, see the impact it has on the performance appraisal.*

## The Four Phases

Here's what the performance management cycle looks like:



## The Basis for Review

Some companies still struggle with creating job descriptions, and there are many reasons for this. For some, not having job descriptions gives them a sense of greater flexibility and being able to change an employee's duties as needed. For other companies, they simply have not got around to it yet. Unfortunately, this can lead to an employee being unsure of what's important, how and what will be measured, and they can also range from being off track on something they think is important but does not fit with the company picture, or they may do essentially nothing in the fear that they could do the wrong thing. The job description is the basis for your performance appraisal.

Here is something else to think about: a job description is a legal document, which means that it can protect the company as well as the employee. It is often the first piece of evidence that judges and arbitrators, or human rights investigators, ask for when legal challenges arise.

Creating a job description, with the specifications for the essential duties of the job clearly defined, is an essential step in the performance appraisal process.

## Performance Standards

We set goals to measure activities that have many variables. We use standards to measure those things that happen over and over again. Standards are generally the benchmark we use to measure how well we are doing in routine activities like making beds, answering the telephone, or preparing error-free invoices.

Employees must know the standards that have been developed for their position so that they know what they must do to meet the standards, and what it looks like to exceed. Standards are always developed for the position, not for the person who is in that position.

## Key Results Areas (KRA's)

KRA's are the important responsibilities of a position, and they get expressed in terms of observable behaviors. We often put a lot of effort into describing a job in terms of attitude and motivation, but those attributes are not really measurable. Instead, we can measure observable behavior.

As an example, perhaps "Initiative" is a competence or performance dimension you want to see, but you'll need to add the observable behaviors that define initiative. How about:

- Undertakes projects without being asked
- Writes own letters
- Makes suggestions for improved ways of doing things

If you get stuck and have difficulty defining the behaviors you want to measure, try this. Think of a person you feel exemplifies the behavior you want (for example, initiative) and define what he or she does that makes you think that way.

## Behaviorally Anchored Rating Scales (BARS)

To formally develop behaviorally-anchored rating scales, organizations must first invest the time (and money) to gather critical incidents of job behavior, and then do statistical analysis to develop sophisticated rating scales. Instead of taking this route, which most companies are unready and unwilling to do, there is an alternate solution.

Determine the categories for which you want to measure employee performance, usually no more than seven competencies. You may already have them listed on your performance appraisal. If you do, use them.

Identify examples of typical job behavior you'd expect to see employees perform to earn a low, medium, or high (or unsatisfactory, satisfactory, outstanding) rating on each category. You could even involve employees in identifying typical job behaviors that they thought merited these ratings.

Use this rating scale, anchored in behavior, to guide employees away from inappropriate behavior and toward the specific type of performance you want.

## A Note about Orientation Programs

The appraisal process starts when the employee and the supervisor reach a mutual understanding of what needs to be accomplished on the job. If expectations are not clearly stated and presented in measurable terms, performance will be difficult to evaluate.

# Setting Standards

Do you wear a certain brand of running shoes? Tie your shoes in a certain way? When we do things consistently, they become standards in our own lives. Workplaces need standards too, as a reference point that tells us when we are doing something correctly.

*In this session, we'll engage your thinking about the idea of standards, their usefulness, and how they apply directly.*

## Setting Standards

Performance standards define good and poor performance in key results areas. Standards should be clearly written so that they are easily understood and so that employees can reach them. Standards are also better accepted when the employee helps to set them. Even when the employer sets a standard, the employee can be consulted on how things will be done and to what level. Involving the employees in this way results in a higher degree of commitment than we can obtain by simply setting a standard the employee is expected to follow.

If your team has individuals who all perform separate tasks, the supervisor and employee can consult and set standards together. If there are multiple employees on a team, try assigning the task to the team or a small group of representatives. You might be impressed to find that employees will actually set a better (or higher) standard than you would have. People can really surprise us! Of course, as supervisor, you will have the final say on where the standard falls (in the event that the group is aiming too low).

You could consider setting standards in any of the following ways:

- The group leader (a supervisor, manager, or in the case of a multinational franchise, someone at head office) sets the standard
- Group members (the employees who do the work) set their own standards
- Group members and leaders negotiate the standards together

When we think about how people learn and what motivates them, we know that people probably work harder and are more productive when they can set their own standards. However, it's also true that if employees represent a company that has restaurants around the world, the company wants standards to be consistent wherever customers are. If you go into Restaurant A in Canada, you will get the same greeting, service, and hospitality when you visit the same chain in America, Australia, or England. That kind of business models leaves only a limited opportunity for employees to influence the standard that has been set, although their own behavior and attitude will affect their ability to meet the standard set.

While having your boss set standards for you may seem impossible in terms of engagement and meeting the standard, group leaders and supervisors need to establish an environment where individuals are respected for the work they do and where their contributions are acknowledged. In addition, an invitation to employees to discuss any issues they have with the standards is also helpful from a feedback perspective. After all, what works in one place may not actually be appropriate in another.

The third approach, where employees are involved in setting standards and they take responsibility for their achievements, is the best approach for a productive working environment. They should have a good understanding of their supervisor's expectations, including the needs of the company.

# Creating a Performance Development Plan

It's always easier to get where you are going if you have a plan to get there. This is why maps are so popular, whether you prefer the paper kind or you use the electronic and digital versions.

*In this session, we'll jump ahead to the fourth phase of the cycle, the performance development plan. We'll circle back to the third phase a little bit later.*

## Performance Development Plans

A performance development plan can link to succession planning and career planning for the organization and its staff. A performance development plan generally includes training or other methods of professional development (more formal education, for example) and should be linked to the performance appraisal document. A performance development plan can help the employee and supervisor to look further ahead than just one appraisal cycle.

## Coaching

This stage also includes coaching. Coaching is the approach recommended for supervisors and managers to work with their employees, and reinforces training or professional development that takes place. Coaching is different from the "telling" style of management, and uses guided conversations to encourage employees to make their own decisions, be responsible for their success in their careers, and to work with rather than against "the system." Like all management techniques, however, coaching is also flexible enough to have honest conversations with an employee and let them know when things are not going so well or need changing.

## Feedback and Communication

If you offer someone a piece of feedback (such as, "You look sharp today") and they say, "Thank you," then we consider they have politely accepted your feedback. When they say, "Oh, this thing I'm wearing is ten years old," you've got some work ahead of you.

*In this session, you'll gain some experience in feedback and communication that will help make your PA meetings go smoothly.*

## Feedback

Feedback is communication that is used as a basis for improvement. In the workplace, we most often refer to constructive feedback, which is always directed at the behavior rather than the person, and needs to be descriptive and specific so that the person can make the changes indicated. It's a very good practice to ask people if they want our feedback, or if they are ready for it. Sometimes people need to prepare themselves, or want to ask a question before you get started.

## Communication

We define communication as sharing messages. We can communicate in many ways: verbally, in writing, and even through

artistic means, like dance.

One of the challenges of communication is being understood. Our skill at expressing ourselves and our ability to listen vary depending on how much effort we apply, and can also be impacted by barriers such as:

- Noise
- Language
- Culture
- Disinterest
- Experience
- Education
- Emotion
- Vocabulary
- Mood

**Which barriers are most likely to be influencing a performance appraisal in your organization?**

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We tend to make a lot of assumptions about the people we are speaking with, and the tension that can sometimes surround the performance appraisal process adds additional interference. Supervisors assume they have interpreted their employee’s comments correctly, and they assume that they are correctly interpreting the information they have gathered during the PA process. They can also assume that others understand perfectly what they, as supervisors, are trying to say.

## Listening Skills

“You never listen when I am talking to you,” is a statement some of us hear frequently. Perhaps, instead of speaking *to* someone, we ought to be concentrating on listening and speaking *with* someone instead.

*In this session*, we’re offering you a chance to become a better listener, as you sharpen your listening skills and make the decision to listen well.

### Active Listening

The problem is that listening and hearing are not the same thing. Most of us were fortunate to be born with hearing, but

listening is a skill that must be learned and practiced in order to use it successfully. When you **hear** something, sound enters your eardrum, passes through your ear canal, and registers in your brain. **Listening** is what you do with that sound and how you interpret it.

Here are some tips for successful listening:

- Listen intentionally for people's names.
- Listen with interest.
- Try to get rid of your assumptions.
- Listen for what isn't said.

**Listening** is hard work. When other people are listening to us, they have the same difficulties we do in trying to focus on a message. Our minds wander, noises or thoughts distract us, and we can be thinking about what to do next.

**Active listening** means that we try to understand things from the speaker's point of view. It includes letting the speaker know that we are listening and that we have understood what was said. This is not the same as **hearing**, which is a physical process, where sound enters the eardrum and messages are passed to the brain. Active listening can be described as an attitude that leads to listening for shared understanding.

When we make a decision to listen for total meaning, we listen for the content of what is being said as well as the attitude behind what is being said. Is the speaker happy, angry, excited, sad...or something else entirely?

## Responding to Feelings

The content (the words spoken) is one thing, but the way that people feel really gives full value to the message. Responding to the speaker's feelings adds an extra dimension to listening. Are they disgusted and angry or in love and excited? Perhaps they are ambivalent! These are all feelings that you can reply to in your part of the conversation.

## Reading Cues

Really listening means that we are also very conscious of the non-verbal aspects of the conversation.

- What are the speaker's facial expressions, hand gestures, and posture telling us?
- Is their voice loud or shaky?
- Are they stressing certain points?
- Are they mumbling or having difficulty finding the words they want to say?

## Demonstration Cues

When you are listening to someone, these techniques will show a speaker that you are paying attention, provided you are genuine in using them.

**Physical indicators** include making eye contact, nodding your head from time to time, and leaning into the conversation.

You can also give **verbal cues** or use phrases such as "Uh-huh," "Go on," "Really!" and, "Then what?"

You can use **questions** for clarification or **summarizing statements**. Examples:

- “Do you mean they were charging \$4.00 for just a cup of coffee?”
- “So after you got a cab, got to the store, and found the right sales clerk, what happened then?”

## The Mission: To Listen

An essential element of the performance appraisal process involves listening to your employee. From the perspective of learning and growth, it is important that the supervisor learn to listen to an employee, and that you give way in the appraisal meeting so that you are doing more listening than talking.

**Generate a list of tips for becoming a better listener.**

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## Communication Strategies

One of the best bosses I ever encountered was the one who asked the most thought provoking questions. He created an environment where his staff could think aloud, problem solve, and consider their own questions rather than his answers.

*In this session, you’ll look at one of the essential techniques for supervisors to master: that of asking questions that lead to thought, discussion, and get the creative juices flowing.*

## Basic Skills

If you are going to improve your feedback skills, you also need to work on your ability to ask thoughtful questions; questions that give us more information about the individual you are speaking with (whether it is an employee, colleague, or a supplier) and their work, thoughts, and feelings. To be successful in hosting a performance interview, the interviewer must have knowledge and skills in both being an effective listener and in asking the right questions in order to be effective.

As leaders, we should be spending a lot of our time asking questions and providing answers. When it comes to asking, however, we often aren’t aware of our technique. Open questions in particular often give us difficulty, which is unfortunate since they are the most important ones for us to become skilled at using. If you are having trouble with open questions, it can be helpful to get more comfortable with small talk and easing yourself into the conversation at hand.

## Questioning Skills

The right questions provide structure to your performance interview. Here are some general guidelines:

- Ask one question at a time, instead of trying to get to everything at once.
- Phrase the question in simple, easily understandable words and terms that don't intimidate your conversation partner.
- Keep your questions brief. Questions that are more than two sentences in length are too long; break them up and ask them as two or more questions.
- Keep your phrasing positive. Reframe negative questions to make them more positive, which will encourage conversation.
- Use open questions to get more information, rather than relying on closed questions.
- Follow up on incomplete answers by probing for more information.

You can plan for the conversation ahead of time and decide what kind of questions to ask depending on what your goals are. Design your questions to help you with any of the following:

- Get information
- Gain consensus
- Focus conversations
- Begin closing the conversation
- Gather opinions

It is helpful to have some good questions ready that relate to the feedback conversation. To improve your communication skills, consider the following types of questions.

## Good Questions

### Open Ended Questions

These are broad, general questions that require your conversation partner to provide more than just a "yes" or "no" answer. They also permit the other person to decide how much information to give.

Open questions can do the following:

- Give us more information
- Encourage your conversation partner to speak openly
- Encourage people to share opinions and ideas
- Help us determine if people have interpreted what we say accurately

The following are examples of open ended questions that can be used in a performance evaluation meeting:

- "In your own words, evaluate your accomplishments this quarter."
- "Tell me about your complaint."
- "Tell me how I can help you achieve your goals."
- "What do I have to give you to get what I want?"
- "Describe how you think the project developed."

### Hypothetical Open Questions

These questions allow the partner in your conversation some flexibility and choice in deciding how to respond to an invented but possible situation. Since they are hypothetical, they give you, as interviewer or leader of the conversation, greater flexibility in designing a question to fit a particular situation. Here are some examples:

- “Let’s change roles for a moment. Suppose you were supervisor of this department and someone came to you with a complaint similar to yours. How would you like to handle it?”
- “If you learned a process or procedure that that could free up one hour of your time each week, what do you see yourself doing during that hour?”

### **Direct or Specific Questions**

These are short questions requiring at least a short answer and may include a yes or no answer. They are valuable because they require limited answers, which can make it easier for some of your employees than trying to deal with a large number of open-ended questions. Here are some examples of direct questions:

- “Is the accusation against you accurate?”
- “Did you accomplish your top priority this year?”
- “Do you think you should receive a promotion?”

### **Closed Questions**

Closed questions can be answered with a single word or two, such as a simple yes or no. They can begin the closing process in a conversation, or provide confirmation of a detail, but they don’t usually lead to a richer conversation or gathering more information. The advantage of closed questions is that they give you control over the questions and the type of answers you receive. Closed questions are easy to interpret and more questions can be answered in less time.

However, closed questions don’t allow for detailed explanations or for the other person to share how they feel about a particular circumstance. If you wish to encourage a richer response or to encourage a frustrated person to talk freely, then you need to avoid asking closed questions. Here are some examples of closed questions:

- “Does this make you angry?”
- “Do you think this appraisal is fair?”

To open up those same questions, you could try these open-ended statements:

- “Please explain how you feel about this situation.”
- “Tell me how you feel about this appraisal.”

### **Third-Person Questions**

Embarrassing or personal questions may be phrased in a less threatening way by involving a third person. For example, instead of asking “Do you think the raise is fair?” the supervisor can ask, “Do the employees in our department think the raise is fair?”

You have to listen carefully to the answer to determine whether they reply using their own personal opinion (as is often the case, and is really what you are after.) You may need to ask some additional questions to more fully flesh out the information you are looking for.

### **Poor Questions**

Here are some question types that you should be cautious of using.

### Loaded Questions

These are questions that have no correct answer, and they usually elicit an emotional response. Loaded questions are not usually used by skilled interviewers because they can easily throw the conversation off track. They may even backfire on you. Some examples include:

- “Have you stopped drinking yet?”
- “Are you still difficult to get along with?”

### Leading Questions

A leading question tells your conversation partner what you really want to hear in their answer. All that you learn by asking these questions is that the employee has figured out how to give you the answer that you want; the “correct” answer.

Examples include:

- “I don’t think you’ve been working up to your potential. What do you think?”
- “You don’t mind helping Annie with her assignment, do you?”

## Probing

When we do not get enough information by using open-ended questions, we can use probes to expand the conversation.

### Verbal and Nonverbal Probes

A probe will encourage your conversation partner to add to their previous response. Verbal probes are often a single word or short phrase. Some examples are:

- “Tell me more about that.”
- “That’s interesting. Tell me more.”
- “Really?”
- “Why?”
- “Can you give me a specific example of what you mean?”

Nonverbal probes rely on your body language and gestures to get the same results as a verbal probe. Some examples are:

- Raising the eyebrows as if you are surprised
- Nodding
- Frowning
- Pursing the lips

### Probing Techniques

There are many ways that you can use probing in your conversations. We’ve provided some techniques for you below.

Ask an **open question**, such as:

- “Can you describe that more clearly?”
- “Would you give me a specific example of what you mean?”
- “What do you think we should do?”

You'll soon recognize that if you ask too many of these questions, your conversation partner will feel like they are under interrogation, so use them carefully.

**Pause.** Many of us feel uncomfortable when silence overtakes a conversation, and we will fill the silence by expanding on what was said previously.

**Use reflective or mirroring questions.** For example, if the employee says "I just don't feel challenged by my work anymore," you may respond by just reflecting back to them, "Challenged?" Then pause. Usually, the other person will provide you with an expanded answer without you asking more questions or interrogating. These kinds of statements also serve to focus or clarify and summarize without interrupting the flow of the conversation. They demonstrate your intent to understand the speaker's thoughts and feelings.

**Paraphrase** what has just been said in your own words. "So if I understand you correctly, you..." This technique shows that you want to understand your conversation partner and that you want to be accurate. It also allows the sender to hear back what they have said from someone else's point of view.

**Summary questions** are a helpful way of probing and winding up the conversation at the same time. "You have spoken to your colleague about his foul language in the office, you have tried to ignore it, and you remain concerned about the impact his swearing has on our visitors and staff. None of these techniques have worked to reduce the amount of swearing and now you are asking me to intervene. Have I got it right?"

Here is another example: when we asked an employee why it would take until next week to finish the project, one of her reasons was lack of cooperation from the production department.

Rather than come back with yet another question, you might just say "Cooperation..." in a reflective tone of voice, and pause again. Usually, the other person will recognize that reflection as a clue to expand or provide you with additional information.

Summary statements or paraphrases sum up what has been said, and will show that you have listened and absorbed what's being said. Don't use them to take over the dialogue.

The summary is the stronger cue that the conversation is winding down on that topic. However, if necessary or appropriate, you can follow this up with a fact-finding question (usually a closed question), such as, "Did you want to say more about the issue?", or, "Do you have any other suggestions?"

## Non-Verbal Messages

Non-verbal messages can be far more important than the words we say. The way we stand, what we do with our hands, the sound of our voice, the way we walk, and the expressions on our face can support, enhance, and even contradict what we say.

In our fast-paced world, we don't have time to get more than a quick snapshot of how a person looks before we make up our mind about them. They are making up their mind about us at the same time, so it is essential that our non-verbal messages are consistent with what we say verbally.

Remember that one important aspect of providing feedback is to encourage employees to learn and grow. If, for example, an employee gets a low rating on some aspect of a performance appraisal, and you as the supervisor notices the

employee's flushed face or tight lips, but you do not make any observation about it (and the employee asks for no explanation), you are not likely to stimulate improvement. In an even worse case, you could see even less performance.

**When we meet, what should we be watching for from our employees?**

- Rejection of our comments (for example, the person physically moves further from us by sitting back in their chair or slouching in their seat)
- Anger on the face and in their posture
- Lack of understanding or comprehension (such as furrowed brows, pursed lips)

**What are some other non-verbal signals we must be careful not to communicate to employees?**

- Boredom (if you look like you're just going through the motions of yet another performance review, they will see it)
- Anger (our own flushed face, or the way we put things on our desk will all convey our own mood)
- Arrogance

The face and the eyes are the most expressive means of non-verbal communication. Additional positive or negative messages are sent by your gestures, posture, and the space between you and the other person.

Positive body language is important to encourage conversation and support your positive intent in meeting with the other person. When we don't pay attention to our non-verbal signals, we often send mixed or confusing messages to people. Get control of your image by working on your non-verbal language.

## Voice

Your attitude is projected through your voice as well as your body language. Make sure your body language and voice always says, "I'm here to help as best I can."

When your voice is annoyed, impatient, or condescending, the other person may become angered or angrier. Speak with a calm, firm, caring, soothing tone. Your communications will be more relaxed, more pleasant, and better understood.

The speed and rhythm of your speech is important as well. Clear communication includes appropriate pauses and inflections to support the words.

## Interpretation Exercise

For each image, determine what you think is happening and how you feel about what you think is happening.

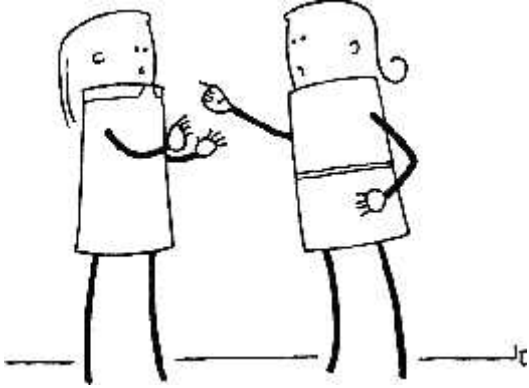

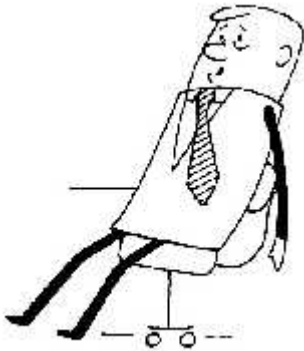
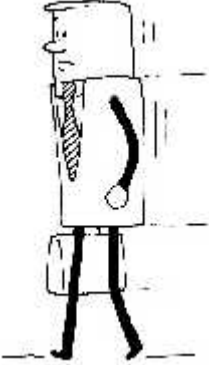
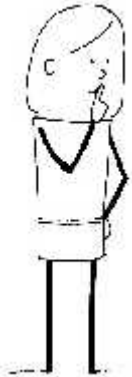
Image	What I Think is Happening	How I Feel About It
		
		
		

Image	What I Think is Happening	How I Feel About It
		
		

## Giving Feedback

Giving effective feedback takes practice, and receiving feedback can be tough, especially if we are expecting criticism. You want to ensure that the employee hears what you have to say, rather than having them focus on the sound of blood rushing through their ears.

*In this session, you'll get some hands-on practice that takes you through planning and giving feedback through some captivating case studies.*

## The Importance of Feedback

Feedback is another critical element of the performance management process. Telling people when they are working well or when there is some room for improvement takes professionalism, tact, and an intent to help your employees grow both personally and professionally.

While some of us (supervisors and employees alike) enjoy the principle, "No news is good news," people actually want to know how they are doing. Embracing an atmosphere of frequent, meaningful feedback allows you to leverage a significant way to keep people interested in their job.

For sports lovers in our midst, think of the sport that you enjoy the most. One of the elements that people enjoy about sports in the aspect of score keeping, which lets you know where you (or your team) stands. Those indications of good performance keep us coming back to revisit the sport over and over again, whether you are someone who plays, or prefers to watch. Without some method of keeping score, even an enjoyable activity can become a meaningless repetition of motions.

The performance feedback you provide your people may be on a group level in terms of how well they are meeting targets compared to other groups. Or, it may be about individual performance toward attainable goals. But just as feedback is necessary to keep interest in a sport alive, it's easy to get off track or fall into a state of limbo without performance feedback. In addition, regular performance feedback is one of the key steps leading up to a surprise-free performance review.

**What do you think are the key things to keep in mind when you are giving others feedback?**

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## Six Characteristics

One goal of feedback is for it to contribute to an improvement in future performance. Even when it does not lead to a desired level of performance, the meeting itself provides the platform to discuss expectations, results, motivation, and how to succeed. For employees (or even suppliers) who choose not to perform at an adequate level, the meeting serves as a benchmark within the larger performance management arena. If an employee refuses to comply, has been supported and coached to do well, and continues to refuse, then the supervisor has the necessary means to move into a disciplinary performance management plan.

When feedback is perceived to be negative (because of our own behavior, or perhaps because it is not well delivered), people will naturally try to avoid it, or at least minimize the negative effects. However, we need to let people know that it can be a great tool for personal development, especially when we include information on both the issues and the possible solutions. With this in mind, let's delve deeper into the six major characteristics of effective feedback.

### In Private

Feedback should be given in private if your comments can be embarrassing, and a formal feedback meeting should always be held in private. While some people like the attention that comes from sincere praise or celebrating an accomplishment in front of others, some do not, and no one wants negativity shared in front of their peers. (This should be apparent without having to state it, but sometimes we get excited and forget!)

### Balanced

Balance in this context is about designing the feedback session so that, even though there may be constructive criticism required, the employee does not feel attacked, or that all you have to say about his work is negative. We recommend that you avoid the older form of "sandwich approach" (by making a positive comment, a negative, and then a positive).

However, you should still start any feedback with a positive comment about some aspect of the employee's work. If you are not comfortable with this, or not good at small talk, write some comments down ahead of time to keep yourself focused. Your employee will appreciate that you get to the heart of the meeting quickly instead of letting any anxiety build. Feedback that is delivered in specific terms and in a sincere manner is usually accepted well, even when we are receiving criticism.

## Relevant

Keep the conversation focused on feedback that is relevant and job related, and to things which the employee has control over. For example, complaining about the way a letter looks when the employee only has access to an ancient printer that adds lines to everything, or asking for a sophisticated looking brochure when there is no budget provided for the proper paper and licensed photography, only adds to the employee's stress and frustration.

## Specific

Avoid general statements when you deliver feedback. "You seem unmotivated," is not nearly as helpful as, "You arrived late to work at least three days a week, your last two assignments were late, and you did not attend the new employee lunch last week."

## Documented

Base your comments on documentation, facts, and your own observation. Don't rely on what another manager or a colleague told you, or what someone overheard, when you should be available to monitor what is going on yourself.

## Personal (In the Right Way)

Compliments or criticisms that are directed generally toward the team are meaningless to an employee. "We just don't seem able to get out error-free invoices," is not as constructive as, "Three of the last invoices you sent out had errors in them." Describe the behavior that is unsatisfactory, rather than judge a person because of it. Base it on their actions, and don't make a personal attack on the individual.

# Accepting Criticism

One sign of being a professional is our own ability to accept criticism. This can be helpful to teach your employees too, who may not have ever had a mentor show them that there are some elegant ways to roll with criticism, and to hear the message rather than thinking there is something more behind it.

*In this session, you'll receive a quick tip list on how to accept criticism that is directed toward your own behavior.*

## About Criticism

Accepting criticism from others can be really difficult. We often hear criticism as a very personal attack on behavior that we already may not be proud of. It helps to think about criticism as feedback and as something to help you improve. This is what we refer to as **positive intent**.

While you may hesitate in doing this, it can be an outstanding opportunity for you to grow. It also means that you are going to follow up a feedback session by asking the other individual if your feedback was helpful, sensitive to their needs, and respectful.

## Tips and Tricks

Here are some tips on accepting criticism.

### **Listen attentively.**

Make sure you understand the criticism and what needs improvement. You may even want to paraphrase the other person's remarks.

### **Ask for details.**

Find out as much as you can about the incident(s) described. Ask lots of open ended questions to gather all the information that you can.

### **Find something to agree with.**

You don't need to say that you were wrong if you weren't, but it does do a lot for your own integrity for you to say that you were wrong if you were. Of equal importance, you need to acknowledge the person's right to criticize and to recognize the importance of the person's concerns. If you cannot agree with the other person about any aspect of the criticism being offered, you could be perceived as rejecting the person as well.

### **Try not to take their comments personally.**

If they've learned anything about offering feedback, they will know they need to speak to your behaviors and not your personal self, but not everyone knows this. Consider that they are being brave and offering feedback (not an easy thing for most people to do) as an opportunity to improve yourself.

# Planning the Interview

Getting ready for the interview means that you can enter into the conversation knowing how you want to start out. We can't always control what will happen, because we don't know exactly how the other person will respond, but we can be prepared.

*In this session, we'll outline the steps that can take place as you prepare for the performance appraisal interview.*

## The Performance Appraisal Interview

What should a manager or supervisor do to prepare for the actual appraisal interview?

- Set up the appointment and choose a location where you will not be interrupted.
- Give the employee some advance notice (at least a week).
- Most importantly, decide what is to be discussed and in what order. Appraisers can easily overwhelm the employee with things that need improvement. Pick those that are most outstanding for praise,

and those performance challenges that most need to be addressed—usually no more than two or three items.

- Have documentation on hand for any criticisms.
- While goals should be those of the employee, you can be a part of that goal-setting process. In fact, you must be if you have never asked an employee to develop goals for themselves before. This is a learning process for them too, and as such, they need your guidance and coaching.
- Gather personnel files, last year’s performance appraisal, the position profile or job description, and any documentation gathered through the year.
- Remind participants that they are being evaluated on the whole review period (usually six or 12 months).
- Provide them with adequate time to review a draft of your written comments before the meeting. You may also want them to complete a self-assessment.
- Mentally prepare for interviews. On a receptivity scale, how receptive will the employee be to your feedback? Can you prepare for their reaction?

## The Interview

Think of the last performance appraisal interview where you were the person being rated. Were you ready? Was your boss? In retrospect, what could have made the meeting better for you as the one who was the subject of the conversation?

*In this session, you’ll learn about a basic format for PA interviews, take some time to gather your own thoughts and do some preparation, and then get some practice.*

### A Basic Format

Typically supervisors invite an employee in, ask them to sit down, and then launch into a monologue, telling the employee all their faults, and what they have to do about them. If they aren’t careful the interview will be over before the employee has had an opportunity to say more than, “Hello.”

The basic organization of the performance appraisal interview is generally the same as for all types of interviews. They consist of three phases: the opening, the discussion, and the closing.

#### The Opening

To skip the opening phase of a performance review interview is just as serious a mistake as to forget to set up an agenda for any other meeting, or to forget to introduce the topic when you are making an oral presentation. The opening phase of an interview includes three basic steps: rapport, orientation, and motivation. Usually they are done in the order listed, but the order is less important than remembering to do them.

##### **Rapport**

Developing rapport with your employee is key to their receptivity. You actually need a good rapport together before this meeting, so make sure that you are one of those supervisors who gets to know their staff, and have a professional

relationship with them. When the appraisal meeting comes, choose neutral territory, or at least arrange the room informally, rather than across a desk from each other. Shake hands, show the person where to sit, offer coffee or juice, engage in small talk for a few minutes, and adopt a friendly, interested expression.

### **Orientation**

Once you have established rapport, explain approximately how long the review will take, and exactly why the company does reviews. Tell the employee how much you appreciate the opportunity to meet one on one for a conversation with all employees. Tell them you want to get their opinion on their performance and you want to add a few thoughts of your own. Tell them you would like to see them leave this review with a good idea of how they are doing and some goals for the year/period ahead.

### **Motivation**

Explain the benefits to the employee for being a willing and cooperative participant in this review. Suggest that this is their opportunity to tell you some of the things that have been on their mind, and perhaps give you some suggestions of how you can be of more help to them. Let them know that this is an opportunity for the employee to think about a personal development plan; a way to enhance their career.

## The Discussion

This is where you openly discuss how an employee really thinks and feels about their results. There are a number of things to keep in mind during this very important part of the review process. Remember not to talk too much yourself. The object is to get them talking. If you want to create a willingness in employees to do a thorough and candid review of their performance, you will find you can learn a great deal by asking open questions and probing their responses.

## The Closing

It's equally important to tie up all the loose ends at the close of the interview. Summarize all the points that have been covered, get the employee's commitment to any changes asked of them, and agree on a follow-up date.

### **Summary**

The summary should contain the employee's agreement with what has been said (or note that they don't agree, as can be the case) and recap the highlights of good performance and improvement goals, along with agreed upon follow-up plans and dates.

### **Commitment**

You should also note what commitment supervisors are looking for. For example, the employee may make a commitment to the performance improvement or development plan that supervisor and employee created together, and there may be some deliverables expected from the supervisor, such as coaching, training, or others.

### **Follow-Up**

What sort of follow-up plan is reasonable and possible? This will depend on the employee, the organization and the resources available, including the supervisor's time, but the plan must be something both know will happen.

### **Conclusion**

The review should be concluded on a positive note, with supervisor thanking employee for taking the time to do a self-assessment and a review with the supervisor, and the supervisor reiterating their confidence that the period ahead will be a good one.

## Goal Setting Role Play

The more times we do something, the more opportunity we have to improve our skills, make changes, and then go back to try it again. This is the essence of practice makes perfect, with a little room for tweaking in the middle.

*In this session*, you'll have the opportunity to practice a goal setting session, an essential aspect of the performance analysis process.

## Providing Feedback

We probably don't give ourselves enough time to give and receive regular feedback, whether we are at home or at work. Our workplaces are so busy and our schedules are often filled with things that we must get done right now.

## Coaching

Why do people love working with coaches? Because they are working with someone who understands how to get them thinking, offers support, and then steps back and let the individual develop skills and the confidence to move ahead.

*In this session*, we will present the essentials to workplace coaching. You will also have an opportunity to practice your new skills.

## The Importance of Coaching

As the workplace changes, employees often ask for coaching to help them grow. One of our roles as a leader is to help others, and the ability to help others improve their skills and attitudes is extremely important.

Coaching is one-on-one mentoring that helps people develop their skills, set goals, and understand your company's success. Coaching is a way of telling the truth, confronting tough issues, and using language to inspire.

The secrets of successful coaching include building on the positive, being diplomatic about the negative, and a commitment to never, ever yell.

When you are coaching your staff, you rely on your ability to listen, ask open-ended questions, support what you say with non-verbal language, and help to grow their career skills. This includes the ability to:

- Make eye contact
- Use supportive body language
- Acknowledge what the other person is saying or feeling
- Use open-ended questions

When you are working on your skills at performance appraisals, help your employee to discuss how they feel they are





## Employees

If you are the employee, complete this self-assessment. If you are the employer, complete the previous section only.

**Rate yourself on a scale of one to ten for each of the following questions, with 1 being “never” and 10 being “always.”**

Area	Rating
I accomplish tasks on time.	
I focus on those tasks specifically assigned to me.	
I try to accomplish extra tasks.	
I communicate well with my co-workers.	
I communicate well with my supervisors.	
When given feedback, I try to implement suggestions for improvement.	
I coach my colleagues.	
I use and develop my areas of expertise.	
I set goals for myself and my team.	
I take pride in my work.	

**Areas I believe I can improve in (and ways I can do so):**

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# The Interview

It's time now for the interview! If you've worked with a company that does PA's regularly, and you have had a few or initiated a few that were good, this will be a breeze.

*In this session*, you'll practice what you have learned so far and draw on those resources for your own PA meetings or interviews.

## Assessment Notes

**Use the space below to take notes about each team's role play.**

Team	Notes

# Maintaining Performance

People who are well engaged in their work seem to have less trouble maintaining their performance than people who are not engaged. While intuitively this makes sense, it also makes sense to consider the impact this has on your workplace.

*In this session, we'll explore the concept of leveraging the PA process to help maintain good performance.*

## Maintaining Performance

Maintaining good performance is as important as improving weak or substandard performance. Good performers want to continue to be good performers, and so they need work that keeps them interested and engaged. If we ignore good performers, even though they are doing well, we run the risk of them losing interest and moving on to another job.

Be careful of avoiding conflict. We see supervisors who are apt to be overly critical of good employees in the belief this keeps them growing and engaged, and at the same time they are overly lenient with poor employees because they don't want to go through the conflict necessary to have poor employees improve.

If you are a supervisor and you want to be fair and just, you must prepare and deal with both sets of circumstances. When it comes to improvement, if there is a good measurement system in place for the type of work they do, then raising the standard and offering training or development will both improve and challenge (unless they feel you are being unfair and asking them to do more than everyone else).

Remember: don't wait until the performance review to handle problems.

## How to Modify Work Behavior?

Modifying work behavior usually has a four-step approach.

1. Begin the session with one positive work performance of the employee.
2. Describe the problem behavior to the employee.
3. Provide a rationale for why this is problem behavior, as well as the impact it has on the work team overall, and you as the supervisor.
4. Explain what has to be done to meet acceptable behavior measures.

Close the session by informing the employee that they are expected to change and that their progress will be monitored. Tell them what improvements you have noticed. Make sure the employee understands the consequences if the behavior changes are not made.

# Handling Performance Problems

Sometimes people simply refuse to comply with what we expect at work. There can be plenty of reasons for this, but what's important to remember is that if the employee is offering excuses, it still does not justify the fact that their work is not getting done or that relationships are suffering.

*In this session, you'll learn about the merits of handling performance problems, setting up a behavior contract for negative behavior, and rewarding behaviors you want to reinforce.*

## Make the Commitment

We typically get hired because we have strengths that will help the organization, but we all have weaknesses too. If things are not going well, the supervisor's job includes acting on it right away so the problem doesn't get worse. We know from experience that if problems are not acted on, they do become worse and can easily become chronic.

In case you are wondering, it is rarely too early to react to a performance problem. Looking the other way or wishing the problem didn't exist, are not on the supervisor's list of options. Bringing a performance problem to an employee's attention can easily generate a defensive reaction, even if the focus is on performance and behavior rather than on personality and attitude, but the supervisor can use some techniques to reduce a negative reaction.

In productive discussions, the focus is kept on the problem behavior, not on the employee. Most of the time is spent talking about the future and the solution, as opposed to the past and the cause.

### Key Action Steps

- Focus on the performance, not the employee.
- Ask the employee how they can solve the problem.
- Use probing questions and active listening to help identify solutions.
- Agree on an action plan and gain commitment to the next steps.
- Agree on a follow-up date and time.
- Express your confidence in the employee.

Keep in mind that even if your intent is good, attempts at change are doomed unless reviews and feedback are perceived as well-intentioned, constructive feedback by your employees.

## Behavior Contracts

Despite our best efforts when it comes to performance management, some employees choose not to perform their duties at an acceptable level. When this happens, and your feedback sessions and coaching still do not lead to the desired results, we recommend that you use a behavior contract (sometimes called a disciplinary plan, behavior improvement plan, corrective action, disciplinary letter, etc.) to define the change in behavior that is required, the consequences for a failure to improve, and who will provide the consequences (usually a supervisor).

Here are some tips for making behavior contracts work.

- Select only a small number of meaningful behaviors for the contract. These should be observable behaviors.
- While a failure to comply is normally negative consequences (up to and including demotion or dismissal), depending on the circumstances you can also include reinforcement contingencies that are important to the worker. Does the worker want recognition, feedback, or something that visibly

reminds them of accomplishments (being careful not to negatively impact other workers' morale, of course)?

- Include an action plan that outlines the desired behaviors the employee will adopt.
- The contract must be signed by both employee and supervisor. If you are in a unionized workplace, the union business partner representative normally receives a copy as well.
- Provide attention, and immediate reinforcement, when the targeted behaviors are demonstrated. That reinforcement may only be a "thank you" but provide it immediately.
- As the action plan gets underway, determine if parts of it need to be revised. Nothing is ever written in concrete. If part of the contract is working very well, but another part is not improving at all, perhaps you need to try a different approach. Remember that in unionized workplaces you may need to check the wording of the collective agreement to ensure you are approaching things to meet the terms of that agreement.
- Record and share progress made by the worker. Positive recognition is often fine to do in public, but constructive criticism should always be done in private. Most employees do not want their colleagues to know that they are on a "disciplinary" plan.

## The Part Where Someone Gets Fired

Have you ever been given a serious reprimand or fired from a job? Do you remember how the meeting was handled? Most of us do remember getting fired, and we can probably also remember how the circumstances could be improved for the next person.

*In this session, you'll consider the elements that make up a firing, and consider the value of reprimanding versus termination in given circumstances.*

### If You Have To Let Them Go...

While it can make things rough for the employee, the supervisor, and the team left behind picking up the extra work, firing an employee is not actually the worst thing that can happen. It can be particularly rejuvenating for a team that has been putting up with the employee's poor behavior or negative attitude. They can actually complete more work – at least in the short term while a replacement gets hired – because of the relief that comes with a toxic person being removed.

For a supervisor, the firing can be a relief too, once it is all over. Choosing to fire someone is a very big decision to make, and can create some inner turmoil when you feel you have done a lot of work to help them be successful there — from setting goals with the employee, coaching, offering constructive feedback, giving regular performance appraisals, developing behavioral contracts—and the employee still can't improve.

If you decide that this step is necessary, make sure it really is the last option and that you have the legal authority to fire this person. If those factors are in place, and you have to do the firing, remember that this is a good thing for everything involved, even the employee. This match is simply not working; it's time for the employee and the company to find someone that fits each of their needs better.

Once you're prepared emotionally, make sure you have the facts straight and your documentation all in order.

- What is the official reason for termination? (If this is a layoff, provide details about unemployment insurance, or let the person know where they can get this information.)
- What (if any) severance pay is being offered?
- Will the employee be able to continue medical benefits?
- When will the employee's last day be?
- If you're the one determining when the last day is, keep the following points in mind:
- First, check the employee's contract for any obligations.
- If possible, some sort of notice is a good idea to allow the employee to wrap things up and to look for another job (i.e. in the case of a layoff due to a work slowdown). However, you will have to balance the notice period with the potential for sabotage from the employee. Generally if someone is being fired, it's best to remove their access to property and equipment at the time of the termination meeting.
- If the firing is due to a serious incident (theft, fraud, criminal activity, refusing treatment for substance abuse, ongoing personal issues with others in the office that this employee incites), it's probably best to end their employment then and there. Severance may reduce the likelihood the employee will file a complaint, but is entirely up to you and the usual practices of the company.
- If the employee has access to proprietary or confidential information, or has access to the company's internal e-mail, internal computer drives, etc., it's also probably best to end their employment then and there. This practice protects you from sabotage and them from suspicion if anything does go wrong.

## Performance Management Checklists

You've learned a lot in this course about your own approach to performance appraisals, how to make them a valuable tool in your work, and how to leverage them for the performance of the people that you lead.

*In this session, we'll present a series of checklists that you can use in your PA work, to make sure that all your i's are dotted and t's are crossed.*

### Introduction

Please keep the three fundamentals in mind at all times and review the checklist through each phase of the process. Throughout the year, as you talk to and coach your employees, refer to the ongoing support and feedback checklist. And finally, as you prepare for the review phase, use the Performance Review Checklist to make sure you are properly completing the performance management process for the period.

### The Fundamentals of the Process

- Do your employees understand what you expect of them?
- Do your employees know how well they are performing?
- Do your employees have what they need to improve their performance?

## Objectives and Results Checklist

- Are your organization's objectives/goals reflected in the objectives and results expected of the employee?
- Is it clear what is expected of the employee? Are objectives specific, accurate, and results oriented?
- Is it clear how performance will be judged through the results?
- Are these expectations realistic? Achievable? Timely?
- Have you planned for no surprises by the end of the process?

## Support Plan Checklist

- Are there any obstacles to the employee meeting your expectations of objectives and results?
- Can these obstacles be overcome with specific training, equipment, increased feedback from the supervisor or other means?
- Is there any other obstacle in the way of achieving the goals?
- If so, can it be overcome by re-prioritizing or re-assigning some tasks without sacrificing performance in other areas?
- Does the support plan accommodate all the requirements needed for the employee to meet the objectives you have set?

## Meeting with Your Employees Checklist

- Will the employee understand how performance will be judged?
- Has the employee raised any objections to the proposed objectives and corresponding results expected?
- If so, have these been resolved?
- Have you explained what performance management means to your employee and outlined the phases of the process?
- Does the employee understand the benefits of the process?
- Does the employee understand the importance of his or her job to the goals of the team/unit/dept.?
- Does the employee understand your expectations in terms of both objectives and results expected?
- Does the employee feel she/he has all the resources required to achieve these results? Is the support plan complete?
- Do your employees understand that they can return to you at any time to discuss your performance expectations, particularly if they are encountering problems?
- Have you answered all the employee's questions?
- Have you heard your employees and taken their concerns and comments to heart?

## Ongoing Support and Feedback Checklist

- If you were to perform a review today, on any of your employees, would there be any surprises for them?
- Have you set a goal for yourself to informally, but regularly, touch base with each of your employees to ask how things are going, ask whether there are any problems, and discuss any difficulties in the achievement of their performance?
- Do you correct performance problems immediately?
- Do you congratulate successes immediately? (And remember that success is relative: getting a supply requisition in on time can be a major success for a chronic procrastinator!)
- Have you reviewed the employee's work plans and objectives at least once during the period?
- Have you updated or modified those work plans and objectives that require revision? Have you done so with the employee's input and agreement?

## Performance Interview Checklist

- Did you give the employee a copy of the self-assessment and your appraisal draft one week before the meeting?
- Have you set an appointment at a convenient time for the employee? Have you allowed sufficient time for your interview? Have you made sure there will be no interruptions?
- Did you brief the employee before the interview so the employee knows to come prepared to discuss past performance and future performance?
- Has the employee been able to complete those sections for which he or she is responsible?

## Performance Review Checklist

- Will there be any surprises for the employee?
- Have you provided factual information where appropriate on the form?
- Are your comments specific and accurate, making reference to original goals established under objectives and results?
- Can you support the judgments you make and record them on the form with specific examples of the employee's performance during the period?
- In cases where the employee's performance met the objectives set, have you acknowledged the employee for a job well done?
- Have you both signed the report?

### Further Reading:

- ✓ Armstrong, Sharon. *The Essential Performance Review Handbook*. Career Press, 2010.
- ✓ Arthur, Diane. *Recruiting, Interviewing, Selecting, and Orienting New Employees (5th Edition)*. AMACOM, 2012.
- ✓ Berger, Dorothy R., and Lance A. Berger. *The Talent Management Handbook (Second Edition)*. McGraw-Hill, 2010.
- ✓ Blanchard, Kenneth. *Leading at a Higher Level: Blanchard on Leadership and Creating High Performing Organizations*. Pearson Education, 2009.
- ✓ Blanchard, Kenneth, Jim Ballard, Thad Lacinak, and Chuck Tompkins. *Whale Done!* Free Press, 2002.
- ✓ Boothman, Nicholas. *How to Make People Like You in 90 Seconds or Less*. Workman Publishing Company, 2008.
- ✓ Carnegie, Dale. *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. Pocket Books, 1998 (Reprint).
- ✓ Daniels, Aubrey, and James Daniels. *Performance Management: Changing Behavior that Drives Organizational Effectiveness (Fourth Edition)*. Performance Management Publications, 2004.
- ✓ Harvard Business Review. *Harvard Business Essentials: Performance Management*. Harvard Business Review Press, 2006.