Conversations of Performance Management

Performance Management at Ohio State
The Fourth Conversation ~ Performance Reviews

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Introduction – Welcome to Performance Reviews

Managers cite performance appraisals or annual reviews as one of their most disliked tasks. Employees often dread them as well. So isn’t it time to start turning this around and making performance evaluations meaningful. The best performance reviews let managers and employees communicate -- share ideas, opinions, and information -- with no surprises or anxiety.

It's important to note that effective performance evaluations cannot take place in absence of ongoing coaching and feedback.

"The manager needs to look at the employee not as a problem to be solved, but as a person to be understood."

- Nigel Nicholson
What is a Performance Review?

The performance review conversation is an opportunity for an employee to ask, "How did I do?" Performance reviews are summative two-way conversations and written documentation which focuses on employee performance. Performance evaluations focus on areas of excellence, goals for improvement and development needs. Remember, during the performance evaluation conversation there should be no surprises because managers and employees have had regular conversations regarding performance throughout the year.

Purpose of Performance Reviews

Performance reviews:

- Let the employee know what he/she is doing well and where there are opportunities for development
- Provide an opportunity for employees to ask for what they need (training, resources, support, etc.)
- Offer an opportunity to strengthen the relationship between the employee and the manager
- Provide the employee an opportunity to focus on their own performance with their manager
- Set the stage for the next performance planning conversation
- Provide input for human resource decisions including promotion, compensation, or corrective action
Characteristics of an Effective Review

- A *shared* responsibility
- A *participative* process
- A means to *recognize* achievement
- An opportunity to *set or re-calibrate goals*

Goals of the Review Process

- Learn from the past to improve the future
- Reflect on and get clear about how the employee contributes to the organization's vision and goals and the university's vision and goals
- Clarify the organization's priorities and determine what must the employee focus on:
  - Each day/month
  - Throughout the next year
- Identify how the employee can be a more effective contributor
- Identify how the manager can support the employee
- Agree to regularly connect on performance and goals

Remember, if performance management is done correctly, there should be no surprises during the review process.
Chapter One – Preparing for the Review as a Manager

Prepare Yourself

1. Review the employee’s job description
2. Review any performance standards (expectations) that have been previously discussed and agreed upon.
3. Review employees goals
4. Review documentation from the performance period (including customer comments, coaching notes, etc.)
5. Determine areas of excellence and plan to discuss these
6. Determine developmental opportunities and develop specific suggestions to discuss with your employee
7. Evaluate performance for the period being appraised and assign realistic ratings
8. Reflect on training and growth needs of your employee. Develop a list of suggested activities.
9. Develop a list of questions to engage your employee in the discussion. For example:
   ✓ What do you like best about your job? Least?
   ✓ What do you think are your strengths? Opportunities for development?
   ✓ What were your specific accomplishments during this period?
   ✓ How can I help you optimize your performance?
   ✓ What would you like to learn?
   ✓ What do you need from me?

Help Prepare your Employee

- Give your employee advance, personal notice of the meeting
- Remind your employee of the value of reviews to both of you
- Define the rating scale on a written evaluation for your employee
- Ask your employee to do a self assessment prior to the meeting

Set the Stage

- Schedule ample time for discussion (60-90 minutes)
- Select a neutral setting that will put your employees at ease
Inputs into the Review

There are many potential inputs into the performance review process, depending on the performance management processes you engage in throughout the year. Use of these inputs should be discussed with the individual prior to the performance review, and ideally, at the beginning of the performance period, during the planning conversation.

Possible inputs include:

- Individual, team and/or unit goals for the performance period.
- Job description reviewed and updated as necessary
- Customer feedback throughout the year or requested at the time of the review
- Documentation accumulated by the manager over the course of the year (e.g. letters, emails from customers, reports, coaching notes, etc.)
- Employees self evaluation
- Peers/colleagues who are familiar with some aspect of the employee’s performance

“Punishing honest mistakes stifles creativity. I want people moving and shaking the earth and they are going to make mistakes.”

~ Ross Perot

When a manager requests feedback from someone else, it can sometimes be difficult to determine if the feedback is legitimate. Below are some questions to help determine if the feedback received from a customer or colleague or peer is “legitimate”.

- Does the feedback come from more than one person?
- Have you heard this feedback before?
- Has the feedback giver observed the individual over time?
- Does the feedback giver know the process or procedure on which he/she is commenting?
- Is the feedback specific? Does it include specific examples?
- Does the feedback represent examples over time rather than merely recent events?
- Are the feedback giver’s standards known and reasonable?
- Writing the Review
- Do you see a pattern?
As you prepare to write the review, consider these steps:

1. Sit down in a quiet place when you are in a neutral mood to reflect on the employee’s performance over the past year.
2. Identify and gather all inputs regarding the employee’s performance for the year.
3. Read all inputs carefully.
5. Identify all messages or issues contained in the inputs. Some may be repetitive and others not. Clarify those that appear to be contradictory.
6. Determine how you will deliver the feedback (e.g. written or verbal). For example, some managers like to summarize all the feedback and provide it in a written document.
7. Remember to document your feedback according to the ABC’s of documentation (see handout).
8. Make sure your written comments accurately reflect the rating you’ve given.
9. Do not use the employees self review as your review. Write your own review and use the employee’s review as a basis for discussion.
10. Each employee should have their own individual review. Managers should not be writing the same things for all of his/her employees.

Common Rating Errors

**Halo Error** – Appraiser giving favorable ratings to all job duties based on impressive performance in just one job function.

**Horn Error** – Downgrading an employee across all performance dimensions exclusively because of poor performance on one dimension.

**First Impression Error** – Developing a negative or positive opinion of an employee early in the review period and allowing that to influence all later perceptions of performance.

**Recency Error** – Allowing performance at the end of the review period to play too large a role in determining an employee’s ratings for the entire period.

**Leniency Error** – Consistently rating someone higher than is deserved.

**Severity Error** – Rating someone consistently lower that is deserved.

**Clone Error** – Giving better ratings to employees who are like the rater in behavior and/or personality.

**Spillover Error** – Continuing to downgrade an employee for performance errors in prior rating periods.
Sharing the Review

Providing an employee with a review helps them become aware of their own actions and feelings and how their actions and feelings impact others. Employees want to hear how they are doing and providing them with regular coaching and feedback will keep employees engaged and motivated and can increase their job satisfaction. The review conversation is an opportunity for managers to provide employees with an overall assessment of their performance.

Remember, the review conversation is another opportunity for you to build a relationship with your employee. Prepare yourself for the conversation but make sure that you go in with a curious mind and listening ears. This is a two-way conversation and a great opportunity for you to learn about your employee’s hopes and dreams!

**Tips for a successful review:**

1. Welcome the employee put them at ease.
2. Let the employee start
   a. Listen and take notes
   b. Maintain good eye contact and attentive posture
   c. Reflect back to the employee your understanding of what the employee said
   d. Don’t interrupt, but ask questions for clarification
   e. Be non-judgmental
3. Compare the actual specific performance results and behaviors with the objectives and standards.
4. Ask the employee for ideas about how to resolve problems.
5. Focus on the future, not on the past.
6. Emphasize strengths, as well as areas that need improvement.
7. Be honest and prepared to discuss questionable items. Support the employee’s effort to improve.
8. Set goals, expectations and standards together for the next review.
9. Discuss development/training plans with the employee.
10. Summarize the review.

**Which feedback is more effective?**

“Good job John.” or “John, that new procedure you developed for routing service calls has really improved our customer satisfaction. Thanks for coming up with it.”
Sample Conversation Starters

Giving developmental feedback using positive language...

- You are so good at gathering information from a variety of sources. We need to find a way to improve your ability to synthesize and make recommendations based on the information up to the same level. Can you think of ways we could do this?

- You are exceptional at face-to-face customer service. We need to figure out how to get your management of my calendar up to the same level of excellence. How might we do this?

Making a statement to the employee inviting developmental self-appraisal...

- How might you improve your performance in __________________ (telephone customer service, meeting deadlines, eliminating mistakes from documents, etc.)?

- Can you think of ways you might get better at __________________ (specific area needing improvement?)

- What might help increase your effectiveness at __________________?

- When you consider your performance at (specific area needing improvement), what skills might you improve?

When you want someone to talk about why they did something...

- Help me understand your decision making process...

- Help me understand your reasons for approaching the situation in that way...

- Can you say some more about that?

- Can you say more about your reasons for approaching it that way?
How can you create more active participation and involvement in the review? Ask questions to encourage employees to “self evaluate”.

- Overall, how do you feel your performance has been?
- Can you identify one or two areas you feel you have excelled at, or projects you’ve been involved in that have been great successes?
- Are there any areas where you feel you could improve?
- What would help you improve in those areas?
- What things do you feel have gotten in the way of improving performance?
- What do you need from me?

It is important for managers to remain curious and ask well-phrased questions which guide employees to look at their own performance and work behavior. Here are a few guidelines regarding the use of questions:

**Don’t ask questions when you are not prepared to hear the answers:** Sometimes people ask questions but are willing to accept only a specific answer. When you ask a question, you have to be willing to consider whatever responses you get and not overreact.

**Questions that start with “why” tend to make people feel defensive:** You can replace why questions with phrasing that tends not to cause that reaction. For example, rather than asking, “Why are you late so often?” try, “Are there any particular things that are getting in the way of arriving at work on time?” Notice the difference in feel.

**Don’t use questions to say things indirectly:** For example, “Don’t you think you should be more diligent in completing your work?” isn’t really a legitimate question. It’s a rhetorical question or your opinion dressed up as a question. It will be heard as “I want you to be more diligent in completing your work.” Questions used to mask statements, opinions or requests create mistrust.

**Avoid compound questions:** A compound question consists of several parts: it’s actually several questions in one. Compound questions are confusing and tend to result in low-quality responses. Here’s an example: “Is there some reason why you have been late on many Fridays and why you tend to leave early on Wednesdays?” That’s two questions and you’re not likely to get good answers to both. Separate the issues and make your questions simpler and more specific.
Chapter Two – Preparing for the Review as an Employee

Performance reviews are for you, the employee, and about you! Performance reviews are an opportunity for employees and managers to have a “year-in-review” conversation. This is a two-way conversation where employees receive feedback on how well they performed over the course of the year and begin to focus on the future. It’s also an opportunity for employees to share their needs for coaching, feedback, and professional development with their managers.

How can I Prepare for my Review?

Self evaluations are often seen as a painful process; however the performance review conversation is time with your manager to talk about you. Your performance review conversation is less about last year and more about the future. You can’t change your past performance but you can impact the future. So what did you learn? How did you grow? What would you do differently? What did you feel really good about? What do you need from your manager?

Self evaluations allow employees the time to reflect and prepare for the performance review conversation. They help to ensure that employees and managers are on the same page in regards to performance. Self evaluations also help employees identify:

- Their most important job responsibilities
- Areas of excellence
- Opportunities for growth and development
- Areas for professional growth
- Where the employee fits into the university and department vision

As you begin to prepare for your review ask yourself, “What would make my performance review conversation more meaningful and helpful?” It’s important to approach the conversation with positive thoughts and to be curious. What, if anything, is missing for you from this conversation” Perhaps you would like more concrete ideas about how you can develop and grow. Or you would like a better understanding of your managers’ expectations. Or maybe you are trying to build a stronger relationship with your manager. Think about your goal of the performance review conversation and make sure you share it with your manager so they are prepared as well. Be candid and honest and be prepared to ask your supervisor open-ended questions that will help you understand your supervisor’s thinking and perspective.
Questions to Help Employees Prepare for a Review Conversation

- How can I get a handle on what I’ve accomplished this year? What I haven’t? How do I share this information with my manager in a way that will benefit me?

- What are my needs for coaching, feedback and professional development? How can I communicate these to my manager in a way that he/she will hear it?

- What can I do to collaboratively plan for my professional development with my manager?

- What specific actions can I take to get more regular feedback from my manager over the next year?

- What do I do well? (accomplishments and examples of successful performance)

- What would I like to do better? (goals and examples of where your performance could have been better)

- What would I like to learn? (goals)

- What responsibilities would I like to take on? (goals)

- What resources do I need to do my job better? (development)

- Did I meet my goals and/or projects from last year? If no, why not?

- Do I have feedback from customers that I can share with my manager?

- What do I like best about my work?

- What is most challenging for me?

- What would I like to learn?

- What could I do to improve my rating in this area next year?
Sharing the Self Evaluation

A good conversation is one where we are able to participate verbally, non-verbally and as an active listener. Below are basic communication skills that will help you as you prepare to take part in the review conversation.

“"I" messages are an excellent form of communication. They can help you express your thoughts about your performance, both what you do well and what you could do better. They are also useful in asking for what you need.

What I do well:
“When I finished the benefits project, I felt really proud of myself. I learned much about using a database that will help me in the future.”

What I could do better:
“I really struggle with being on time to work. When I’m late, it makes me feel rushed and start the day off badly. I’m going to try to get to bed earlier, so I can be here on time every day.”

What I need:
“When you correct my performance in front of others, I feel embarrassed. It really makes it difficult for me to keep trying. I would appreciate receiving constructive feedback in private, rather than in front of my peers. What do you think about what I’ve said?”

After the conversation, take time to reflect on the feedback you’ve received and think about how to apply it. Continue to ask for feedback and to offer feedback on a regular basis.