

Turn Good People
Into Great Employees

Performance Reviews That Work

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PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT



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Turn Good People Into Great Employees

Performance Reviews That Work

Few employees actually look forward to getting their performance reviews.

Why? Perhaps it's because so few managers look forward to giving them.

But it doesn't have to be that way.

The performance review is one of the best tools a manager has to fine-tune an employee's performance. Done right, these regularly scheduled recaps of the day-to-day engagements between managers and employees can boost morale and productivity.

Whether they are annual reviews or more frequent mini-reviews, the best ones include a plan for employees' continued professional growth.

Plus, they're not about money. Raises are about money.

They're not about filling out forms. Audits and inspections are about filling out forms.

The review – or appraisal – is about feedback. It's a real conversation between the manager and employee about the meaningful aspects of the job and the relationship between the two of them. It's a concise recap of what's gone on before and what the employee needs to focus on in the coming months. And it's based on the regular feedback employees have gotten throughout the year.

It's not a time for surprises.

If a manager has saved things up for a year and then springs them on an employee during the review, the performance review won't be helpful. In fact, it'll probably do more harm than good.

And for managers who only see performance reviews as a way to document performance, they've probably lost the battle before it's begun.

Going through the motions of an annual performance review is like dieting one day out of the year and wondering why you're not losing any weight.

Personnel development is one of the keys to every successful organization. Yet despite their importance, performance reviews remain the one critical development area where managers fail. And most of them say they don't get enough help from their organizations to do them properly.

Human nature doesn't change

Why are reviews fraught with emotional snares and pitfalls?

Most employees are just like anybody else - they don't like hearing about their shortcomings.

It's human nature.

It's very uncomfortable seeing your shortcomings in writing and then stored away in a file someplace.

The truth is, most managers don't enjoy bringing up those shortcomings either.

Which means honest feedback - the only kind that matters - seldom happens. It requires a balance of candor and sensitivity, and that's where many managers fall short.

With the normal pressures of the day-to-day workplace, not many managers can pull it off.

Why performance reviews fail

The main reason performance reviews fail: Most managers haven't properly prepared for them.

Many times, the manager has failed to engage the employee day to day throughout the time leading up to the review.

Then the manager fails to think through how to write a review that sets attainable goals for the employee and makes the job meaningful.

Result: The manager fumbles through the review, creates confusion and sends the message that the review wasn't that important to the manager either.

But there are other reasons reviews fail. They include:

1. The manager and employee are friends and cannot separate their friendship from the manager/employee relationship.
2. The employee is hearing negative feedback for the first time during the review. Employees should never be surprised by the information they're given during the review process.
3. Reviews are scheduled only when employees are struggling and facing possible termination. The employee already sees the review as the "enemy."
4. The review is sugarcoated for whatever reasons and doesn't truly reflect the employees' work/position/abilities.
5. Some employees get reviews and others never do.
6. Goals and expectations are not clear or realistic.
7. Managers try to measure performance in abstract terms, such as attitude, motivation or dependability, and ignore concrete measures.

Where to begin

Performance reviews should be viewed as aids to workers' professional development. Some employees and positions need reviews more frequently than others.

It helps to remember that an appraisal does not need to follow a rigid system or be a complete summation of everything involved in an employee's performance.

Instead, the review can be a forum for selective feedback the manager deems appropriate to the circumstances.

Some helpful guidelines

The first rule of thumb for managers: Avoid comparisons to other people.

Instead, focus on the individual, giving an honest assessment of what went right for that person, and what you think were the most important things that could have been done better during the period being reviewed.

For instance, it should never be: "You only do six of these a day, and Beth does 10."

Instead: "You do six of these a day. I'd like to find a way to build you up to eight, or even 10! What would you think of that? How do you think we could help you get to that?"

Give thought to focusing on what should happen for the employee to succeed and for that success to make a significant contribution to the growth of the individual and the organization.

Granted, it's always challenging for managers and supervisors to find the time and energy to conduct such individualized reviews.

Just remember: The payoff comes in terms of employee motivation, retention, better communication and attainment of personal and company goals throughout the year.

The timing

For employees who have been with an organization for a year or more, the exact timing of the review is best left to the discretion of the manager.

In many cases, though, reviews are done annually or around the employee's anniversary date.

However, managers and supervisors probably shouldn't be dogmatic about the timing.

There may be some exceptions.

For instance, a manager may conclude that a review is not needed for a variety of reasons, including:

1. The manager does not have enough skills to do a meaningful review, or
2. There are no expectations of a significant benefit to the company or the employee as a result of the review.

It pays to keep in mind that the goal is to give the employee a meaningful review that will set him or her up for success in the immediate future. Having a review by a certain date is not the goal in and of itself.

Responding in a timely fashion

Also, a review should generally be done if an employee requests it and a reasonable amount of time has elapsed since the last review.

Delaying reviews for no apparent reason, or simply because the manager is "too busy," is the quickest way to sabotage a review before it even starts.

For most organizations, personnel development is one of the highest strategic tasks that managers and supervisors can undertake. Good managers should try to take the time to respond in a timely manner to an employee's natural question: "How am I doing?"

First-year employees: Mini-reviews

For new employees, it's good if a manager does an abbreviated review after the first three months and again at around six months.

Performance reviews are not Performance Improvement Plans

A performance review should not be confused with a Performance Improvement Plan, also referred to as a PIP.

The PIP is a tool used in many organizations to address specific performance problems. It's needed if the problems are serious enough and are recurring in a way that the employee's job may be in jeopardy unless they're remedied in short order.

Ongoing feedback: It bears repeating

As mentioned earlier, performance reviews should not be seen as a substitute for ongoing and productive verbal feedback that managers and supervisors should provide to subordinates on a daily basis.

It is more effective if managers do not "save up" criticism during the year to hit an employee with at performance review time.

Otherwise, employees will feel ambushed.

Preparing for the review

In organizations that give reviews regularly, there is almost always an anticipation period leading up to it.

If employees expect good things, they will generally remind the manager/supervisor that their anniversary and/or review date is approaching and request to set a time.

In those instances where the employee might not expect a favorable review, he or she might approach the review with trepidation and try to "hide," conveniently forgetting that their review is even due.

Managers might want to consider giving the employee some time to work on current problems before they schedule a review in those cases.

Once a manager recognizes that a review is upcoming, it is generally a good idea to get with the employee and set a date.

This gives both parties adequate time to prepare.

Employee preparation

The employee should be given a copy of a performance review questionnaire (see the sample near the end of this Essential Insight) and be prepared to answer the questions on it.

The questionnaire is used to spark thought and introspection on the part of the employee.

Some employees feel compelled to write out answers to the these questions. But responding to the questions in writing need not be mandatory for the questionnaire to be effective.

All that's required is that the employee be prepared to discuss his or her answers to the questions and engage in an open and fruitful dialogue with the manager/supervisor conducting the review.

The questionnaire is intended both as a conversation starter and to uncover information appropriate to the review process.

Always check past reviews

The manager should always check the employee's most recent written review to make sure that areas of concern identified then were addressed and that priorities and goals were met.

If those goals were not met, the manager needs to determine why (for example, company priorities may have shifted), and what, if anything, should be done.

Determining the priorities

The most challenging part of any review is deciding which two or three main points are to be addressed.

These may be issues that need to be corrected, or they may merely be developmental points that will help the employee step up to the next level.

It's always a good idea to write out a draft of the review (and check it with a member of senior management). Writing things down helps to assure that the main points are being addressed.

It's also a good way to make sure that the review doesn't get sidetracked into other areas causing the principal issues to be ignored.

Since the main purpose a written draft is to help focus the manager's thoughts, the draft itself shouldn't be shared with or shown to the reviewee in advance.

That could leave the person with the impression that everything is predetermined and that nothing he or she may say will make a difference.

Sitting down face to face

While there are no hard and fast rules, the verbal portion of the review should last about one hour or less.

Dragging it out any longer could have the effect of diluting the main focus of the issues you are trying to center on.

In the case of newer employees being reviewed during the first three months of their employment, a half-hour should be sufficient. There probably isn't that much to talk about at that point.

During the face-to-face discussion, it's a good idea to take notes that will help you better construct the final written review document.

Directing the discussion

The performance review questionnaire is designed to help prepare the employee for the interview. It will help uncover:

- The employee's self-evaluation of the job he or she is doing.

- What he or she feels best about in the job (this can give managers a good idea on specific strengths and how to best use the talents of the employee).
- What the employee feels he or she needs to improve on.
- If there are any hidden frustrations with anything to do with the job (sometimes they're easy to remedy; sometimes they aren't but they provide an opportunity to explain the rationale behind certain company policies).
- What the employee's own goals and aspirations are for the immediate and medium-term future.

Giving good feedback

It's always best when employees are encouraged to find ways to solve their own problems and accept responsibility for the results.

However, good managers can – and should – provide help and insight.

At each point along the way during the oral part of the performance review, the manager should give feedback to the employee as to the manager's perception of the issue being discussed.

Don't be surprised to learn there are considerable differences in perceptions of the employee and the reviewing manager.

Most employees naturally tend to think very favorably about the way they do their jobs, while it is the role of the manager/supervisor to put everything in perspective and keep employees reality-focused.

Remember: People tend to see what they want to see.

Two key questions

However, if there is a vast gap between the employee's favorable self-evaluation and a manager's critical appraisal, something is very wrong.

In these instances, good managers look at themselves first and ask:

Did I do a good enough job during the year of communicating responsibilities?

If those job duties were successfully communicated to the employee, then the next question a manager should ask is:

Did I do a good enough job expressing dissatisfaction and the need for improvement with the appropriate aspects of this employee's performance?

The goal is to apprise the employee of management's thinking on the most important aspects of job performance and to get the employee to understand the reasons for that judgment.

Complete agreement may not be possible at all times, but it is a good goal to strive for.

Managing expectations: What's the next level?

It's important to manage expectations carefully. For instance, it's not uncommon for employees to say during a performance review that they want to move up to the next level or into management.

But no employee should be pushed into or invited to the next level if, in the opinion of the manager, this clearly is not appropriate.

That is a recipe for failure.

In the most successful organizations with seasoned, engaged managers, employees tend to be more impatient about the rate of desired progress.

They want to go further faster.

It is a good manager's role to instill a sense of realism and manage expectations. The employee needs to continue to feel fulfilled and challenged even though the ultimate goal is not immediately achieved.

That's not an easy balancing act.

No resting on laurels

On the other hand, even the best employees who've just gotten a favorable performance review might think it's OK to simply continue on as they are. In a few instances that might be alright. But generally, people need to continue to grow professionally in some manner.

Remember: It's OK to stretch good people – they'll feel most satisfied when they are busy with productive tasks. Steady feedback will key in a good manager if he or she is pushing too hard.

Disengaged people who do not see a clear career path will stagnate. Their performance will usually decline, and they may well become so disillusioned that they fail to see how they fit into the organization.

At the end of the verbal review, the manager/supervisor often sets a target date for getting together again with the employee to go over a written review and conclude all other matters.

Separate the review from all compensation questions

A review is an opportunity for a candid two-way exchange of views on the employee's performance and his or her place in the organization.

If salary considerations are combined with the review, it can often make the employee unnecessarily defensive.

The other reason is to avoid a strict "work for pay" atmosphere. In other words, it's best to avoid a situation where the employee says, "I'll do more ... " or "I'll do better ... if you pay me more money."

It's better if the employee wants to do more or do better because he or she cares about the work and wants to improve professionally.

For those reasons, it's usually best to separate the performance review from any salary discussion. The performance review should always be done before any salary discussions.

Revising the final draft

After the verbal review, it's time to go back over any notes and the initial draft.

Make appropriate changes/additions/deletions on the basis of what was discussed and decided earlier.

When writing a final draft, it helps to use some of the employee's own words in the document about the issues that were discussed. That way the employee sees that he or she was listened to. This will also help get greater buy-in down the road.

Get employee input

In an ideal situation, the employee agrees with the review and the document is quickly finalized.

The employee keeps the original, a copy is put in his or her file and the appropriate department head also gets a copy.

But sometimes, the employee might ask for a minor change in wording. If such a change does not substantially alter the meaning of the document and the focus of the review, it's probably a good idea to accept the suggested change.

This shows a willingness on the part of management to listen and sometimes negotiate on points of importance. It also shows the manager is approachable and fair.

Disagreements

On rare occasions, an employee may not agree with the review at all and no minor changes can satisfy him or her. In these instances, the manager's review should stand and go unchanged into the personnel file.

It's usually OK to allow the employee to insert another document into the personnel file with his or her own comments about the review.

Be sure not to coach the employee in any way. For instance, if the employee submits a largely incomprehensible document, file it as is.

Of course, in those extremely rare cases when manager/supervisor and employee are not on the same page at all, there are larger problems that no performance review can remedy.

The written text of the review is important and should be reviewed by a department head to ensure it uses the right tone and the right themes and is in accordance with the goals of the department and the company.

Organizing the written review

Generally, a written performance review should consist of several different sections.

Good Points/Strengths

This first section should contain a series of brief summations of what the employee has done well during the past year. It should include all significant successes and progress in different parts of the job.

Several of these positive points may come from the employee's own words. During their self-evaluation in the verbal part of the review, employees will probably have listed what they are particularly proud of.

Be sure to use some of those to round out the "Strengths" section.

Praising behavior you want to see repeated

It's a universally recognized management strategy to praise the kind of behavior that a manager would like to see repeated.

So, if there's something to build on, by all means mention it among the good points.

Focus first on the good points that are important to achieving organizational goals.

Things like "your desk is very neat" probably aren't worth mentioning in a review. It's doubtful that such a quality will substantially contribute to the achievement of company goals – unless there is a larger, related issue with the employee's poor organizational skills.

Try to couch good points in higher-level terms, and try to use words and terms from core organizational principles and values – every opportunity to reinforce these values and principles should be used.

For example, it is better to say: "You have embraced the core company value of continuous learning by mastering that new software program and teaching it to other colleagues" rather than "You did well teaching software program X to department Y."

Consider this anecdote of the medieval traveler who came upon a group of stone masons at work beside the road and asked them what they were doing.

The first workman replied: "I'm cutting these stones." The second said, "I'm making sure this wall is straight."

But the third said, "I'm building a cathedral."

Performance reviews are an important tool in helping employees see that they're not just performing individual tasks - they are building cathedrals.

Use positive language!

Strive to capture actions and attitudes positively. For example, do not praise someone for "not getting into a rut."

Even though the intention is positive, this may reinforce the thought on the part of the employee that he or she may be close to being in a rut.

It would be much better to say: “You are continually finding new and fresh ways of approaching customers.” That’s the kind of praise that gets people to repeat the desired behavior.

Setting goals

Even if the employee achieved all the previously identified goals, try to avoid phrases that would indicate that he or she has “arrived” and has nothing further to achieve.

It is better to keep the next goal in front of people.

For example, do not say or write: “Your production jumped 10% and you have met all expectations.”

The employee would be right to think there is nothing further to be achieved. Instead, try: “Your production jump of 10% in the past year was very gratifying and should be an important stepping stone to getting you up to the 15% level – or even higher – next year!”

This keeps the next goal in front of the employee’s eyes.

Areas for improvement/development needs

Spurring improvement among employees is where a manager’s skills are tested most. It’s the one part of any worthwhile performance review that should not be shortchanged.

Establishing accountability and responsibility

This section of the review should cover the area(s) where the employee did not do so well.

But how these points are put forward is extremely important.

Properly phrasing shortcomings can mean the difference between an employee accepting responsibility and accountability for his or

her work, and agreeing to embark on a campaign to improve, or an employee becoming defensive.

Remember: There is little to be gained from a mere enumeration of failures. This will depress the employee, may provoke defensiveness and hostility and may even engender further failures.

Fostering a “can-do” attitude

Normally, it is better to focus on specific actions that are the most likely to correct the past situation.

The aim is to have the employee walking away from the review with a sense of responsibility for past shortcomings, but at the same time with a newly energized feeling that he or she can and will do better in the future. They should also see clearly that help will be available.

For example, do not write or say: “Your production fell 10% last year, and you need to raise that this year.”

This will merely put the employee further in touch with the negative feelings he or she is no doubt feeling already.

Also, this kind of general criticism gives people no ideas on how to improve.

Instead, try something like: “We all agree that raising production 10% will be the main priority for the coming year. At times like this, it’s best to fall back on all tried-and-true quality control methods including: (then list those methods specific to your organization and that particular task or area.)”

Establishing accountability in a positive fashion is the difference between creating hope or despair.

It is important that the effort to insert positive language into the review not be confused with sugarcoating the review.

Good managers do not gloss over deficiencies. Instead, deficiencies must be faced head-on, as long as the manager can help point to the way for the employee to get out of the situation.

Avoid language that invites arguments

When discussing deficiencies and making suggestions for improvement, avoid qualifying phrases like “I think that”

This merely weakens the statement that will follow and may even invite an argument.

For instance: “Well, that’s what you may think, but actually I think ...” Instead, it is better to state the manager’s perception as fact. That’s why managers are put into their positions – to make these kinds of judgment calls.

Determining priorities

Even when there are specific areas for improvement, there should always be new priorities for the employee for the coming year.

There’s always more to do!

In advance of the review, think about what the employee could do better in the future. What else the employee might do – either in addition to the tasks being done at that time, or in an upward move to higher-level tasks, or in a lateral move to re-energize the person and prevent boredom and stagnation.

Using the questionnaire

The sample questionnaire included near the end of this Essential Insight asks employees if there are any specific wishes, ambitions or aspirations that the manager should be aware of.

If their own ambitions match the manager’s assessment of their talents and potential, this is the time to talk about future development and agree on new challenges to be undertaken.

A recap of that part of the conversation can then be put in writing in this part of the review.

Avoid pushing all employees into management or supervisory roles with questions like “Where do you want to be in a year or two?”

These types of questions imply that they should aspire to a promotion, and this may not be appropriate for all.

Aligning organizational goals

Always strive to create the greatest possible alignment between the employee's priorities for the coming year and the organization's goals and priorities.

Creating new priorities and new responsibilities for the sake of busywork does not add value to the organization or to the employee.

People will see right through it and will resent rudimentary tasks that contribute little to their professional growth.

It is best to limit the new priorities for the coming year to no more than three items the employee can truly focus on.

If the list grows beyond that, the real priorities will inevitably be diluted.

Remember: The written performance review isn't necessarily a verbatim recording of everything that was said during the verbal review session. For example, it can be agreed during a verbal review that an employee will increase production. But this does not necessarily have to be put in writing if there are more important growth issues to be documented.

The general assessment

Written performance reviews should always include a few paragraphs explaining the manager's general assessment of how the employee is doing.

It works best when managers take some latitude as to the content of this part. The assessment requires a general judgment on performance during the past year and a call to action for the future.

Focus on outcomes

A good review always focuses on what the manager wants the employee to take away from it.

The review should make employees feel good about their service to the organization. An employee should also believe he or she has a good possibility of achieving success - even when that includes the correction of past problems.

The written review should lay out a clear career path and let people know that their work is appreciated by their colleagues, their manager(s) and the organization.

Managers may want to use some of these exact words (when they are true) to make employees feel good about themselves, their work and their employer.

It's good to characterize the review by saying something like "This is a mostly positive review ..." or "You've had a very good year"

Remember: Be careful with superlatives - since managers want people to have an even better year next year. For instance, it can never be "the best ever ..." since that's always yet to come.

Looking beyond one year

For longtime employees, it is always good to look at the past year in the context of previous years. For example, one year of recovery from a deep valley in performance isn't enough to warrant a pronouncement that all problems have been solved.

Praising just one "comeback" year too highly may inadvertently lead people to do less than their best in the following year so they can compare favorably the next year.

Fostering positive feelings

When the employee is a keeper, do everything possible to get him or her in touch with their positive feelings about working for the organization.

A good way to do this is to build on what they already said in the review about liking the job and the people they work with.

To be able to do this and insert the appropriate phrases in the written review, it is helpful during the verbal review to ask the employee what he or she likes best about the job and then repeat that language.

If there is substantial doubt about the desirability of the employee's continued service, a Performance Improvement Plan should be implemented.

Don't forget the personal touch

It is OK to express, even in writing, personal appreciation for a job well done and working well together.

However, managers must remember that the review should come across as being about the employee being reviewed.

It's about the employee - not about you as the manager. Avoid phrases that may unintentionally reinforce your authority or superiority over the person.

For instance, avoid "I have never seen an employee who responds so well to change." That's about the manager. Instead, try "You respond to change better than any other employee."

Performance Review Samples

The following pages include a Sample Questionnaire and four examples of written evaluations.

- **Sample Questionnaire:** A list of eight questions managers should share with employees prior to the actual face-to-face review. These carefully worded questions are meant to help spur thought on the part of employees about where they've been, and where they'd like to be headed, in your organization.
- **Four Examples of Written Evaluations:** These offer actual language you can use when assessing employee performance. The true value of these four examples is that each has examples of the kind of language that helps a manager set the stage to improve an employee's performance in the coming months.

Remember: These are not one-size-fits-all documents because the needs of each individual employee are different. But by incorporating the essential elements of a performance evaluation as described in this report, coupled with the sample documents provided in the next few pages, you will have the foundation for a review process that both the supervisor and employee will find meaningful.

Sample questionnaire

[Name of Organization]

Performance Evaluation Questions

From time to time, it is our practice to hold performance reviews. These reviews are not intended as “report cards” – rather, they are a chance for us to evaluate together where you have been, how you are doing and where you are going.

Part of what makes these reviews valuable is your preparation. The more thought you put into the process, the more you get out of it. Please evaluate the following questions.

1. What are your job responsibilities, as you understand them?
2. Rate and evaluate how you are doing in each area.
3. What aspect of your performance are you most pleased with?
4. On what aspect of your performance do you think you need to work hardest in the coming months?
5. What skills do you want to improve most on and how do you plan to do it?
6. What is the one thing you are happiest about in your current work environment?
7. What is the one thing you are unhappiest about and would like to change?
8. How are we doing in satisfying your needs?

Optional additional question:

Are there any specific professional aspirations, hopes or ambitions that I should be aware of as your supervisor?

Four examples of written evaluations

1. REVIEW OF A VERY PROMISING JUNIOR EMPLOYEE

(Given at six months, this review is designed to push an employee to stretch self)

TO:

FROM:

RE: Performance review

DATE:

Here's a summary of what we discussed at the performance review last XXXXX after your first six months here:

Strong points:

- Exceptional skills: Be specific. For example: Excellent eye for detail; Top-notch analytical skills; Impressive phone skills, etc.
- Good skills: Be specific. For example: Good with new customers; Good with understanding data, etc.
- Valuable participation in meetings.
- Sense of ownership for your job.

Emerging skills to build on:

Time management. You know that if you are to take over full responsibility for your area, you'll have to become more productive. The best way to do that is by developing the mental discipline to force yourself to determine what the focus of each day should be. Once you've mastered the skill of deciding priorities, you'll be best positioned to identify the tasks to get you there.

Attention to detail. You've made good progress to control some excess sloppiness in your own work, which had the unfortunate

effect of making your work appear of less quality than it was. You still have a way to go. You know what you have to do: Concentrate harder on how you present information to other departments and look over your own work one more time with a critical eye.

Continuous learning. You're impatient to take on more responsibility faster, but there are good and bad sides to impatience. Ambition is fine, but your present priority is to get the most learning out of every phase of the training process.

Concepts of which your understanding is still in the beginning stages:

Packaging and "selling" the essential information. You have not been able to consistently develop ways to lure more potential buyers. Watch how the experts (your peers) do it and emulate them.

Core values. One of our core values is collegiality and freely giving of ourselves to others to help them improve their performance without regard for rank or hierarchy. We don't hide our talents. You seem to be largely unaware that you make the impression on some people of being somewhat introverted and shy. But you have a lot to offer to others. Don't be afraid to reach out, make contact with and extend a helping hand to others.

Customer focus. You have embraced our long-term strategy to effectively create customer loyalty. You've recognized it is a step-by-step program and have approached it in a manner that will best position you to take customer focus to the next level.

General assessment:

You are well on the way to meeting and in some areas exceeding the expectations we had of you as to where you would be after one full year with us. We have every reason to believe that after your first year, you will be able to function as reliable employee in an important position, producing quality results with as little supervision as possible. There are other things connected with being a valuable employee: liaison with the marketing department, public speaking skills to enthuse others, etc. (Be specific.) But if you

dedicate yourself to a solid learning process, your long-term goal of eventually becoming a manager and training others in our way of producing business results also seems achievable at this point. You will realize that you still have much to learn on principles of management, leadership skills, the big-picture business executive outlook, principles of marketing, etc. You'd do well to concentrate for the moment on becoming the best at what you currently do. That will give you the confidence that will serve as the building block for future success in all other areas.

We'll do everything we can to help you achieve it.

2. REVIEW OF A STRONG EMPLOYEE SEEKING A PROMOTION

TO:

FROM:

RE: Performance review

DATE:

To memorialize last week's performance review, here's a summary of what we discussed:

Strong points:

- Sense of ownership of your work
- Self-starter mentality, initiative for coming up with ideas
- Developmental activities, both in formal and informal settings with selected employees
- Keen awareness of and adherence to processes/procedures
- Strong core-area skills (Be specific.)

Emerging skills you need to build on:

- Keeping pace with technological advances

You have mastered execution of most specific aspects of your work, but yours is a field that is always changing and updating itself. It's incumbent on successful employees to stay abreast of these changes to keep themselves updated and ahead of the technological curve.

- Making yourself results-driven

You take to heart the task of making your work the best it can be, but I don't yet get a keen sense you have etched in your mind it's all for a business purpose - (put specifics here). Make those numbers your personal goal and link your tasks more closely to business results.

- Building and maintaining good relationships

Good relationships are the heart and soul of future business arrangements. These strategic relationships need to be developed and maintained on a regular basis.

Areas that still need some more work:

- Meeting deadlines

Deadlines have turned out to be your biggest challenge. You should be able to organize customer needs and deliver service consistently, not just now and again. Find ways to maintain that momentum!

Action steps:

- Become better at thinking ahead instead of just instinctively acting.
- Activate the left “analytical” part of brain, not just right creative side.
- Read and emulate success stories of others.
- Knowledge of and feel for general management and business principles

You have started to read business and management books, but a sophisticated level of understanding of business principles does not yet consistently show in your work.

Action steps:

- Continue reading management and business books.
- Discuss what you’ve learned, show it in “upward communication” reports.

General assessment:

In many areas you have exceeded our expectations, such as in the remarkable rapport you have established with your co-workers, which is essential to our business success and a model for other

employees here. Still, you're not quite working as independently as possible after one full year. Your own insights as to how you should attempt to get there are right on the mark (applying clear intellectual processes to the structure of your work). Now it's time to do it!

Your eventual goals of assuming more responsibility, and generally as a leader in the department, are achievable with hard work. Managing in a results-driven business is much more than having a nice touch with certain people. It involves first mastering success skills yourself, then showing others by example, taking on initiatives beyond your immediate area of responsibility and finally articulating the company vision through all your interactions. You're definitely capable of getting there and we'll do everything we can to help you.

3. POSITIVE REVIEW FOR A MIDDLE-LEVEL MANAGER

TO:

FROM:

RE: Performance review

DATE:

On the occasion of your most recent employment anniversary, here's a summary of our performance review discussions:

Strong points:

- Good manager – with you on the job, the task gets done, on time and always more than adequately.
- Strong results orientation – you buy into our measurements system and get buy-in from others.
- In the past year you greatly improved your skills in the performance review area and in administering compensation policies aimed at what's best long-term for the company and our people.
- Excellent new recruit trainer – people learn our core editorial values from you and learn them well.
- You're valuable to me because you help me manage resource issues for the entire department.
- You show strong commitment to fostering productive working relations with other departments.
- You're willing to help other areas of the company as an "internal consultant" to cooperate with our quest for further growth in non-traditional areas.

Your areas of priority:

People development: This is perhaps the most important thing we can do as managers for the long-term well-being of the company

and I think you've made remarkable strides in this area during the past year. You've had successes in developing middle-level managers and effectively delegating responsibilities to them; you've built up a solid track record as an excellent trainer in the basics for new recruits; you've managed to create staff stability in your group, while at the same time managing the economic expectations of some of our people and convincingly communicating the needs for and the wisdom of our compensation policy. It's been a happy story for me to see a transformation to a situation where people are actually asking me – begging me – to make you their supervisor. We can never rest on our laurels in this area, and new people will bring new challenges. Indeed, the same people need to be constantly motivated with new challenges, too, but it's been a pleasure for me to see you grow in this area.

Influencing results: It's been a challenging year for all of us in our drive to exceed business results from last year. We have rowed upstream in a soft economy. In the end, results were not acceptable this year in our key areas. We didn't anticipate how deeply external circumstances would affect us, and when we did react, it was too little, too late. We can't look for too many excuses. It doesn't do any good to argue (even if there's a grain of truth in it) that results would have been worse if it hadn't been for our intervention. If we want growth for the company and its people, we can't be satisfied until we find ways to advance the ball. Of late, you've tried to be more creative with different approaches (and encouraged your group to do the same), as we urged in last year's review. Not all those efforts will pan out immediately. Don't be discouraged our customers don't instantly love every new thing you try. And concentrate on high-impact business efforts and don't get too distracted by "packaging" sideshows. We believe quality is king in our business and that's where efforts should be focused.

Job enlargement, extending your influence beyond your group: I know you're ambitious in the good sense of the word and you want to continue to move up with the company. Don't stare yourself

blind on the fact that you've had the same title for the past three years and haven't had another specific promotion. You have become more valuable in the management of the department and to the company as a whole because of the expertise that you continue to acquire. Those contributions have been noted and are appreciated. You make more frequent and valuable contributions in group meetings and are showing real leadership in the so-called Values issues, which are the most important. And you have become a valuable internal consultant to new hires. Our perspective is that you are enlarging your role at the company and it's important to keep that perspective.

General assessment:

As a department, we face three great challenges during the coming year and you will play an important part in all three of them:

First, you will see us as a company display all sorts of non-traditional activities in search of further growth. It's up to us as managers not to show any jealousy toward those new ventures and to do what we can to support them – even if we don't get directly rewarded for our involvement. We will all share in the success if we do it right.

Second and perhaps most importantly, we have to reverse the downward trend in our own business sector and we are looking to your group to show us the way how to do that even in the face of adverse circumstances. It'll take a combination of hard work and getting back to basics with what has worked for us in the past, as well as a substantial dose of creativity and adaptability. It's up to us to show real leadership in not being satisfied with any part of the business going backward. We aren't satisfied until we see growth and advancement.

Thirdly and of almost equal importance is your active collaboration in the important staff renewal we're in the middle of at the moment. We are in the process of setting and enforcing high standards in productivity and quality. We have brought on and will continue to bring on a number of new people of varying levels

of experience and we all need to help integrate them as fast as possible and cheer their advances, without any false sense of insecurity. The more smart, good, strong people we have at the upper levels of the department, the better it'll make us all.

I feel sure the next 12 months will be exciting for all of us and I'm confident there will be a major role for you to play.

TOUGH FEEDBACK TO A NEWER EMPLOYEE

TO:

FROM:

RE: Performance review

DATE:

Here's a summary of what we discussed:

Strengths:

- Organizational skills and time management
- Attitude and work ethic
- Initiative – you're anxious to take on more than what's required and expected
- Clear.

Areas to work on:

Flexibility. You're strong-willed and you believe in yourself. Strong convictions have given you a confidence base that served you well in learning a difficult field and making the progress to date, which is considerable. There is a flip side to strong convictions, however. If they aren't tempered by flexibility, it can result in rigidity. There is no room for rigidity in our culture. We're a flexible company with few rules – the only rule is to try to serve our customers the best possible way. You've exhibited something bordering on rigidity in several ways. On a fairly minor point, you're sometimes hesitant to start over when that's exactly what is needed. We don't believe ironclad rules on who does what make sense from the point of view of serving customers.

We also admire your ambition to be named a Group Leader in short order, but it worries us that you apparently think that you're just about there. You have already told us that we will have to agree to

disagree on this point, but we still urge you to try to understand – and at least respect – management’s point of view. As long as the managerial hand-holding must continue to get your projects into market shape, you have to realize that any promotion is premature. Your focus at present should be on continuing to learn your field, or, in terms of a sports analogy, continuing to chart plays from the bench, understanding why something worked and why something else didn’t, instead of tugging at the sleeves of the coach saying, “Put me in coach, I can do it.” We hold no one back unfairly. We have a crying need for good people. When you’re ready for more responsibility, we won’t hesitate one moment to confer it.

Developing expertise. You learned a lot about your products this past year, but you have still more to learn. You may now understand the market needs, but you don’t always find the best ways to fill them.

Be relentless in your efforts to find out what any piece of info really means to our customers, make the extra telephone call to regulators, consultants or other sources. Learn how business works in general and how business principles apply to your field. Ask in-house experts. Set up a site visit. Go to conferences to rub shoulders with our people. Above all, seize every opportunity to talk to customers on the phone. We’ll help you in every way we can to scale the learning curve faster.

General assessment:

You came to us with little practical experience. We hired you mainly on the raw desire and determination we saw in you. In view of that, you have exceeded our expectations during your first year here. Your eagerness to learn a difficult area has pleasantly surprised us. You’ve made outstanding progress and you’ve shown yourself to be reliable. That’s made you an important part of the team that has shown improvements in the business results. You can be proud of what you have achieved in your first year, but that pride should be tempered by a healthy dose of humility, the realization we all have about how much more there is to learn.

This is a generally positive review that hopefully provides the road map for your journey to scale the next level at our company. Your intermediate goal is to (be specific here). Following this road map can get you there. Over the next few months, we think it's a good idea to open up another avenue of learning for you in an unrelated pub, so you'll be progressing on more than one track simultaneously. That's so you will be able to take advantage of the first realistic opportunity for substantial advancement that arises. We trust you'll tackle any new assignment with the same dedication you've shown so far.

Access our helpful tools, articles
and other Essential Insights at
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