

# Performance Review Guidelines

## Why Reviews Matter

The purposes of the annual performance evaluation process are to promote communication and provide useful feedback about job performance, to facilitate better working relationships, to provide an historical record of performance and to contribute to professional development. Continuous feedback of employee performance is an important aspect of the supervisor's job. By providing constructive feedback on a regular basis, the supervisor is giving the employee information about work performance and, if needed, allowing appropriate time to make corrections in performance and/or behavior. Regular feedback avoids "blindsiding" the employee at evaluation time with an unsatisfactory review.

## Avoid Bias

Some of the following factors may bias performance reviews. It is important to keep these things in mind when preparing for and writing reviews so that each employee's performance is assessed in an objective, consistent and accurate manner.

Halo Effect - all dimensions of performance are rated the same as a single dimension that happened to impress the supervisor either very favorably or unfavorably.

Overly Critical - when a supervisor sets unrealistically high standards, employees may conclude they will never measure up and stop trying.

Overly Lenient - the end result of being overly lenient is the same as being overly critical. If anything goes, why try harder?

Middle of the Road - some supervisors rate all employees within a limited range. Not everyone performs at the same level. Review forms should reflect differences in performance. Evaluations like this are confusing and resented. They prevent the open communication a review should foster.

Recent Performance Error - it is easiest to recall most recent performance. What the review should measure; however, is behavior over the entire span of the review period. Keeping documentation throughout the period and referring back to it will enhance the review and be more reflective of the employee's overall performance.

## Goals Setting

Goal setting is an important part of the review process. Using SMART goal criteria will help you in setting effective goals for the future.

S = Specific

**M** = Measurable

**A** = Attainable

**R** = Realistic

**T** = Time-bound

**Specific:** Goals must be clear and unambiguous. When goals are specific, they tell employees exactly what is expected, when, and how much. Because the goals are specific, the supervisor can easily measure an employees' progress toward their completion.

**Measurable:** What good is a goal that can't be measured? If goals are not measurable, supervisors never know whether their employees are making progress toward their successful completion. Not only that, but it's tough for employees to stay motivated to complete their goals when they have no milestones to indicate their progress.

**Attainable:** Goals must be realistic and attainable by average employees. The best goals require employees to stretch a bit to achieve them, but they aren't extreme. That is, the goals are neither out of reach nor below standard performance. Goals that are set too high or too low become meaningless, and employees naturally come to ignore them.

**Realistic:** Realistic, in this case, means "do-able." It means that the learning curve is not a vertical slope; that the skills needed to do the work are available; that the project fits with the overall strategy and goals of the university. A realistic project may push the skills and knowledge of the people working on it but it shouldn't break them. Devise a plan or a way of getting there which makes the goal realistic. The goal needs to be realistic for where the employee is at the moment.

**Time-bound:** Goals must have starting points, ending points, and fixed durations. Commitment to deadlines helps employees to focus their efforts on completion of the goal on or before the due date. Goals without deadlines or schedules for completion tend to be overtaken by the day-to-day crises that invariably arise.

If improvement is needed in the employee's performance, be sure to explain to the employee what requirements are not being met, and remedial steps that need to be taken for improvement, and the consequences if he/she fails to improve.

Balancing the demands between work and home has become a juggling act for many employees. Some problems are small and easy to resolve and others just seem too overwhelming to handle alone. Sometimes those problems and concerns begin to affect other aspects of the employee's life; for example, jobs, family, or relationships. If an employee's work performance is declining or is not meeting expectations, referral to the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) may be appropriate. The EAP can assist the employee with a variety of issues, including stress management, parenting skills, traits of a health family, coping with grief and loss and balancing the demands of work and home.

The employee and supervisor must acknowledge the review process. By acknowledging the evaluation form, the employee acknowledges having read and discussed the report with the

supervisor. *It does not necessarily imply agreement with the supervisor's evaluation of the employee.* If an employee does not agree with any portion of the evaluation form, as completed by the supervisor, the employee may respond on the comments section.

## **Develop On-Going Performance Communications**

Recognize that performance management is a continuing process to assist employees in enhancing performance and development. On-going feedback should clarify expectations or standards, and perceived performance throughout the year, and bring to light issues that may contribute to or distract the employee from achieving optimal performance. Establishing milestones for periodic monitoring of performance goals and progress reports in objective terms will help keep an employee on target. If goals need to be changed, added or eliminated during the review period, take corrective action when necessary.

It is important to maintain open communication channels with the employee throughout the year to ensure that issues are elevated quickly and resolved in a timely manner. If performance is not meeting expectations during the year, you should work with Human Resources to develop a plan to coach, assist, and/or re-direct the employee's performance.