

10 Secrets to an Effective Performance Review: Performance Review Examples and Tips

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#1 Use performance logs to simplify employee reviews

If you're relying solely on your memory to evaluate employee performance, you are making appraisals far more difficult than necessary. That's why it's best to institute a simple recording system to document employee performance.

Create and maintain a log throughout the year.

Performance logs needn't be complicated or sophisticated.

The key is to establish a system that you will use regularly. No matter how you take notes, make sure to keep them confidential.

Recording performance

The file should include a copy of the director's position description, job application and résumé. Follow these steps for recording performance:

1. Include positive and negative behaviors.

Recording only negative incidents will unfairly bias your evaluation. Make a point to note instances of satisfactory or outstanding performance as well. One way to ensure a balanced reporting is to update performance logs on a regular basis, instead of waiting for a specific incident to occur.

2. Date each entry.

Details such as time, date and day of the week help identify patterns that may indicate an underlying problem before it becomes more serious.

3. Write observations, not assumptions.

In all log entries, be careful about the language you use. Performance logs can end up as evidence in a lawsuit. Your comments should focus only on behavior that you directly observe. Don't make assumptions about the reasons for the behavior or make judgments about an employee's character. Keep out any comments that border on personal comment or prejudice.

4. Keep out biased language.

A good rule of thumb: Any statement that would be inappropriate in conversation is also inappropriate in an employee log. That includes references to an employee's age, sex, race, disability, marital status, religion or sexual orientation.

Don't suggest reasons for employee actions or make connections between events without direct evidence.

5. Be brief, but complete.

Entries should use specific examples rather than general comments.

6. Track trends.

If you begin to see patterns, make notes in the log or flag prior incidents of the same behavior. Bring your observations to the employee's attention only after you've defined a specific problem.

#2 How to conduct positive, valuable assessments

Start a review meeting fully prepared and with a positive attitude.

Approach the evaluation as a mutual learning experience for you and the employee. You can gain valuable insights from the employee, and you have information and experience that can help them improve their performance. Go into the meeting ready to talk, listen and recharge your relationship.

Performance logs:

Include:

- Project assignments and deadlines met or not met
- Your assessment of the quality of an employee's work
- Instances of tardiness, work absences or extended breaks
- Disciplinary discussions and actions taken
- Employee responses to problems and questions
- Positive contributions to the camp's goals
- Details of significant personal interactions

Don't include:

- Rumors or speculation about the employee's personal life
- Theories about why the employee behaves a certain way
- Information about the employee's family, ethnic background, beliefs or medical history
- Your opinions about the employee's career prospects
- Unsubstantiated complaints against the employee

Setting the atmosphere

Performance meetings and reviews are emotionally charged events. You can help reduce the tensions by choosing the right time, place and surroundings. Hold the review in a private, neutral environment. A small conference room is ideal.

Avoid meeting during busy or stressful times for the employee. Ask if the time you've chosen is convenient, and be ready to change if he or she seems hesitant.

Dedicate uninterrupted time to the discussion. Block off sufficient time. You may not need the full period, but it's better to schedule too much time than too little. Create an environment that supports discussion, cooperation and negotiation.

Eliminate as many interruptions as possible. Hold calls or forward them to voice mail. Put a "Do not disturb" sign on the door.

Focus your words on results

Don't get caught up in small talk. False intimacy may increase the employee's discomfort and destroy the meeting's businesslike tone. By the same token, don't make light of the review process or give the impression that you are just "going through the motions."

Emphasize that this meeting is important and you want it to be productive. Provide an overview of the points you want to discuss. Start by discussing the achievements of the year. Give the employee an opportunity to express their greatest accomplishments.

Discuss any problems you've observed with the employee's performance. Address each problem individually, cite specific examples and let the employee respond.

- **Describe the performance problem.** Focus on the employee's results and behavior in specific, nonjudgmental terms.
- **Reinforce performance standards.** Your employee already should know the standards expected from previous meetings. Review them quickly and move on. If the employee challenges the validity of a standard, calmly state your reasons for requiring it, and gently steer the conversation back to the reasons the person didn't comply. If necessary, refer to the employee's job description to confirm the responsibilities associated with the position.
- **Develop a plan for improvement.** Your review preparation should include a plan for helping the employee improve performance. During the meeting, the employee may suggest additional solutions. Agree on a method for improving performance in the short run, and establish some options in case the first method proves ineffective.
- **Offer your help.** Show your commitment by helping them obtain training, resources or other assistance to reach performance goals.
- **Alternate negative and positive comments.** If you have a list of performance problems to address, be sure to insert some positive comments also.
- **Emphasize potential.** Remind employees that they can apply their strengths to their weaknesses.

#3

Turn a negative into a positive:

During performance reviews, use clear, nonjudgmental language that focuses on results and behavior. Notice the positive and negative aspects of these statements:

- “Your work has been sloppy lately.” (*Negative*: too vague)
- “Your last three reports contained an unacceptable number of statistical errors.” (*Positive*: cites specifics)
- “Don’t you bother to proofread anymore?” (*Negative*: accusatory tone)
- “Is there a reason these errors are still occurring?” (*Positive*: gives employee a chance to explain)
- “You’re obviously not a mathematician.” (*Negative*: focuses on the person, not on performance)
- “I know you’re capable of producing more accurate work.” (*Positive*: reaffirms confidence in employee’s abilities)

#4

How to measure an employee’s ‘intangible’ traits

As part of the performance review process, supervisors are typically called upon to evaluate employees on the basis of intangible factors, such as cooperativeness, dependability and judgment. The higher up the organizational chart, the more important those traits become.

Match traits to the job

One key to assessing an employee’s intangibles is to ask yourself which traits are vital for each job. Cooperativeness may be critical for an employee working on a team.

Before performing an employee’s review, critically review the intangible factors included in the person’s performance standards. You should be able to comfortably answer the question: “Why is this employee rated on this measure?” Remember, every performance measure should be rooted in a concrete operational goal.

Employee evaluation form measuring intangible traits

As part of the performance-review process, supervisors may use the following questions to help quantify the intangible qualities of their employees.

PLANNING

1. Does the employee set verifiable short- and long-term goals?
2. Are the employee’s goals in tune with organization’s needs?
3. Does the employee’s planning show sound assumptions reflecting the goals and available resources?
4. Does the employee typically achieve the expected results?

ORGANIZATION

5. Is the employee aware of what is going on in his or her department, including who is doing what?
6. Does the employee know what the department can do in an emergency?
7. Does the employee do a good job of delegating work according to staffs' abilities?

INTELLIGENCE

8. Does the employee see relationships between facts and draw appropriate conclusions quickly?
9. Does the employee learn from experience?

JUDGMENT

10. When confronted with an emergency, does the employee quickly recognize the most important priorities?
11. Does the employee appreciate the financial implications of his or her decisions?
12. Does he or she make decisions quickly, but not hastily?

INITIATIVE

13. Does the employee anticipate what has to be done?
14. Does the employee perform well in the absence of superiors?
15. Has the employee made original suggestions to improve operations?

LEADERSHIP

16. Does the employee explain rather than command?
17. Do people listen closely when he or she speaks?
18. Does he or she deal smoothly with unexpected developments?

#5

Avoid phrases that can sabotage job-review meetings

When you talk with employees about their performance reviews, beware of using phrases that can unintentionally communicate the wrong message, or come across as too negative or personal. Your goal is to deliver reviews that help shape employees' performance.

#6

5 steps to help employees reach their peak performance

1. Define what you mean by high performance.
2. Involve them in setting goals.
3. Keep the goals realistic.
4. Help them become motivated to make work "flow."
5. Avoid micromanaging.

#7

5 warning signs of performance review problems

- 1. Employees are unpleasantly surprised by the ratings.** Performance appraisals shouldn't contain surprises. They should be a summary of comments employees have already heard throughout the evaluation period.
- 2. Ratings are uniformly excellent.** There is no useful feedback in not assessing different aspects of performance effectively.
- 3. Great employees don't receive great ratings.** Look around at the employees who are the strongest. They should be receiving the best ratings. If not, your appraisal instruments aren't rewarding what they should.
- 4. Employees who are dismissed have recently received excellent appraisals.** One purpose of performance reviews is to provide documentation for the organization in case a dismissal is necessary. When the performance appraisal doesn't support a later decision, it can make it more difficult for the employer to defend its actions.
- 5. Productivity generally goes down during appraisal time.** The purpose of performance reviews is to increase productivity.

#8

Writing employee reviews: Steer clear of two common errors:

- 1. Evaluation of attitude, not performance.**
- 2. Evaluation inflation.** Supervisors too often rate mediocre employees as competent; competent employees as above average; and above-average employees as superior. The problem comes when an employee is fired for poor performance yet his history of reviews tells a different story.

#9

Incorporating an employee self-review

One simple way to reinvent performance appraisals is to shift the responsibility for initial evaluations back to your employees. If you ask workers to grade themselves, you'll find (more than likely) that they're harder on themselves than you'd ever be! And this, more than any other exercise throughout the year, may place you and your supervisors in the roles of career mentors and coaches rather than unilateral decision-makers and disciplinarians.

Logistics: It's not simply about asking employees to complete a blank appraisal form. Instead, give them a separate self-evaluation form that allows them to recap their achievements, identify their shortcomings and initiate discussions regarding their future development. A basic self-evaluation form asks three core questions:

- 1. "How do you feel you have performed throughout the review period?"**
- 2. "Which performance areas do you wish to develop?"**
- 3. "What are your goals for the upcoming review period, and what measurable outcomes will indicate that you have accomplished these goals?"**

#10

Sample performance review

Date of Review: 5/1/10

Date of Hire: 3/31/09

Reviewer Name: Jane Smith

Reviewer Title: Program Director

PERFORMANCE ELEMENTS

Quantity Needs improvement

Dave regularly produces a normal amount of work, and he demonstrates a commitment to increasing productivity. However, it sometimes takes him longer than satisfactory to complete work and he too often misses deadlines. Dave works more slowly than the position requires and he does not always achieve his established goals.

Quality Meets job requirements

Dave displays a strong dedication and commitment to excellence. He works hard to improve quality in his own work and promotes quality awareness throughout the organization. The work he produces meets standards for accuracy and completeness. Dave applies the feedback he receives to improve his performance and he monitors his work to meet quality standards.

Job Knowledge Exceeds job requirements

Dave demonstrates significant expertise at his job because of his in-depth knowledge and skills. He is an exceptionally fast learner and able to quickly put new skills to use. He reads and researches extensively, staying on top of current developments that might impact his field. Dave displays a better than usual understanding of the interrelationship between his job and the jobs of others. He effectively uses the resources and tools available to him. However, he needs slightly more supervision than he should to fulfill the responsibilities of his job.

Problem Solving Meets job requirements

Dave identifies most problem situations within appropriate time frames. His information gathering and analysis meet the requirements of his position. Most of the time, he develops several alternative solutions to problems. He usually resolves or minimizes most problems before they grow into larger issues and he participates well in group problem-solving situations.

Communications Outstanding

Dave displays superior verbal skills, communicating clearly, concisely and in meaningful ways. He demonstrates outstanding written communications skills. He listens carefully, asks perceptive questions and quickly comprehends new or highly complex matters. Dave is extremely thorough and proactive about keeping staff well-informed.

Planning & Organization Needs improvement

Dave plans ahead for additional resources. He sets measurable, realistic goals and objectives for himself. He works in an organized manner. However, Dave would be more effective if he prioritized and planned his work better. He could make more efficient use of his time through better planning and organization. Also, Dave often has difficulty integrating changes into existing plans.

Cooperation Exceeds job requirements

Dave is consistently tactful and considerate in his relations with others. He displays an upbeat, positive outlook and pleasant manner under even the most trying circumstances. He is always the first to offer his assistance to his staff and he plays a highly proactive, participative role when working in group situations. Dave is particularly successful at establishing and maintaining good relationships. He takes an active role in resolving conflicts before they get out of hand.

Dependability *Meets job requirements*

Dave responds promptly and reliably to requests for service and assistance. His dedication to the job often exceeds normal expectations. He is usually punctual and he makes an effort to schedule time off in advance. Dave has little difficulty following instructions and responding to management directions. In most situations, he assumes responsibility for his own actions and outcomes. He generally keeps his commitments without delay or follow-up.

SUMMARY

Dave has been in this position since (insert date here), slightly more than 1 year. During that time, he has assumed most of the essential duties of the position and only needs support on some of the more complicated aspects. His focus on quality at times interferes with his ability to meet deadlines. With increased attention to timeliness, I expect that Dave will further improve by the next review.

PLANS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Be wary of taking on responsibilities that aren't yours. Learn to better estimate how long tasks will take. Ask for help if competing demands become overwhelming. Prioritize demands and take them one at a time. Improve planning and organizing skills. Resist handling too many tasks simultaneously. Track precisely how you spend your time.

Employee Acknowledgment

I have reviewed this document and discussed the contents with my manager. My signature means I have been advised of my performance status and does not necessarily imply that I agree with the evaluation.

Employee Signature Date

Reviewer Signature Date