

The Magic of Performance Reviews

Despite its reputation, an **effective** performance review can have magical impacts on an employee's experience within your organization - reproducing the behaviors that make an employee successful, even excellent, and providing needed feedback to help an employee understand expectations, improve performance, and develop trust.

If you are open to the work, and willing to invest the time, effective performance reviews can make your job more fun and fulfilling, help the employee to grow and achieve excellence, and set your organization up for success.

So, as we think about **performance reviews**, what do we actually mean?

What it is:

- **A chance to give clear, direct, and supportive feedback.**
Employees universally want to know how they are doing, what they are doing well, and how they can, or need to, improve to be successful.
- **A mirror for the employee to see and identify strengths and performance challenges.**
We all have blind spots and sometimes can be hardest on ourselves. Hearing what we are doing well, and what is disadvantaging us without our knowledge leads to trust in leadership, and professional growth.
- **An opportunity to set and clarify performance expectations.**
Being crystal clear about why this position exists, what the expectations are, and how they are being measured is critical to employee success. Knowing expectations is the **most** fundamental need for employee engagement.
- **A development tool.**
Almost all employees want to know how they can grow, be more valuable to the organization and achieve success. Performance feedback is the vehicle for growth.

What it is not:

- **A way to punish poor performance.**
Employees should not wait until performance review time to learn that a behavior or action was improper or deficient. Providing immediate feedback to employees regarding unsatisfactory performance is fundamental to helping them succeed.
- **Only a recent look back.**
When doing a performance review, consider the entire time period being reviewed, not just the most recent events.
- **The only time to give feedback.**
Frequent feedback on performance – seeing and responding to people at their best and when they need coaching – in real time, is the secret to performance success.

The Importance of why we do performance reviews:

- To provide a routine opportunity to give feedback.
- To allow two-way communication regarding performance.
- To allow an opportunity to improve understanding.
- To improve working relationships and trust.
- To provide an opportunity for the employee to ask for help.
- Most importantly, to demonstrate an intent to help the employee be successful.

How to Do a Great Performance Review:

In preparing yourself and the employee for the review, there are a few important things to do to ensure employee success:

- **Review the job description.** If you don't have a job description, create one, and if you have one, ensure it remains current and relevant.
Why is this important? It is fundamental to understanding why this position exists. What are the essential functions they are expected to perform? What knowledge and skills are required to be demonstrated? If you haven't articulated these, the employee often flounders and may engage in activities that aren't relevant to the position, frustrating you both.
- **Have clear performance expectations outlined.** Have 3-5 clearly outlined job expectations and measurements for the time period being reviewed. This is important so that both you and the employee can clearly see if they have been successful or not.
- **Know clearly for yourself the skills you will be assessing.** Often, we are interested in both the technical skills being demonstrated, and the behavioral talents employees bring to the table. Technical skills can be taught. Behavioral talents are the traits that people naturally exhibit as a part of who they are and are hard to teach. Here are some examples of both:
 - **Technical Skills may be learned at school or with experience, and include:**
 - Writing, computer skills, technical skills needed to perform the job, driving, operating machinery, etc.
 - **Behavioral Talents are innate interpersonal skills necessary for success such as:**
 - Effective communication, teamwork, relationship building, adaptability, critical thinking, taking responsibility, optimism, openness to learning and feedback, ability to manage self and time, leadership, etc.

Knowing what skills and talents are important to you and the position will help you recognize what to celebrate, and if remedial action is needed, to determine if more technical training is possible or needed to achieve success or is it a behavioral talent for which feedback and practice is needed. And sometimes, it helps you both understand that the person may be miscast in the position, and needs to find another, more suitable role in which they can be successful.

How To Do a Great Performance Review, continued:

According to Marcus Buckingham and Curtis Coffman in the book First, Break All The Rules, here are 4 things to remember when conducting a performance review:

1. **Keep it Simple.** Use a simple format that allows you to concentrate on the difficult work: what to say to each employee, and how to say it.
2. **Have a feedback routine that forces frequent interactions.** Studies have shown that annual performance reviews do not have the intended effect of helping employees be successful. When you meet more frequently, the specifics of a success or a disappointment are fresh in memory and can be responded to in relevant time. Quarterly performance reviews are recommended.
3. **Focus on the future.** Do a review of the past performance period to highlight successes and explore needs. Then move to a discussion about what's next. Questions such as, "What do you want to accomplish in the next few weeks or months? What measuring sticks will you use (how will we measure success?), and, How can I help?" According to the authors, these kinds of conversations prove to be more energetic, more productive and more satisfying to both manager and employee.
4. **Have the employees keep track of their own performance and learning.** Let them know that you will be following up to review the measures and discuss next steps at each review. This creates a dynamic event that engages the employee, rather than having them be a passive participant in the review process.

According to the Leapsome Website, here are 9 key tips to conducting a successful performance review:

1. Have **clear outcome expectations** communicated to the employee, preferably in writing, at the start of the performance period.
2. **Ask for self-assessment.** What do they see as their strengths and areas for improvement? As they reflect on past performance, what are their proud moments, and learning experiences? What are their future goals?
3. Ensure the review conversation is **open and a two-way discussion.**
4. **Share what impact the performance review may have on them** – on their pay, continued employment, promotion considerations, etc.
5. **Share performance feedback frequently.** As noted earlier, you need not wait until the scheduled performance review date to share feedback. Catching employees doing well and giving recognition or learning that a behavior or interaction is disadvantaging them and needs to be corrected should be done in real time, as close to the event as possible.
6. **Give specific examples** of what behaviors you are recognizing and celebrating, or events that are not satisfactory and why a change is needed. Being too vague with feedback is not helpful and can impact trust. Keep feedback work-focused and not a personal attack.
7. **Keep biases in check.** A biased review is an incorrect assessment and will hurt trust.
8. **Choose your words with care.** Avoid accusatory language, generalizations and "you" statements. Use "I feel that" or "I think that" sentences to show empathy and start the conversation.
9. **Tie feedback to actionable recommendations and goals.** Make clear, doable recommendations with a timeline for follow-up.

Common Mistakes to Avoid:

- Rating quantity over quality.
- Not having clear expectations in place before the review.
- Not giving actionable feedback – concrete ways to move forward.
- Focusing only on weaknesses.
- Overwhelming the employee with too much information.
- Not having the best interest of the employee at heart.
- Not documenting the review, including date and signatures.

Ultimately, taking the time to have an open and honest conversation with the intent to help the employee be successful is the whole point of doing routine performance reviews.

Please keep in mind that the important part of the review is the one-on-one conversation, not so much the form. The form is only a tool to support and document the conversation. You can develop any form that you feel meets your needs, and there are lots of examples on the web.

Having said that, in the following pages, I have prepared some examples for you of a skills list, a couple of sample performance review formats for which you can add your own questions, and some open-ended question examples to support you should you find them helpful. Remember, you can design your own tool with your own specific questions. I kept these performance review examples to one page – yours can be as long or short as you need.

Additionally, here are some books that I think are great resources:

First, Break All the Rules by Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman

This book gives a blueprint for what the world's greatest leaders do differently.

The Truth About Employee Engagement by Patrick Lencioni

How to address the three root causes of job misery and improve job satisfaction

Reality-Based Leadership by Cy Wakeman

Cy shares thoughts on how to ditch drama and turn excuses into results.

The Ideal Team Player by Patrick Lencioni

This book talks about how to recognize and cultivate the 3 essential virtues of an employee.

Five Levels of Leadership by John C. Maxwell

Maxwell is a leadership guru who shares info about the steps to great leadership success.

I am happy to talk with you at any time if you have any questions or would like more information. My contact information is:

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Skills List

The following is a list of technical and behavioral skill examples that may be helpful to you as you think about what success in a role requires. This list is not all-inclusive, so feel free to add others.

Remember, **Technical Skills** are skills that can be learned through education and experience. **Behavioral Skills** are innate talents that people naturally exhibit and are difficult to train.

These are **skills that you keep in mind** when hiring for a position, and you look for competency in when reviewing performance.

Not all skills will apply to all positions, so consider the position when determining the skills you consider to be important to the role.

Technical Skills

Grammar Skills	Computer Software	Business Correspondence
Office Equipment	Phones	Web Applications
Social Media	Market Analysis	Accounting
Human Resources	Business Law	Driving/Equipment Operations
Materials Management	Building Trades	Budgeting
Risk Management	Project Management	Quality Control
Data Analysis	Compliance	Research
Scheduling	Recruiting	CPR/First Aide
Data Entry	Training	Artificial Intelligence

Behavioral Skills

Amiable	Collaborative	Collegial
Composed	Conscientious	Creative
Decisive	Dependable	Detail-Oriented
Diplomatic	Direct	Disciplined
Effective Communicator	Empathetic	Empowering
Enthusiastic	Entrepreneurial	Even-tempered
Expressive	Flexible	Good Listener
Helpful Team Player	Honest	Humble
Independent	Insightful	Methodical
Observant	Open to Feedback	Perceptive
Persuasive	Poised	Punctual
Quality-focused	Relationship Builder	Resilient
Secure	Self-reliant	Shrewd
Supportive	Systematic	Tactful
Team Player	Trustworthy	Willing to Learn

Open-Ended Question Examples

For many of these questions, asking them first, and then giving your feedback and observations can be very powerful. Responding to some of the questions with, “Here is what I think”, gives the employee a chance to get needed feedback that we so often crave. You can share with each what your observations are, both to acknowledge and recognize successes, and to offer constructive feedback to help them be successful. Remember, the key to building trust is to be authentic and concrete.

Let’s review your goals. What successes have you had this performance period?

What actions have you taken to achieve your goals?

What do your performance measures tell you?

What do you think you do that makes you as good as you are?

What roadblocks have you faced to success? What efforts have you made to eliminate them?

What has been challenging for you?

What discoveries have you made?

What partnerships have you built?

Let’s talk about your talents. What do you feel your talents are?

What do you enjoy most about your work?

What would your perfect job be?

Conversely, what would you say your nontalents are? These are things that you must work especially hard at, struggle with, or avoid.

How will you move forward and address those things that you don’t enjoy or avoid? How can I help?

Going forward, what are your goals for your role?

How will you measure success?

What information or resources do you need to achieve success in your role?

What do you wish we had talked about that we haven’t already shared?

Performance Review

Employee Name: _____ **Date:** _____

Reviewer Name: _____

1. During this performance period, how have you met your performance expectations? *(They should have specifics such as measurements, timelines, outcomes, etc.)*

2. What were your most impactful successes?

Here is what I think:

3. What were your biggest challenges and learning opportunities?

Here is what I think:

4. What do you feel you need to be successful in this role?

5. Going forward, what will your primary goals be? *(Here is where you establish expectations for the next review)*

6. How will you measure success?

Employee Signature: _____

Reviewer Signature: _____

Performance Review

Date: _____

Employee Name: _____

Reviewer Name: _____

	3 Exceeds Expectations	2 Meets Expectations	1 Needs Improvement
1. Employee has the knowledge, skills and ability to perform their job.			
2. Employee meets established goals and expectations of quality, quantity, customer service, and timeliness.			
3. Employee exhibits good work habits that include proper conduct, speech, and ethical behavior; follows policies regarding attendance, safety and punctuality; and routinely meets deadlines and quality standards.			
4. Employee maintains and demonstrates positive and constructive relationships, i.e. they are a team player, receive constructive feedback well, resolve conflict, and treat others in a respectful manner.			
5. Employee is self-directed, resourceful, and creative in performing job duties; identifies and provides solutions for problems; initiates ideas and works toward improving customer service, business processes and accomplishing results.			

Next Steps/Goals:

By signing this document, the employee acknowledges receipt of the performance review.

Employee Signature: _____

Reviewer signature: _____

About the Author:

Lisa Martin has been immersed in Human Resources and Management for over 30 years. Starting her career as a Sr. Caseworker for the Department of Human Services working with adults and youth, she went on to own and operate a 24-hour restaurant, become a Human Resource Analyst for Mesa County, as well as serving as Vice-President of Human Resources for Hilltop, and Human Resource Manager and now Consultant for Ariel Clinical Services.

She has served in a variety of board positions such as:

- Western Colorado Human Resource Association – Secretary, Vice-President and President
- Habitat for Humanity – Board member, Vice-President and President
- Holy Family School Board member
- Little Creek Homeowners Association – Vice-President, President

She was named Professional of the Year by the Western Colorado Human Resource Association in 2008 and was given the Summit Award for outstanding contributions to HR and business initiatives for the Colorado Chapter of the Society for Human Resource Management in 2012.

Lisa is now semi-retired and provides HR consulting services through her consulting business, Lisa D. Martin HR Consulting, LLC.

She can be reached at lisadm686@gmail.com, and 970-210-5809 if you have any questions or wish to learn more.