

Drafting the Evaluation

- **Note:** If you have an employee who was hired recently, took Family/Medical Leave, shifted jobs/supervisors or was on a performance improvement plan during the year, you will need to take additional steps and follow federal regulations. Please consult your HR liaison.
- Collect information (notes, sample work product, feedback from others, and self-assessment from employee). When incorporating feedback from others, look for patterns and trends. It is also important for the supervisor to agree with/support any feedback from colleagues if it is referenced in the evaluation.
- Performance ratings should be accompanied by narrative feedback that describes patterns and trends of performance, using specific examples to support an assessment. The most frequent problems with evaluations are a lack of specifics or details (too general or too short) and a failure to identify areas for growth or improvement going forward.
- Watch out for unintentional bias when judging an employee's performance, including:
 - Primacy/1st impression: the first impression of someone's work was fantastic or horrible and it is that impression that drives the rating rather than the totality of an employee's actual and recent accomplishments
 - Halo/horn effect: the tendency to rate someone high or low in all categories because he or she is high or low in one or two areas
 - Spillover: the label of strong/weak performer or in/out-of-favor sticks with an employee year to year
 - Central tendency: the habit of assessing almost everyone as average and a tendency not to rate anyone very high or very low
 - Recency effect: the tendency to assess people based on most recent behavior and ignoring behavior that is "older"
 - Leniency effect: the tendency to rate higher than is warranted, usually accompanied by some rationalization as to why this is appropriate (e.g., don't want to de-motivate employee)
 - Inconsistency: different standards are used in evaluation, either across employees in similar positions or across supervisors within a department
 - Opportunity bias: ignoring the notion that opportunity (factors beyond the control of the employee) may either restrict or facilitate performance, and assigning credit or blame to the employee when performance was influenced by opportunity (or the lack thereof)
 - False attribution errors: performance is a function of both the individual and the system he or she works in. Sometimes supervisors act as if the situation is under complete control of the employee and fail to acknowledge the impact that the system had on strong or weak performance

Holding Effective Evaluation Discussions

Sometimes managers & employees have different perspectives regarding performance. This evaluation discussion is an opportunity to ensure you understand (not necessarily agree with) each other's perspective. While the supervisor's judgment determines the performance ratings, it's important for employees to feel acknowledged and that future plans account for concerns & challenges they anticipate facing.

- Schedule the conversation at a time when you can give your undivided attention. Sharing the written evaluation in advance of the discussion gives your employees time to digest the information and come ready to talk.
- Be prepared. Have examples on hand and be ready to explain the rationale behind specific ratings or assessments that the employee might not understand, have questions about, or disagree with. Anticipate areas where there might be very different perspectives about performance.
- The discussion should be a 2-way conversation. Rather than moving lockstep through the evaluation item-by-item, open with a more general question that requires the employee's thoughtful consideration. One way would be to say ... "You've had a chance to read the evaluation. Why don't we start by you telling me how you think the past year has gone?" Then listen as the employee responds and continue the discussion from there. See sample discussion starters on page 3.
- Invite the employee to share his/her perspective or solutions before you share yours. Where possible, build on what the employee has described. This conversation is about doing with them (not to them) and achieving something positive together. See sample discussion starters on page 3.
 - Share your confidence in the employee's abilities – both in areas where she or he has demonstrated capability and opportunities where they can develop and demonstrate their potential.
 - Give credit and acknowledge the accomplishments the employee has achieved during the year. Talk about what helped make them successful and ways to extend that to other work they or colleagues are undertaking.
 - When critiquing performance, be specific and concrete. Frame the feedback within a positive goal and be future/solution focused. Help identify solutions by indicating there will be another chance for the employee to get it right (e.g. "Next time, let's take this approach).
 - Acknowledge when performance is influenced by factors beyond the employee's control (e.g., insufficient resources or time for training in new technology, shifting supervisors and/or priorities during the year, etc.) This includes factors that contributed to poor performance or supported excellent performance. When planning for the future, keep this context in mind.
 - Use open-ended questions to stimulate thinking. Get employees to generate their answers and discover solutions themselves by asking leading questions and exploring answers ("what if ..."). It's ok to be transparent about this "let me ask some questions, share our thoughts and before I/we/you decide next steps or the best approach."
- You can make changes to the written evaluation, including changing a performance rating, if a fact arises during the evaluation discussion that significantly changes the supervisor's judgment about that area of performance. You should not change performance ratings based on the persuasive skills of the employee!

Sample Evaluation Discussion Starters ...

- What has gone particularly well? What have you accomplished? What are you proud of?
- What are you doing that works? What has contributed to those successes? Who/what has helped you do your best work?
- What was challenging this year? What made it challenging? What did you try and how was/wasn't that effective in addressing the obstacles? With hindsight, what could you/we/others have done differently?
- What do you want to continue doing/do more of/do better/do differently to be even more effective?
- What have you learned? How have you changed? What did you do to help you improve in X?
- I'm interested in hearing more of your thinking on (xxxx). I want to understand where you are coming from on this.
- I'm curious about your assumptions here because ...
- Can you tell me more about how you know this?
- I see that differently because ...
- What would success look like?
- What/where can we start?
- How would you tackle this?
- What would this look like in action? Has this been tried in other situations and how did it work? How is this similar or different than other situations?
- What is important to you that is not being addressed by this? Where are you willing to compromise to get other things that are important to you?
- How can we ... (enlist the employee in identifying next steps or solution to a situation)
- What support do you need from me/others to accomplish this? What can I do (as your manager) to help you be as efficient and effective as you can be?
- What do you want to be doing in (x) years? How is what you are doing now getting you there? How can we use next year's projects and work as an opportunity for learning and growth?