

Conducting Performance Management FAQ's

Q. How can I deliver bad news to an employee who is performing poorly?

A. "Bad news" suggests a surprise coming to an employee. There should be no surprises at the final annual evaluation. During the year, a supervisor should be giving feedback to an employee and if performance is unacceptable, that should show up in behaviors and lack of progress on goals throughout the year. Feedback given immediately after the supervisor identified the problem or lack of progress will not be "bad news". It flows from the specific behaviors noted and is not likely to be challenged. However, feedback withheld will always constitute a surprise – which is as unpleasant for the supervisor and it is for the employee.

Q. How can the supervisor avoid or minimize rating errors?

A. As a supervisor, you have final authority over ratings and overall evaluations for your direct reports. To be aware of the most common ratings errors will help you be as fair and objective as possible.

Similarity effect – occurs when you perceive and rate others as you perceive yourself. You judge positively those who most resemble you.

Halo effect – occurs when you rate a person based on one positive attribute. This is too narrowly based.

Leniency error – occurs when you rate everyone at uniformly high levels. This is very common and results from mistaken feelings that positive ratings will encourage better performance or to avoid conflict.

Central Tendency Error – occurs when you give everyone average ratings in order to avoid conflict.

Sequencing effect – occurs when your assessment is influenced by your previous assessment of another employee. Your good or bad feelings about one employee spill over into your evaluation of another employee.

Recency error – occurs when you base an assessment largely on the one positive or negative incident that recently occurred. This ignores the overall performance throughout the period.

First Impression error – occurs when you judge largely on the first impression that you had of the employee.

Contrast error – occurs when you evaluate one employee by contrasting him or her against another employee. Each employee needs to be evaluated individually.

Q. *Can goals be changed throughout the year?*

A. Absolutely. Priorities change, departments and staff retarget their activities and staff can also change. Further, as the year progresses, obstacles to achievement of goals can arise and make the achievement goals impossible. As these circumstances change, the goals may need to be changed or new ones substituted for the old. This is why, ongoing, open and clear communication is critical to the entire process.

Q. *What about personal development?*

A. Annual goals should include developmental goals for each employee. Sometimes they will include improving skills or goal achievement on the job. Sometimes they will involve learning new skills or becoming proficient in new technologies or systems. Sometimes they will include training either internal or external.

Q. *What about obtaining input from others; co-workers, customers, subordinates?*

A. This is perfectly acceptable. Feedback as a concept is very flexible. Where appropriate, supervisors should solicit feedback from peers, direct reports and customers to augment direct and indirect observation. This cumulative data can provide well-rounded and pertinent feedback material. However, an important point to keep in mind is that the identification of which sources of input will be used **must** occur at the beginning of the performance cycle. And under all circumstances the supervisor is the accountable party for final assessment, since he or she is accountable for the department results and neither accountability for results nor accountability for judgment can be delegated to others.

Q. *What if I disagree with my supervisor in the final ratings or other assessment of my performance?*

A. You should note your assessment on the form and if you disagree, include that. The form should be signed by both the employee and the supervisor with a copy to Human Resources.

Q. *I received an overall rating which indicated unacceptable performance. What does that mean?*

A. It means that your performance needs to be improved or you may risk termination. The matter is serious and you should clarify with your supervisor what needs to be done – both in terms of goal achievement and behaviors – to avoid these consequences.

Q. *Isn't this process overly complicated and lengthy?*

A. It need not be. The initial discussion need not take more than one or two hours. Coaching sessions can be as brief as 30 minutes (especially if the supervisor gives feedback on an ongoing basis, when a problem has arisen or the employee is “caught doing good”). And the final meeting can be done in two hours. Altogether then, the whole annual process can be done in less than 6 hours, a small percentage of the 1950 hours an employee spends on the job each year.

The time invested is far less than the time wasted by unproductive behaviors, goals missed and wrongly directed efforts. Moreover, the Conference needs to achieve a great deal in the next few years and everyone is needed to give his or her very best. Improvement in performance, retention of talent, positive morale – these are key outcomes from a properly executed performance management system.