

Performance Reviews



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Many organizations conduct formal performance reviews. Typically, these reviews are completed by an employee's immediate supervisor with little or no input from the employee. The employee is then provided with formal "feedback", at THE annual performance review meeting.

While performance reviews are an invaluable tool for evaluating how employees are doing and for encouraging employees to improve and excel, poorly done reviews are counter-productive and harmful to an organization.

The Laundry List

Some supervisors view the annual performance review as an opportunity to bring out a laundry list of everything the employee has done wrong over the year in the guise of providing "feedback". Communication is one way, and the "feedback" given at the performance review is the first time the employee learns of all the things that he/she has been doing "wrong". Often, the "feedback" is non-specific and simply a reflection of the supervisor's opinions. "Goals" are then set for the next year based on this non-specific "feedback" and with little or no input from the employee.

Everyone is a star

On the flip side, some supervisors rate all employees as "outstanding", regardless of actual performance. These supervisors are uncomfortable with conducting reviews and fear they will be unpopular if they provide any kind of constructive feedback. When this approach is adopted, performance issues remain unaddressed at the expense of the organization's bottom line and the morale of productive employees.

Performance appraisal is a complex and voluminous topic and it is not possible to explore it fully in a blog. However, it is hoped that the following tips will be useful to organizations and supervisors.

Do's

- Before introducing a formal performance review system, ask why your organization needs it and what the organization hopes to achieve, then tailor the appraisal system accordingly. Don't conduct performance appraisals just because everyone else is doing it.
- Research the different appraisal methodologies carefully and pick one that best suits the goals that your organization hopes to achieve. If you do not find any

one methodology that is suitable, design (or hire an expert to design), a system that will work for your organization.

- Train and coach the managers and supervisors who will be conducting the performance reviews so they know what the organization expects out of the appraisal system.
- Train & coach employees on their role in the performance review process.
- Try to implement a review system that allows for meaningful employee input and two-way communication.
- Encourage supervisors and managers to give timely and specific feedback on an ongoing basis without waiting for the formal review. That way, performance issues can be addressed as they arise without the annual laundry list being dumped on an employee at the formal review.
- Provide feedback in a constructive manner. Don't criticize. Remember that the purpose of giving constructive feedback is to improve performance.
- Once legitimate issues are identified, ensure that the employee has the proper tools, training and coaching that is needed to overcome the identified issues.

Don'ts

- Don't generalize or give feedback that is vague. Avoid language such as "everyone says", you "always", you "never" etc. Be specific and provide examples of any concerns that you have. If you provide specific examples, the employee will be able to see and understand your concerns. Vague feedback is meaningless and confusing and will only result in alienating the employee.
- Don't stint on praise. Give praise where praise is due. Again, provide specific examples. Don't just say "you are doing a great job".
- Don't rate all your staff as "exceptional" or "outstanding" because you want to be popular.
- Don't wait for the formal performance review to provide feedback. In order to be effective, feedback must be specific and timely. Telling an employee one year or several months down the road that "everyone is complaining about "x, y & z" is not only useless, it is counterproductive.

For performance management to be effective, feedback (both positive and constructive), should be provided on an ongoing and timely basis.

[learn_more caption="About the Author:"]

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Heather is a lawyer, investigator and mediator, with a unique combination of legal expertise and extensive hands-on human resources management and labour relations experience. Prior to being called to the British Columbia Bar, she was a Human Resources Manager at the University of British Columbia and Labour Relations Advisor to Vancouver Community College.

Heather provides legal advice on all aspects of employment and labour issues arising in the union and non-union context through her law firm, Integritas Workplace Law. Heather also provides workplace mediation services, general human resources support to employers, and workplace investigation services. Heather is a frequent speaker and webinar presenter and regularly contributes articles on workplace issues.

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