



Conducting Effective Appraisals

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While the performance appraisal process isn't exactly a favourite amongst managers, it is helpful to know that there are several different types of performance appraisal strategies to choose from. Knowing there are options available should give you the flexibility to find the right type of appraisal method for each department or even specific employee within your organisation.

Types Of Performance Appraisals

The 360-Degree Appraisal - This method of appraisal involves allowing other employees to fill out a questionnaire detailing their experiences with a specific employee. The feedback of peers can be reviewed by the manager and considered during the appraisal.

General Performance Appraisal - This appraisal method involves on-going communication between the manager and employee throughout the entire year. At the end of the year you'll determine whether the pre-set goals and objectives were met, provide feedback, and set new goals.

Technological/Administrative Performance Appraisal - The technological or administrative performance appraisal focuses more on technical skill than anything else because these employees have specialized tasks. They're judged on specific skills, the amount of work they produce/complete, and a variety of other tasks.

Manager Performance Appraisal - Managers must go through the appraisal process as well. This type of appraisal usually covers both job skill as well as human resource skill, as most managers usually have clients to keep happy as well as a team to keep organised. Most often a manager appraisal will include feedback from team members, usually obtained anonymously.

Employee Self-Assessment - This type of appraisal is one of the most dreaded by employees as no one seems to enjoy rating themselves. Most often the self-assessment is compared to an assessment completed by the manager and then discussion regarding the differences follows.

Project Evaluation Review - A project evaluation review is a great project management tool. Instead of waiting until the end of the year an employee or team is reviewed at the end of each project. This gives them the tools necessary to make adjustments for the next project.

Sales Performance Appraisal - Sales performance appraisals are often the easiest to conduct but the most painful. A salesperson is simply judged on his results versus his set goals and salesmen are often held to their financial goals more than any other section of the organisation. A manager and salesperson must discuss ways to achieve their goals or changes that need to be made to make them reachable yet still realistic.

There are a myriad of different appraisal types and we'll go over each in more detail in the future. Simply walk away today with the understanding that there is no "out of the box" appraisal process you can apply to every member of your organisation. They're all individuals and have to be appraised as such as well!

Preparing For Appraisals As A Manager

In order to conduct effective appraisals it's important to understand the logistics of how the appraisal process works. Your organisation's human resource department should have already taken care of the legalities behind the creation of the review process and is most likely responsible for giving you the formal paperwork for completion. It's now up to you to complete the actual review. Here are a few things to keep in mind during the process.

Don't spring a last minute meeting on your employee

It will likely take you a considerable amount of time to gather the information needed for the review. If you know the review is coming up, your employee should know, too. Give them at least two weeks' notice so that they can prepare their own documentation, if necessary.

Give your employee the opportunity to review themselves

Give them a blank copy of the review form and ask them to complete it and return it to you at least a week before the meeting. Having them answer the same questions about themselves that you are trying to answer may shed a different perspective on your thoughts and opinions regarding the way they work.

Have a good understanding of your employee's job description

This should go without saying, but also relates back to your technical skills and abilities. Do you really understand how your employee's job is done on a regular basis? If not, you need to find out. How can you judge or rate them if you have no idea what they are actually supposed to be doing?

Avoid surprises during your performance appraisal meeting

Do not bring a laundry list of negative issues or problems to the performance appraisal meeting. If an employee's behavior or work has not been up to standard, this is not the time to address or rehash those concerns unless the concern is very recent or you have addressed it previously. Performance appraisal meetings should be positive experiences.

This isn't an all-inclusive list of steps to take when preparing for a performance appraisal meeting, but should give you a firm foundation to start from. I have found that the more prepared I am going into this type of meeting the smoother they tend to go. No one enjoys being reviewed, so your employees will appreciate your efforts to keep the process as painless as possible.

Helping Your Employees To Prepare For Their Appraisal

Now that you understand the best practices behind conducting appraisals, you can really start to prepare and plan for upcoming performance appraisals.

It is easy as a manager to worry so much about our end of the appraisal process that we forget how difficult and anxious it makes our employees. One of the best things you can do as a manager is to give your team members and employees the tools they need to prepare for their own appraisals before they happen.

Here are a few things you can do to help your employees prepare in advance for their appraisals:

Set Expectations

Let your employees know what to expect during the appraisal process. Let them know that the appraisal process involves both the employee and the management team. Your employees should know that they are expected to be prepared at the time of the appraisal – with a clear understanding of their job description, ideas concerning their strengths and weaknesses, and with ideas concerning their projected career path.

Alleviate Fears

Make sure your employees understand that the appraisal process was not created to criticise or put-down their performance. Nothing that happens during the review should be a surprise. If you have a problem with your employee's performance you should have addressed it already, and in the review you should review whether or not the changes you have discussed need to occur. Your employees should understand that their viewpoints will be heard, respected, and taken into consideration.

Self-Evaluations

As tedious as they may seem, having an employee complete a self-evaluation form prior to an appraisal will give you great insight as to what they think of their job. A good employee should be able to honestly evaluate themselves and write out their ideas concerning strengths and weaknesses in certain areas. I can always tell which employees are confident and which are not (or which are terrified of the review process) by the way they complete their self-evaluation forms. Use these forms as a guide when planning your physical meeting.

Set A Date & Time

It's important to let your employee know exactly when and where their appraisal will take place. Most employees know around what time of year their annual appraisals take place so letting them know the date and time a bit in advance will save them a considerable amount of anxiety. It will also give them plenty of time to gather any information they'd like to present.

Choose A Neutral Venue

Choose a private place within which you can hold your appraisal meetings. Don't use your office or the office of your employee. Try to find a quiet conference room and make sure

that your staff knows not to interrupt your appraisal meetings. Your employees deserve all of your attention during their appraisals.

Positioning

Make sure that no matter what room you are in the layout is friendly and welcoming. Try to choose an informal environment and try to avoid sitting face to face or across from one another. If one person sits at the head of the table the other should sit to his right or left, at a 90 degree angle. It's a bit more causal and a lot less confrontational.

Be Friendly

Despite your distaste for the appraisal process, you simply must be friendly, positive, and calming. Your employee, regardless of how great he performs, will likely be terrified of his appraisal. Make sure you smile, open with a positive statement, and use open body language at all time. Make sure your employees know that their appraisal meetings are theirs and they are welcome to add their own input at any time.

Remember, the appraisal process should be looked upon as a tool for growth, not as an opportunity to chastise, punish, or discourage employees. Keep the experience as positive as possible and your employees will thank you later with their hard work and dedication!

What Are The Benefits Of Conducting Regular Appraisals?

I know we have already said that conducting appraisals is a dreaded task, but there are quite a few benefits that, as a manager, you can achieve by having more frequent appraisals and, in the end, your major annual appraisal will go much smoother. Here are a few reasons to consider.

- 1) The more frequently you sit down with each member of your team the more you'll understand exactly where it is in the grand scheme of things. You'll have a better understanding of his goals, strengths, weaknesses, and limitations and will be able to adjust his tasks to focus on his strengths.
- 2) Having frequent meetings will give you the opportunity to identify potential problem areas, giving you the ability to make changes before those problems have a negative impact on the team's overall work and progress.
- 3) Your team members will be more likely to ask for needed help if you open the door and give them an opportunity during which they feel comfortable.
- 4) You will have the opportunity to work together to set realistic training and development goals.
- 5) Your employees won't be as nervous or scared about their appraisal meetings because they won't be as formal and the frequency will make them more comfortable with the entire process.
- 6) Frequent reviews will give your team members a better opportunity to prepare for their large annual appraisal, saving time in preparation.
- 7) The more frequently you work with your team members the more accurate your notes about individual performance will be.

Why not consider a more frequent appraisal process? By implementing regular meetings you'll find that your employees are not only happier and more receptive to the process but will feel as though you care a bit more about their successes and development paths.

Preparing For Your Own Appraisal

You now have plenty of information about how to conduct an appraisal with your team members - but what about when you, personally, are being appraised by your boss? Do you spend time preparing well and laying the foundation for your own success?

Firstly, ask these questions:

- Am I satisfied with my own performance in this appraisal period?
- Have I achieved all the objectives set out for me?
- What went well and what went not so well at my last appraisal?
- What objectives do I need to set for this next appraisal?
- What did I learn from the last time I appraised one of my staff members?

Answers to these questions will assist you in the preparation of your own appraisal.

Let's look at a checklist of ideas that will help you become more confident in what you have to do to succeed in your own appraisal:

- 1) **Understand what the main objectives are and how your performance is monitored** - If you're going to discuss your pay and remuneration, find out what the terms of reference are first.
- 2) **Lay the groundwork** - Your manager should give you adequate notice and guidance on the structure of the meeting. Review your past performance and plan your objectives for the next few months.
- 3) **Focus on key areas** - Discussions should revolve around the key tasks or projects you thought went well and not so well, your overall performance, areas of improvement, plans for future projects and your short and long-term development plans.
- 4) **Ask for specific feedback** - If your boss gives you fairly woolly or generic feedback, ask them to be specific; you want to know exactly what their expectations are. If they say "you need to show more assertive behavior", ask them for examples and specific things you can do and say.
- 5) **Dictate how you can be helped to improve** - Propose your own solutions to problems that may be interfering with your performance. This is a great opportunity to show your boss that things could improve if you could get help.
- 6) **Discuss your current and future priorities** - Your boss might be trying to align company goals and objectives, while you are dealing with day-to-day minutia that takes a lot of your time. Agree what your key priorities need to be to assist your boss achieve their goals as well.
- 7) **Agree goals and objectives** - You can reassess the factors contributing to changes in your business environment. Make sure you are both aiming for the same target.
- 8) **Agree further training and development for yourself** - You should agree a general programme of skills and talent acquisition for yourself that will continue to make you a

valuable team member and asset to your boss. The more you learn and develop, the better chances you have for future promotion prospects yourself.

- 9) **Agree the evaluation and set yourself up for progress** - Make sure your final evaluation is agreed and ensure you are clear on the measurable aspects for the next time period. Write up the agreed action plans and determine how they are going to be monitored. Keep a record for yourself and plan regular reviews with your boss so there are no surprises at your next appraisal.

Remember that preparation is key. As Warren Buffett said “Noah didn’t start building the ark when it was raining”. If you apply all the ideas and ground rules for your own appraisal, you give yourself a great chance to progress and prove your worth to your boss and your company.

What Are The Benefits Of Conducting 360 Degree Appraisals?

We have already discussed the different types of performance appraisals available to you, but I wanted focus on what I believe to be the most effective and most interesting style of performance appraisal - the 360 Degree Appraisal.

The 360 degree appraisal process is a process in which individuals who work closely with an employee are allowed to participate by providing feedback about the employee in question. They are often given questionnaires that they can either complete by naming themselves or anonymously. These employees are expected to honestly rate their experiences with their team members in terms of behaviour, attitude, job skills, and overall ability to complete tasks.

In some instances, only those working within the same team are asked to complete a 360 degree appraisal. In a company where one team may report to another, however, it is important to get feedback on an employee's experiences with different types of people. Therefore it is important to include not only an employee's peers but his up-line managers, subordinates, staff from other departments, and sometimes even outside customers or vendors.

You should include a wide variety in the 360 degree appraisal. Failure to do so will really limit the results you get and short changes the potential this type of process can really have on your ability to judge an individual's overall performance.

Before implementing a 360 degree appraisal within your organisation you must train your employees as to the importance of fair and non-discriminatory appraisals. If you receive surveys that make derogatory comments about a person's age, gender, or ethnicity you find you are not learning much about the employee himself but instead about the dynamic of the workplace within which you all work. It's valuable information to have but would be unfair to include these types of derogatory critiques in a person's annual review.

Putting together a good 360 degree appraisal system will take quite a bit of time and effort but you'll find it worth the effort in the end. Remember, you're the manager and the ultimate decision regarding a person's appraisal is up to you. In the end, though, it's always nice to have additional feedback to consider.

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