

Performance Review Do's and Don'ts

1. DO be intentional about creating an honest two-way dialogue

The most common mistake that managers make in performance review is to create or allow a one-way dialogue. Even the most observant and intuitive manager cannot know everything that is going on with their employee. Likewise, if the employee does all the talking, the manager can be shut out of giving important developmental guidance. Only with a foundation of trust and honest two-way communication can real performance development take place. Anything else is lop-sided communication that at best is a waste of time, and at worst leads to a diminished relationship and diminished results.

2. DON'T fall prey to 'halo effect'

Managers sometimes allow a single characteristic to influence their ratings of other unrelated factors. For example, an employee is willing and capable of taking on any project. That outstanding trait can cause the supervisor to ignore a worker's shortcomings. It just feels wrong to give Joyce a 3 on initiative and a 2 on everything else. But it may be accurate.

Advice: Eliminate the halo effect by considering each review element independently.

3. DON'T be overly lenient

Managers often either feel uneasy about criticizing employees' efforts or may allow emotion to cloud their judgment of their long-term employees. Leniency hurts company performance because it fails to flag weaknesses. Plus, in court, employees fired for poor performance will point to positive reviews as proof of discrimination.

4. DON'T be overly harsh

Overly harsh assessments are demoralizing for workers who make relatively consistent positive contributions. The antithesis of the halo effect... this tendency to over focus on the rare mistake can result in resentment and diminished motivation.

5. DO go high and low

"Central tendency assessment" occurs when a supervisor gives all workers average ratings. This attitude can depress employee morale and indicate that the supervisor isn't doing his or her job.

Advice: Keep detailed employee logs and record instances of superior and inferior performance.

6. DO focus on pros and cons

Many managers give little credit to excellent work and focus almost exclusively on weaknesses and "needs improvement" areas. Review forms are famous for encouraging this type of behavior. Give equal time to each aspect of the performance review, regardless of the assessment. Don't nitpick or try to find something wrong where no problems exist.

7. DON'T compare workers

There's no need to discuss how other workers achieve their goals. This allows the discussion to shift away from the core issue: his or her work. Drawing comparisons among workers only builds resentment. Assume that all your employees are capable of superior performance and talk only about ways to enhance their efforts.

8. DO stay on track

Because reviews are stressful, it's human nature to want to talk about anything except the subject at hand. But it's important not to let the discussion get sidetracked. Have scheduled, uninterrupted time and a written agenda prepared that you can refer to frequently. You're there for only one reason. Stick to it.

9. DON'T contradict yourself

One of the most damaging mistakes you can make during a review is to send the employee mixed messages. Know what you want to say, put it on paper and talk it through in advance so that you can catch any errors in your logic. Contradictory messages erode your credibility and do nothing to improve the employee's performance