

Performance Review DOs and DON'Ts

Performance reviews are important for ensuring that employees are successfully meeting their job requirements, identifying under-performance issues and providing employees with an opportunity to raise any concerns they may have. Effective performance reviews should align employees' development and professional growth with that of the business. Employees are generally more productive and motivated when they understand the role their contributions play in achieving the company's goals and objectives. The performance review process can be a great way to strengthen the relationship between a manager and employee by promoting open communication in a relaxed environment.

It's important to keep the following do's and don'ts in mind to minimize the stress level for both employees and their managers, as well as maximize the effectiveness of your performance review process.

DOs: Best Practices for Conducting Employee Performance Reviews

1. DO have a system in place for measuring performance. Make sure you have a clear system upon which to measure performance and that employees understand the performance standards against which they will be evaluated.
2. DO schedule the performance review meeting ahead of time so that the employee is not caught off guard. Hold the meeting in a neutral, private place, like a small conference room, where you can close the door and sit across from (or next to) the employee at the same level.
3. DO break the ice before beginning the performance review to set the tone, then invite the employee to review his or her self-appraisal first. This helps eliminate defensiveness and gets the meeting off to a good start by establishing that it is a dialogue, a two-way conversation in which both parties can share observations, perspectives and comments about job performance.
4. DO be direct, factual and detail-oriented when discussing performance. A well-prepared and honest performance review is the key to managing employee performance. It helps to achieve your company's goals by aligning your employees' development with the company's performance.
5. DO document all points covered in a performance review. Accurate documentation allows for ongoing feedback and can help measure an employee's progress. Performance records can also provide important documentation for your company in the event a disciplinary action, termination or other adverse personnel decision becomes necessary.
6. DO ask the employee to analyze and evaluate their own work performance and include it in a self-evaluation prior to finalizing your performance documentation.
7. DO highlight good performance and why it was good.
8. DO use the performance review documentation to guide the evaluation and record outcomes. Remember to be honest with your review. If you provide a very positive review of an employee without detailing the problems, you now have documentation that does not support a decision to discipline or terminate. If a lawsuit surrounding the termination occurs, it may be more difficult to defend your company's actions.

Performance Review DOs and DON'Ts

9. DO remember the performance review is a two-way discussion.
10. DO be aware of how you word or phrase questions and statements to help eliminate the potential for misinterpretation.
11. DO agree that there is a need for a change in the employee's performance before developing a plan of action. Discuss a plan of action for helping the employee to improve work performance and encourage the employee to contribute ideas on how to reach performance goals.
12. DO remember to treat all of your employees fairly when it comes to performance reviews and avoid any statements or actions that can be construed as discriminatory.

DON'Ts: Things to Consider in Preparing for a Performance Review

1. DON'T wait to discuss performance issues until the employee's annual review. When it comes time for the formal review, there really shouldn't be any surprises if there has been ongoing communication and feedback between the supervisor and employee. Provide a clear, concise explanation of the issues you wish to address with the employee and provide specific examples.
2. DON'T rely on your memory in outlining how well the employee achieved his or her goals and met your expectations. The human memory is a mismatch detector and it will always do a good job of remembering the bad stuff, while forgetting the good stuff. Keep a file on each person who reports to you, and make regular notes to yourself on behavior and results as you observe them—the good, the bad, and yes, even the ugly. Encourage your employees to keep files for themselves, so that they, too, have documentation when they are writing their self-appraisals.
3. DON'T make negative comments that attack an employee's attitude or personality traits rather than work performance. Be sure to review the employee's overall performance based upon specific, job-related criteria – behaviors and results. Provide concrete examples of performance problems.
4. DON'T avoid or dodge difficult discussions. Address them head-on with compassion and respect.
5. DON'T use closed-ended or rhetorical questions; instead use open-ended questions and active listening.
6. DON'T forget that change can be threatening to an employee. Demonstrate support and confidence in your employees (where appropriate).