

Lawrence University

Performance Review Guidelines

Why Reviews Matter

The purposes of the annual performance evaluation process are to promote communication and provide useful feedback about job performance, to facilitate better working relationships, to provide an historical record of performance and to contribute to professional development. Continuous feedback of employee performance is an important aspect of the supervisor's job. By providing constructive feedback on a regular basis, the supervisor is giving the employee information about work performance and, if needed, allowing appropriate time to make corrections in performance and/or behavior. Regular feedback avoids "blindsiding" the employee at evaluation time with an unsatisfactory review.

Preparing For Reviews

To facilitate communication, it is important that supervisors and employees prepare for the review session. There should be a clear understanding of the employee's responsibilities. The job description, which interfaces with the evaluation form, should accurately reflect these responsibilities. The supervisor should review the employee's job description for accuracy. An updated job description should be submitted with the review form to Human Resources. A copy of an employee's job description can be requested from Human Resources.

Plan the communication; prepare questions that will be asked and try to anticipate concerns. Begin on a positive note. Emphasize what is valued, liked and appreciated about the employee. From there, move to discussing those areas that require improvement. Never criticize without making specific suggestions for improvement. It may be appropriate to work with Human Resources to develop a Performance Coaching Plan or formal Warning Notice if performance is far below expectations or has been deficient over a period of time. While it is important to discuss past performance, significant time should be spent discussing the future – more effective ways to accomplish essential job functions and goals, and continued professional development. If the evaluation form is to provide an accurate track record of employee performance, changes in performance must be noted.

Prior to the supervisor completing the review, the supervisor may consult others who also have knowledge of the employee's job performance because of interaction and collaboration. The employee may also complete a self-evaluation form independently, prior to the scheduled session, from which to contribute to the process.

Avoid Bias

Some of the following factors may bias performance reviews. It is important to keep these things in mind when preparing for and writing reviews so that each employee's performance is assessed in an objective, consistent and accurate manner.

Halo Effect - all dimensions of performance are rated the same as a single dimension that happened to impress the supervisor either very favorably or unfavorably.

Overly Critical - when a supervisor sets unrealistically high standards, employees may conclude they will never measure up and stop trying.

Overly Lenient - the end result of being overly lenient is the same as being overly critical. If anything goes, why try harder?

Middle of the Road - some supervisors rate all employees within a limited range. Not everyone performs at the same level. Review forms should reflect differences in performance. Evaluations like this are confusing and resented. They prevent the open communication a review should foster.

Recent Performance Error - it is easiest to recall most recent performance. What the review should measure; however, is behavior over the entire span of the review period. Keeping documentation throughout the period and referring back to it will enhance the review and be more reflective of the employee's overall performance.

Review Format

There are two formats which may be used to conduct reviews, a memo format or a formal review form. If a more formal evaluation is preferred, please visit the *HR for Managers* section on the Lawrence Human Resource webpage, <http://www.lawrence.edu/dept/hr/>, for forms currently available (NOTE: *user name and password is required*). Be consistent with all direct reports when choosing a review format.

Goals Setting

Goal setting is an important part of the review process. Using SMART goal criteria will help you in setting effective goals for the future.

S = Specific

M = Measurable

A = Attainable

R = Realistic

T = Time-bound

Specific: Goals must be clear and unambiguous. When goals are specific, they tell employees exactly what is expected, when, and how much. Because the goals are specific, the supervisor can easily measure an employees' progress toward their completion.

Measurable: What good is a goal that can't be measured? If goals are not measurable, supervisors never know whether their employees are making progress toward their successful completion. Not only that, but it's tough for employees to stay motivated to complete their goals when they have no milestones to indicate their progress.

Attainable: Goals must be realistic and attainable by average employees. The best goals require employees to stretch a bit to achieve them, but they aren't extreme. That is, the goals are neither

out of reach nor below standard performance. Goals that are set too high or too low become meaningless, and employees naturally come to ignore them.

Realistic: Realistic, in this case, means "do-able." It means that the learning curve is not a vertical slope; that the skills needed to do the work are available; that the project fits with the overall strategy and goals of the university. A realistic project may push the skills and knowledge of the people working on it but it shouldn't break them. Devise a plan or a way of getting there which makes the goal realistic. The goal needs to be realistic for where the employee is at the moment.

Time-bound: Goals must have starting points, ending points, and fixed durations. Commitment to deadlines helps employees to focus their efforts on completion of the goal on or before the due date. Goals without deadlines or schedules for completion tend to be overtaken by the day-to-day crises that invariably arise.

The Review Session

When the supervisor schedules the performance review meeting with the employee to review the content of the evaluation form, adequate meeting time (with privacy and without interruptions) should be planned for reviewing the evaluation and to permit the employee to respond to the content.

At the meeting, the supervisor will go over each section of the evaluation form, explaining the content described within the form in an effort to increase understanding between the supervisor and the employee regarding job performance. Performance reviews are often one-sided, with the supervisor telling the employee what he/she thinks of the employees work. But this process should be an exchange of information. Give the employee a chance to discuss issues of concern. Allow the employee to state his or her side of a situation by remaining objective and listening carefully to the employee's statements to determine validity without becoming defensive. Reviews provide excellent opportunities to discuss procedural and organizational issues that may affect employee performance. If improvement is needed in the employee's performance, be sure to explain to the employee what requirements are not being met, and remedial steps that need to be taken for improvement, and the consequences if he/she fails to improve.

Balancing the demands between work and home has become a juggling act for many employees. Some problems are small and easy to resolve and others just seem too overwhelming to handle alone. Sometimes those problems and concerns begin to affect other aspects of the employee's life; for example, jobs, family, or relationships. If an employee's work performance is declining or is not meeting expectations, referral to the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) may be appropriate. The EAP can assist the employee with a variety of issues, including stress management, parenting skills, traits of a health family, coping with grief and loss and balancing the demands of work and home. Employees can contact the EAP at 800-222-8590. No one outside the EAP will know they are using the service unless they tell someone. Anything they discuss will remain confidential.

The employee and supervisor must sign and date the review form completed by the supervisor. By signing the evaluation form, the employee acknowledges having read and discussed the report with the supervisor. *It does not necessarily imply agreement with the supervisor's*

evaluation of the employee. If an employee does not agree with any portion of the evaluation form, as completed by the supervisor, the employee may respond on the comments section. Should an employee refuse to sign the performance review, the supervisor must document that fact on the evaluation and submit the review to Human Resources.

The original, signed evaluation form should be submitted to Human Resources with the updated job description. A copy should be provided to the employee evaluated and the supervisor should retain a copy.

Develop On-Going Performance Communications

Recognize that performance management is a continuing process to assist employees in enhancing performance and development. On-going feedback should clarify expectations or standards, and perceived performance throughout the year, and bring to light issues that may contribute to or distract the employee from achieving optimal performance. Establishing milestones for periodic monitoring of performance goals and progress reports in objective terms will help keep an employee on target. If goals need to be changed, added or eliminated during the review period, take corrective action when necessary.

It is important to maintain open communication channels with the employee throughout the year to ensure that issues are elevated quickly and resolved in a timely manner. If performance is not meeting expectations during the year, you should work with Human Resources to develop a plan to coach, assist, and/or re-direct the employee's performance.