



# Preparing for the Performance Review Process

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## HOW AM I DOING?

“How do I know when I am doing a good job?” “What does my supervisor and job expect of me?” “How can I get ahead at Acadia?” These questions are often asked by employees, but often go unanswered for a variety of reasons.

Each employee is entitled to know how they are getting along on the job and how their performance is viewed by their supervisor.

Communicating regularly with your employees about how they are doing and how your unit is doing is one of your major supervisory responsibilities. Senior administrators and your staff require this of you.

Communicating performance information to employees is an ongoing year-round responsibility. It is not just done at the end of probation or at annual report time.

Often performance problems develop into full-blown crises because a supervisor has not communicated with their employee early or regularly enough to identify and improve deficient skills or job knowledge. It also happens that another employee’s excellent performance goes unnoticed and unrecognized. How an employee feels about their job often affects how they perform on the job. **Ongoing communication is critical to managing employee performance.**

Assessing employee and unit performance against established standards and goals will become a more demanding and frequent activity for you in the future as the University continues to establish its objectives and examines its operations for greater effectiveness.

Therefore, you have a critical role to play in helping your employees achieve their goals in an increasingly demanding work environment. You contribute to the University’s performance and its need to operate effectively and reach its goals by ensuring that the University’s substantial investment in people is managed effectively.

### A. WHY CONDUCT PERFORMANCE REVIEWS?

#### A.1 Benefits for University

- provides data to unit heads for decisions related to promotion, transfer, training and development, discipline, and termination;
- improves staff morale through open communication, mutual trust, and team effort;
- creates more cost-effective operation and maximum utilization of human resources.

#### A.2 Benefits for Supervisor/Unit Head

- provides a method for assessing the capabilities/strengths and areas for improvement of employees;

- presents a basis for discussing job expectations and any changes in responsibility which may arise over the year;
- helps focus on areas where the employee needs coaching, encouragement and/or training for improved performance;
- leads to ideas from employees for more effective work methods and distribution.

### **A.3 Benefits for Employee**

- provides a clear explanation of job standards and expected results, and how well the employee is performing against these;
- identifies areas of ability, and provides the opportunity to develop skills requiring improvement;
- maintains open and constructive communication channels between supervisor and employee, through discussion and feedback process, by providing an opportunity to talk honestly and openly about the work in a non-threatening atmosphere (the focus is on the work, not the employee); and
- ensures that the supervisor is aware of employee's training and developmental needs and career aspirations.

## **B . WHAT SKILLS DO MANAGERS NEED TO REVIEW PERFORMANCE?**

### **B.1 Communication Skills**

- active listening
- effective questioning (open-ended, closed)
- providing effective feedback focusing on work, not employee

### **B.2 Coaching Skills**

- defining and analysing performance problems
- using a positive, constructive, problem-solving approach to deal with performance problems

### **B.3 Assessment Skill**

- analytical skills in identifying strengths and areas needing improvement and in recording performance assessments clearly

- ability to set job definitions, goals and standards that are clear, attainable and measurable
- organizational and writing skills, and ability to gather relevant data into a coherent, constructive assessment

## **C. RESPONSIBILITY FOR COMPLETING THE REVIEW FORM**

You, as immediate supervisor, are responsible for completing the performance review for employees in your work unit.

Your role, therefore, is to organize and design the work of your staff. There is a legitimate need to know how well employees perform and how their performance contributes to unit performance.

You may obtain input from other individuals for whom the employee works and who are able to provide valuable information.

In cases where the employee formally reports to more than one supervisor, it is the supervisor for whom the majority of the work is done and who is in the best position to complete the assessment.

You should consult the next highest level of management (review officer) to obtain support for the assessment, prior to discussions with the employee.

## **D . PERFORMANCE REVIEW PROCESS**

### **D.1 Performance Review Begins with Performance Planning**

For **new employees**, this means the detailed explanation of performance standards and unit expectations given at the employee orientation meeting on the first day of employment.

For **more experienced employees**, this involves reviewing progress towards goals and revising performance expectations for the coming year.

The following first steps are important:

- You must have a good knowledge of the complexity, responsibilities and limitations of each job under your supervision.
- Job descriptions and job fact sheets identify job responsibilities. These should be carefully reviewed and revised before the assessment interview if they are inaccurate or outdated. Always keep a copy of the most current document and ensure a copy is on file with the Department of Human Resources.
- You and your employee agree on the significant activities, responsibilities, goals, critical aspects and priorities of the job.

### **D.2 Recognizing Positive Performance**

- Part of coaching is recognizing good performance and telling the employee.

- On a regular basis, supervisors should provide positive feedback to the employee when job expectations have been met or exceeded and opportunities to develop on the job through added challenging assignments.
- Recognition for a job well done reinforces good performance and encourages the employee to continue to perform well.
- Jot down notes about exceptional results for use in the year-end performance assessment. You may use the Notable Incident Record for this.

### **D.3 Identifying and Dealing with Performance Problems**

- Compare actual results achieved against job standards (job description/job fact sheet should be revisited each year and revised as necessary), goals and expectations established at the beginning of the review period. Identify how and where performance met or did not meet standards. The discrepancy between actual results and job expectations should be defined in specific terms. (Use the Notable Incident Record to keep notes on an ongoing basis.)
- Analyze the reasons why this discrepancy exists. Is it a skill deficiency? Are there obstacles to performance? Are the expectations reasonable? Have the standards been clearly communicated to the employee? Are there personal problems interfering with job performance? Does the employee have the necessary education, training and experience to do the job?
- Set up a meeting to discuss the problem with the employee using a problem-solving, positive approach - focus on the problem. Do this as soon as the problem is identified. Remember that small problems can escalate into big ones if not dealt with early.
- Describe the problem in terms of job expectations and explain clearly and specifically the areas of good and poor performance.
- If serious performance problems persist you can prepare a formal assessment form at any time of the year.
- Refer to policy, procedure or collective agreement requirements on “constructive discipline”, if any.

### **D.4 Feedback (critical)**

- Comments must be based on specific aspects of the employee’s performance or job-related behavior, rather than on personal traits or characteristics.
- Vague, general statements are not helpful. Comments and written assessments should be specific to a goal or event, descriptive and only judgmental in terms of consequences.

- Feedback is useful only if it concerns results or behavior that the employee has the ability to control and change. It may be that the employee will be unable or unwilling to change, but it is your responsibility to identify where the change is required.
- Feedback should build on strengths, problem solving, and the joint development of alternatives.
- Feedback which points out an employee's job-related weaknesses is more difficult for the supervisor to deliver, particularly if it is information that the employee may NEED to hear, but may not WANT to hear. However, the responsibility rests with the supervisor to discuss areas requiring improvement, and to constructively assist the employee in his/her attempt to improve.

#### D.5 Documentation - An Ongoing Process

- Documentation should focus on an employee's job-related behavior, achievement of results and actions, rather than on personality or attitude.
- Informal notes to file and/or critical incidents which note significant positive and negative performance, or examples of work, are essential to back up assessments. Use Notable Incident Form to keep a record.
- Documentation must be detailed, accurate and unbiased.
- Documentation should be observations of actions and results (i.e. not hearsay). *Remember: Incidents should be recorded and communicated with the employee as they occur.*

#### D.6 Suggestions for Documentation - Behavioral Statements

- When describing the performance of an employee, the supervisor should define it in such a way that anyone listening to the description could see the behavior. Describe the situation in which the behavior occurs.
- The following two examples describe the same employee's behavior in two different ways.
- Example "A" focuses on the supervisor's perceptions of the TRAITS of the employee and does not describe the behavior in a way that it can be "seen" or can be changed by the employee.

Avoid this: "A" is just generally a disagreeable worker, and so negative all the time that I'm really not sure what to do. "A" is Aggressive and extremely disruptive. Sulks a lot, and sometimes just sits and daydreams. Insubordinate and doesn't follow rules. Provides poor service.

- Example "B" describes the BEHAVIOUR of the employee and the supervisor's observations of how that behavior impacts on the effectiveness of the employee's performance.

Use this: "B", whenever given an instruction, immediately responds by telling you it can't be done that way. Verbally threatens other workers, leaves own job and walks over to other areas to tell jokes and generally distracts other workers. This is against department rules. Sometimes just sits in a corner, or can be found

looking out the window for several minutes at a time, talks back to supervisor. ignoring own responsibilities and other employee's requests.

## Summary

### **A - Not Clear**

### **B - Clear- Specific**

Disagreeable, Negative	Immediately and abruptly responds by telling you why it can't be done that way.
Aggressive	Verbally threatens coworkers; shouts when making a point.
Disruptive	Leaves own job, distracts others with jokes; chats. This takes up employee's and coworkers' time.
Sulks	Sits in the corner and won't talk to anyone.
Daydreams	Looks out the window for several minutes at a time.
Insubordinate	Talks back to supervisor when asked to do task. Said "You..."
Doesn't Follow Rule	15 minutes late for work 13 out of last 20 work days.
Provides Poor Service	Has not returned 10 telephone calls during last 4 work days. 5 clients have made complaints to supervisor about missed deadlines.
Missed Dates	Was two weeks late in meeting Project A target date of May 15; was three weeks late in meeting Project B target date of July 1.

## **E. SETTING PERFORMANCE GOALS/STANDARDS**

If planning is thoroughly done at the beginning of the review period, i.e., a year ahead, the year-end review will flow naturally and will not be difficult to complete, nor will employees get unpleasant surprises at year-end. Standards and results achieved will be used as the basis for assessing performance throughout the year, and the basis for determining the final performance level.

Add new projects/assignments to goals/objectives list as they are assigned.

Effective performance standards should:

- measure **QUALITY, QUANTITY** and **TIMELINESS**
- be **VALID** and measure what they are supposed to measure
- define **OBSERVABLE** behavior, activities or results

- be **ACHIEVABLE** and, at the same time, **CHALLENGING**
- be **UNDERSTOOD** and **AGREED** upon by supervisor and employee
- be **SPECIFIC** and based on the **JOB**, not the employee
- be **CLEARLY WRITTEN** and **COMMUNICATED**;
- be **DEVELOPED** by the supervisor with employee input
- be **FLEXIBLE** so that they can be adjusted to reflect changes due to unforeseen events/circumstances.

At this stage, and before meeting with employee, discuss the assessment with your immediate supervisor, i.e., reviewing officer. Meet with your staff member now to discuss assessment.

## **G. PREPARATION FOR PERFORMANCE DISCUSSION WITH EMPLOYEE**

### **G. 1 Preparing for Performance Discussion**

#### (a) Supervisor's Items to Assess Prior to Discussion with Employee

- Identify factors which are beyond the control of the employee that may be impacting performance (external or internal), e.g., equipment breakdown, lengthy illness, late arrival of information from other sources.
- List of job standards, goals and expectations set twelve months ago and amended during the past year.
- Job Fact Sheet.
- Samples of employees work.
- Factual assessments from other supervisors/individuals who have responsibility for, or dealings with, the employee during assessment period.
- Notable Incident Records, notes, records of discussion, memos related to performance, reports on attendance, accidents, etc.
- Record of compliments or complaints received.

#### (b) Setting Up the Interview

- Explain to the employee that he/she may prepare for the interview by doing a self-assessment using the performance review form and/or noting questions regarding job expectations, training required, etc. Set a date for the discussion.
- Establish a private convenient place and sufficient time for an unhurried performance assessment discussion. Interruptions should be avoided. Plan to devote about the same amount of time to each employee. Two hours maximum per employee interview is a reasonable length of time.

(c) For the Employee - Items to Review Prior to Interview

- Review job descriptions and/or job fact sheet. Must have a full and complete understanding of the job duties and responsibilities, and expected level of performance for each duty/activity.
- Complete a self-assessment of achievements, strengths and areas requiring improvement, developmental needs, career aspirations.
- Be prepared to commit the effort to carry out the plans for training and development that will be established.

**G.2 Watch Out for the Following Rater Biases and Errors**

- The “Halo” Effect

This occurs when the performance is viewed as all positive, or all negative, without a careful analysis of actual performance in different aspects of the job. *Describe the individual’s performance on each of the assessment criteria independently.*

- Central Tendency

This occurs when performance is rated down the middle on all criteria and usually for all employees. *Use all of the rating scale when such ratings are appropriate. Few employees will rate exactly the same for all performance criteria.*

- Leniency and Severity

Similar to central tendency, but is at rating scale extremes. Supervisor is a “tough rater” or an “easy rater”. *Ensure that the assigned assessments accurately reflect the individual’s performance on the job relative to your expectations of him or her, and his or her peers.*

- Hearsay

Descriptions must be assigned on the basis of the supervisor’s actual experience with and observations of the individual’s performance, or direct input from functional supervisors or others for whom the employee works; and not on the basis of rumor or third party reports.

- Recency

This occurs when a supervisor assesses performance only on the recent few months. Usually occurs as a result of not considering the full twelve months of performance because no goals were set and no records of performance kept during the year. Supervisor relies on his/her memory. *Review twelve months and keep records and discuss performance through the year with employee.*

- Notable Incident

This occurs when one incident overshadows the supervisor's view of the normal day-to-day performance of the employee. Usually the incident is negative, but can be positive. Use the Notable Incident Record form to note incidents/accomplishments, indicating positive and negative events. Review this log before completing the assessment form.

- Bias or Prejudice

The supervisor must not allow personal feelings towards an employee to affect the assessment of that individual's performance. Focus on results.

### **G.3 The Performance Assessment Interview**

- Use Goal Setting Performance Guide.
- Put the employee at ease by explaining the performance review process and the purpose of the discussion. (This will be straight-forward if performance planning and coaching are carried out as recommended).
- Referring to your assessments and employee's self appraisal, focus on how performance demonstrated by the employee has exceeded, met, or did not meet the expectations set out at the beginning of the review period. Focus on results and related behavior for each applicable assessment criteria.
- Begin by conveying the overall rating on the Summary.
- While the assessment should focus on strengths, it should also point out deficiencies requiring further training.
- Make it a two-way process. Allow the employee into the discussion. Ask open-ended questions such as:  
*What was the most successful task/project in the past year? Not so successful?*  
*What areas of the work are you most interested in?*  
*What types of problems/concerns have you encountered?*  
*What areas would you like to receive more/less supervisory assistance?*  
*How can I help you carry out your job more effectively?*
- Allow the employee to express feelings, comments, perceptions and suggestions on the areas you have assessed. EMPLOYEE PARTICIPATION and self-assessment are critical to a successful assessment. Summarize your understanding of the employee's comments

to ensure that you understand his/her perceptions by saying “Let’s see if I understand you clearly...”

- If differences in opinion occur on the performance results and on job standards and expectations, specific areas of disagreement should be identified and discussed. If the information you developed is accurate and clear, and the judgments have been checked out, you should stand by it. If the employee disagrees, but does not provide new information which would influence the assessment, then the matter must be considered closed. The employee may indicate on the form why he/she disagreed with the assessment. If you agree with the employee’s points, be prepared to change the written assessment.
- Wherever possible, differences should be resolved by using a mutual problem-solving approach where concerns are identified, alternatives are generated, and to resolve concerns. Specific steps should be developed to implement this plan; however, this is NOT a negotiating session and the supervisor has the final say on ratings.
- The employee reads and signs the assessment form to acknowledge that a discussion was held and that the contents are understood. This does not necessarily mean that the employee agrees with the rating(s).
- Set a date to plan the next year’s activities.
- Conclude meeting cordially and positively. Thank the employee for meeting with you.

#### **G.4 Follow Up to Interview**

Schedule another meeting, if necessary, to mutually agree to changes in goals and expected results for the coming review period.

### **H. COACHING FOR IMPROVED PERFORMANCE**

#### **H.1 Ongoing Coaching**

- A training video (VHS 38 minutes) THE HELPING HAND is available at the Department of Human Resources to help you assess your coaching skills.
- Another role of the supervisor/coach is to HELP the employee identify problems that he/she may be having, and to help the employee find ways to solve each problem.
- One fundamental role is to CHALLENGE and STRETCH employee’s abilities through planned constructive delegation. This is COACHING.
- Effective coaching depends on a shared exploration of problems, and development of possible solutions. This problem-solving approach is usually more effective because what may seem obvious to the supervisor may not be obvious to the employee, and vice-versa. Also, the employee may have helpful information and ideas which may be useful in developing an effective solution.

- Discussions about performance should occur naturally and continually during the year. This is called FEEDBACK. This sets up conditions for effective coaching.
- Expectations about how a job should be done may change, depending on the task at hand, and should be communicated on a frequent basis.
- Periodic discussions should occur to review the employee's progress on the job; to review and possibly revise the standards of performance; and to plan future work.
- It is particularly important to provide coaching early and regularly through the probationary period.
- Effective communication immediately commends employees when they merit praise, and allows for errors to be corrected constructively.
- Continuous communication enables you to monitor strengths and weaknesses in the skills of the employee on an ongoing basis to identify shifts in levels of performance.
- Maintain written records of discussion and observations that occur throughout the assessment year.
- A major outcome of coaching is that the employee's abilities/skills can be fully utilized and increased while relieving the supervisor of some of his/her work.