

Performance Evaluations Don't Need to Taste Like Brussels Sprouts – Making Reviews an Appealing Experience

Whether you are about to be evaluated or perform an evaluation yourself, chances are that you're really not looking forward to it. Giving evaluations, especially where there's some negative feedback involved, is like a ripping a band-aid – you just want to get it over with, and suffer as little pain as possible. It's interesting however, that something so crucial to a company's success is so very much disliked. Kind of like eating Brussels sprouts.

Part of the problem may lie in the way evaluations are approached. Go into any task with a defeatist, negative attitude, and chances are that it will not turn out very peachy. For evaluations to be effective, they must be approached with sincerity and goodwill – with the knowledge that this person you are evaluating has potential. And like a miner, you're trying to uncover and buff this diamond in the rough.

For the evaluation process to be a fruitful one, guidelines must be in place. What messages do you want to convey to the employee? What is it that you hope for him or her to achieve?



This process can be simplified if you think of an employee's position as being comprised of two key components: standards and expectations.

Standards are easy to communicate and comprehend. Any position entails duties that require certain minimum standards to be met. Ideally, all these standards are clearly outlined at the time of hiring. For example, a standard for a customer service position would be good people skills; a candidate has to be relatively extroverted, friendly, and agreeable. If, during a

worker's probationary period, this standard is not met, then it should be addressed promptly.

Expectations are more complex, in that they are custom-tailored to the employee based on a variety of factors which include prior experience, education, skills, and potential. As such, greater consideration must be given to the employee's strengths and weaknesses and individual personality traits. Expectations more frequently require re-evaluation and are more long-term in nature.

Performance appraisals should be seen as part of an ongoing practice, a periodic "summing up" of feedback that is regularly given. It really is cliché, but communication is key to any successful organization. Regular feedback and praise of an employees' performance should be expressed throughout the year, as warranted. If it isn't, you're already creating potential problems that no evaluation practice can correct. For example, if employee John, who hasn't received negative feedback (if, in fact, any feedback) were suddenly hit with an evaluation that suggested his work was subpar, he likely not only be surprised but upset as well. If Joann, who continually performs at sub-standard levels, does not receive constructive criticism regularly, then she may see no need to strive for improvement.

Evaluation tips for managers to keep in mind:

- ❖ Evaluations should be held at regular intervals – once or twice a year, or as deemed necessary.
- ❖ A friendly, open atmosphere is important. Encourage the person being evaluated to ask questions or offer input.
- ❖ Whenever possible, choose a low-stress time to do evaluations. Scheduling a performance review during a very busy time of the year probably won't go over very well.
- ❖ Prepare for the evaluation in advance. This includes:
 - ❖ Highlighting the person's strengths and recent achievements
 - ❖ Describing areas that need development
- ❖ Offering practical methods to improve in weak areas
- ❖ Asking for feedback on the evaluation
- ❖ Scheduling a follow-up to ensure that improvement is progressing
- ❖ Remember that negative criticism should always be tempered with sincere, friendly advice on how to improve. Employees must be made to feel that you are on their side, and truly wish the best for them.
- ❖ Above all, be fair, honest, and professional. If you come off as condescending, this could put the person you are evaluating on the defensive or, on the contrary, totally demoralize them.

Employees being evaluated should, ideally, do their part to ensure that the process is a useful one. Honest and realistic self-appraisal is required, as well as an appreciation of the company's perspective. In essence, an open-minded, objective attitude toward constructive criticism is the key to benefitting from feedback. If, however, an employee is sensitive to criticism, which is understandable, then this issue should be addressed and resolved by the manager before the evaluation begins. PsychTests' **Sensitivity to Criticism Test** can help. Even during the initial hiring process, personality assessments can help determine how a person handles criticism. This is particularly important in jobs where feedback is given often, or where an employee is likely to need a "thick skin", as the case with sales or customer service. ✂

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