



February 2008 Writing Effective Performance Reviews

It's that time of year again—performance review time. Whether you are the manager who has to assess many employees or you just need to prepare for your own review, here are a few writing tips to make the process smoother and more meaningful.

For a successful review, plan ahead. To get the juices flowing, begin jotting notes about the job performance. Review your calendar and email messages to jog your memory about past projects, successes and challenging situations.

Next, schedule time for writing the review or completing the appropriate forms. Block out that time now before someone else fills up your calendar with meetings. If your company allows it, perhaps you'd like to do this paperwork at home or at a coffee shop where you're less likely to get interrupted.

In the heart of the written review, be sure to translate how an employee's behavior affects the organization. For example, don't just write that Sally works well on teams. Continue the idea by saying Sally worked well on the customer service and training teams, and that made meetings shorter, less frequent and the process enjoyable for the other team members. The same can be done for poor behavior. This approach helps employees connect with the organization and its mission.

Employees can use the same approach by citing outcomes and how the outcomes affected the daily operations of the organization, saved money or maintained customer relationships. This tactic can help an employee document their value to an organization.

As much as possible, provide an example for each comment. This is where those past email messages and calendars can be helpful. Giving examples clarifies the issue and can give the employee more direction in changing behavior. As an employee, you can remind your supervisor of the additional responsibilities you handled while a co-worker was on extended leave or a position was unfilled.

Focus your written review on the objective and not the subjective. Keep in mind that someone who appears unfriendly might actually be shy or distracted by a project.

Don't comment on any personal issues or anything outside of the job performance. If you have questions about how a disability might be affecting your or an employee's performance, consult with your human resources department before putting it on paper.

Remember to include development plans in the written document, as well. Managers can address specific areas for improvement for employees and set clear guidelines such as returning all phone calls by the end of the day or answering all email messages by the end of the week. Employees should come with their own ideas of how they plan to improve their performance. Again, these plans should be objective and quantitative.

Finally, treat each written review as you would any other written piece. Write complete sentences, use proper punctuation and proofread it carefully for misspellings.

If you need help in establishing criteria for employee performance or helping employees who don't seem to be performing the way you would like them to, please give me a call!

Karen DeYoung is principal of DeYoung Consulting Services, which provides quality learning experiences for individuals and groups. We develop training materials and activities that advance individual, team, and organizational learning. Our work is done with integrity, reliability, and accountability.

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