

## Conducting Effective Performance Appraisals

So often performance appraisals are viewed by either party as being a negative experience, something to be done within the quickest possible time – or in many instances, not provided at all.

In a world where managers practiced effective leadership and good coaching skills throughout the year there would be little need for an annual performance review; instead these discussions would be ongoing.

Where a performance review is required due to legislation, organisational policy or such then it is important to have in place a process designed to ensure an effective outcome. What is the purpose, or outcome of a performance appraisal? Firstly and foremost the aim is to help develop potential amongst those on your team. A performance appraisal is not the place to tell someone what they have been doing wrong during the year. Those conversations should have taken place at the time. Some managers view an appraisal in a negative light because they see it as the time when they should deliver bad news. Wrong.

Team members appreciate the opportunity to meet with their manager and have a talk. It provides both parties with an opportunity to have a one-to-one conversation ranging over a variety of topics. It provides both parties with an opportunity to discuss opportunities for added responsibility or to be involved in different work. It provides the manager with an opportunity to learn of the issues that impact upon the staff member's ability to complete their work. The reason performance appraisals have gained a bad reputation is because managers fail to implement a process of two-way conversation. Many managers are more focused on telling the worker their perspective than they are on listening to the perspective of the worker.

**Be Prepared.** The Scouting Motto, Be Prepared. Both parties should take time to prepare for any performance review. The Manager should set the date and invite the employee to attend, along with a suggestion the employee take time to prepare, make notes, and bring along information on things they would like to discuss. Leave adequate time for this preparation to take place, especially if your organisation utilises some form of feedback process. As the Manager set aside at least one hour for the review to take place. Consider holding the review in place free of disturbances and distractions. Even hold the review in a neutral place, somewhere relaxing along with a cup of coffee.

**It is a conversation.** Not an interview or some form of dictatorial edict, a conversation. This means that for the Manager, what you hear is more important than what you have to say. *Try this.* Instead of pushing your feedback or your written report, heavily embroidered with red ink, designed to draw attention to you, across the table and tapping it with your finger, instead keep the paperwork closed and instead ask your staff member an open-ended question – then sit back, shut up and listen. Ask



your employee to tell you about the progress of their program or project or just ask them to talk about the past twelve months at work. You will be amazed at what you will learn when you take the time to listen.

**Create space to reflect.** When there is an issue to be discussed, focus on the observed behaviour. Avoid discussing personalities and avoid placing your interpretation on the event. Don't be judgmental. Explain that you are aware of certain workplace behaviours that you would like to see done differently. Provide the evidence, be it your own observations or authentic feedback. Then suggest to your staff member they take time to reflect and think about how they might do things differently. Explain you don't wish to tell them how to behave at work instead you want to hear their ideas on how they might behave at work. Suggest you both meet again in a couple of days so that you can hear the employee's ideas.

When there is something negative to be discussed, this part of the process is critical. It shifts everyone away from being reactive to becoming proactive. It gives people time and space to reflect. It reduces any tension.

**Engage your employee in the outcome.** So often the Manager acts as if they know what is best for their team member. When a manager does this they are simply projecting their own desires onto someone else. When you want your employee to do something different you have two choices. You can tell them what to do; and they will do exactly that and no more or you can explain the desired outcome and ask them to tell you how they plan to achieve the outcome. Ask yourself, what is more important. The process or the outcome? Don't forget to ask your employee for ideas on how the two of you should monitor progress.

**Follow up in writing.** Provide a written record of the discussion, any agreements and outcomes. Include details of the monitoring process and any planned future meetings. Ensure you both schedule any agreed monitoring or follow up - you will both be focused on the future then, rather than the past. It also sets a positive tone for the next performance appraisal.

*This management tip has been brought to you compliments of John Coxon & Associates. We work with management teams and managers in the health sector and not for profit sector in Australia and New Zealand to help develop leadership capacity and management competencies. We achieve this through consulting, management coaching and professional development opportunities.*

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