Employee Reviews

by Anonymous

If you have employees, you are going to encounter employee problems.

The best approach to addressing issues with employees is clear, authentic communication.

Conducting powerful performance reviews is key to maintaining a positive company culture.

When to Conduct a Performance Review

Most performance reviews are held annually, however you have the freedom to hold them as often as you feel necessary. Some owners hold them every six months; some do so even more frequently.

The important thing to realize is that your employees can view performance reviews as negative. When you schedule these reviews, do it in person and explain that it's a time to have a *conversation*– not a lecture – about what's going well and what can be improved.

What is the Result of the Review?

You don't need to be a psychologist to understand what makes people tick.

The simple fact is that people yearn to feel good about themselves. They need to feel like they are growing and moving *toward*something greater than just a job.

Negative messages stick more than positive ones and can quickly lead to unmotivated employees.

That's why it's so important to properly balance the message of their performance. You want them to leave feeling inspired.

Manage the Message

People need help developing positive perceptions about themselves.

You can help the outcome of your performance reviews by creating a "safe zone" for your employees where you can both engage in open and honest discussion.

Open the meeting on a positive note. Consider the following guidelines for doing this in the review (as well as on a daily basis):

1. **Offer employees unconditional acceptance**

You may not always agree with your employees' behavior, but it is important that you always value and support who they are as people.

It is a myth that employees perform best under pressure. People generally do their best when they are relaxed.

By letting your employees know that you honor and respect them, you can create a solid, trusting atmosphere where they feel safe enough to take risks, and secure enough to be their best.

2. **Insist on excellence**

When your employees know that you expect them to strive for and attain excellence—not because you've said so, but because they see you modeling it for them – it sends the message that they are capable of more than they know and that they shouldn't settle for anything less than their absolute best.

3. **Define and enforce standards**

People always perform better when they know the rules.

Without clearly established standards, your people won't know exactly how they are being evaluated and what types of behavior are acceptable or unacceptable. If you want them to adjust a behavior or level of performance, you must let them know the result you expect.

Standards provide a sense of security and independence, and take the guesswork out of day-to-day activities. Your people can move freely within defined parameters without having to look over their shoulders or second-guess themselves.

Standards communicate the rules of the game.

Your employees will rise to your high standards if you give them a chance.

4. **Praise employees' positive *attributes***

Managers, in a sincere desire to give their employees positive feedback, frequently tell employees they are "doing great" or that they "did a good job."

There is nothing wrong with that, but it can easily become a sort of management tic, and, as such, is easy for employees to discount and dismiss – feeling that anyone could have earned that kind of "drive-by" recognition.

Truly effective managers notice the actual *behavior*, the unique *talent, skill,*or *characteristic*a person brings to the task – not just that it was accomplished.

When you complement people on their *attributes*– their *discipline, intelligence, determination, attention to detail, patience, helpfulness, enthusiasm*– the essential qualities that were uniquely demonstrated in a given task, you identify and highlight a specific behavioral characteristic. If you clearly communicate that it is this characteristic you appreciate, your employees will strive to cultivate it.

You can't make people behave the way you want unless they want to. But you can reinforce the behavior you seek by simply noticing it.

Accountability for Handling Employee Issues

Even with the best systems and most attentive managers, behavioral problems still surface.

You will never – nor should you ever – have to shoulder full responsibility for another person's choices or actions. So when those things you cannot control begin to impact performance, you need to be prepared to approach the issues with sensitivity, empathy, and firmness.

Consider our Employee Problem Resolution System to help you productively address any employee behavioral issue:

1. **Identify the issue or problem to be addressed**

Be clear and direct about the result or standard that is not being met. Stick to the specific issue and try not to make any assumptions or generalizations that might obscure or complicate the problem.

2. **Get acknowledgement of the issue and the need to address it**

Your employee must willingly admit that there is a performance issue and that something needs to be done about it. Otherwise, you can't even begin to address the problem.

Usually, your employees will acknowledge the issue, and could even be relieved that you brought it up and are not trying to avoid it! Furthermore, if your employee is the one who raises the issue — congratulations! That is a clear sign that your relationship is worth the time it takes to preserve it.

3. **Discuss the ideas you both may have about what is underlying the issue**

Get your employee's perspective on the situation and then communicate your point of view. You both need to understand as much about the situation as possible in order to analyze and respond effectively.

4. **Create a plan to deal with the issue**

With some knowledge, patience, and creativity from both parties, together you can create an inspired, effective strategy to resolve any issue and free a person to move beyond their current limitations. Whatever is agreed upon should be in writing for you both to review.

The plan should include the overall desired result, clear, progressive steps, acceptable standards and timelines, and benchmarks so you know the plan is working.

A written plan is vital. Without it, your best efforts could be forgotten in a moment, and your ability to follow up and evaluate your employee's progress is significantly compromised. The written plan is also the clearest, most complete way to communicate agreements.

5. **Get the employee's commitment to implementing the plan**

Your employee must be willing to actually follow through on whatever plan you both have agreed to, and, whenever possible, the consequences for not doing so should be clearly outlined.

6. **Follow up on the plan**

Create regular 'reporting loops,' or weekly/monthly meetings, to keep up to speed with the employee's progress and development.

You need to hold your employees accountable for their agreements, and they need to see that you are going to remain engaged and supportive of their progress or challenges.

By creating a genuine, motivational environment where employees can be helped to discover what it is about them that makes them the most effective people – not just effective workers – you'll be strengthening your peoples' skills that they can apply, not only on behalf of your company, but in all areas of their lives.

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