Conducting Effective Performance Appraisals: Tips For Supervisors

What's required?

• In general, the University requires that supervisors conduct a performance appraisal of each employee in writing at least once annually.
• The performance appraisal is a communication tool between the employee and the supervisor and is part of the official personnel file.
• Merit compensation should be discussed with the employee, but not necessarily as part of the appraisal discussion. The performance appraisal looks at specific areas, goals, and standards of performance and the employee’s progress toward meeting them, as well as future goals and employee development.
• The supervisor may either use the standard performance evaluation form or develop a customized one.

The Pre-appraisal Checklist and Preparing for the Appraisal

1. Set a calendar date and time in advance that is mutually convenient for both you and the employee, and that will allow enough time for each of you to do preparation. A conference room is a good choice for privacy and no interruptions. Schedule enough time for discussion [1 to 1-1/2 hours].
2. Gather:
   • the job description and performance standards
   • goals set from the last appraisal
   • work rules and procedures
   • your documentation notes
   • any feedback or letters from customers/co-workers
   • current disciplinary memos
   • the previous performance appraisal
3. If you have asked the employee to do a self-appraisal, be sure to obtain that early enough so you have a chance to review it as part of your preparation. Note: then be sure to provide the employee a draft of your appraisal, so the employee may review it ahead of time, as well.
4. Before filling out the appraisal form, take a moment to:
   • list the main areas of responsibility
   • what the employee has done well
   • what the employee needs to improve in
   • what you can do to help the employee do a better job
5. Remember to avoid:
   • Halo Effect - tendency to overrate a favored employee, or an employee who had a prior good rating
   • Horns Effect - tendency to rate an employee lower than circumstances warrant
   • Recency Error- letting outstanding work [or unsatisfactory work] immediately prior to the evaluation offset an entire year of performance
   • Cookie Cutter Effect - not focusing on individual specific performance and rating all your employees, or groups of employees the same
Conducting the Appraisal

1. Welcome the employee; put the employee at ease. Offer to get the employee something to drink.

2. Let the employee start
   - Listen and take notes.
   - Maintain good eye contact and attentive posture.
   - Reflect back to the employee your understanding of what the employee said.
   - Don’t interrupt, but ask questions only for clarification.
   - Apply the 90/10 Rule: the employee talks 90% of the time and you talk 10% of the time.
   - Be non-judgmental

3. Compare the actual specific performance results and behaviors to the standards. Stay away from an attitude or personality focus.

4. Keep the appraisal open to employee input.

5. Ask the employee for ideas about how to resolve problems.

6. Focus on the future, not on the past.

7. Emphasize strengths, as well as areas that need improvement.

8. Be honest and be prepared to discuss questionable items.
   Support the employee’s effort to improve.

9. Set goals, expectations, and standards together for the next appraisal.

10. Discuss development/training plans with the employee.

11. Summarize the session and end on a positive note.

Handling Employee Behaviors

- If the employee becomes defensive or makes excuses:
  - Listen to what the employee has to say and paraphrase back. Remain neutral. Maintain eye-contact.
  - Don’t solve the problem.
  - Ask for specifics with open-ended questions.
  - Try to determine the cause:
    “Tell me more.” “How did you reach that conclusion?”
    Ask how the employee will resolve the problem.

- If the employee becomes angry:
  - Stay calm and centered. Maintain eye-contact.
  - Listen to what the employee has to say and paraphrase back.
  - Let the employee “run down” for as long as s/he needs until the employee can listen to you.
  - Avoid arguments.
  - Bring discussion and focus back to performance and standards.
  - Say the employee’s name, and ask open-ended questions.

- If the employee is unresponsive or withdraws:
  - Be patient and friendly.
  - Show concern.
  - Stay silent, and wait for the employee to say something.
  - Ask open-ended questions.
  - Note that the employee is unresponsive.
  - Encourage the employee that you want to hear his or her input, and this input is important to you.
Closing and Follow-up

1. After the appraisal discussion, complete the written appraisal.
2. Both the supervisor and the employee should sign the appraisal. Signing the appraisal does not mean the employee agrees with the appraisal; it means that the appraisal has been shared with the employee. The employee can provide a written response, which is optional.
3. Provide the employee with a copy, and the original should go in the employee’s personnel file.
4. You and the employee should exchange ongoing feedback about performance goals and standards throughout the year.