



What Is the Most Painful Part of the Performance Review Process?

This question was posed by one of the Bridgestar LinkedIn group members. It sparked a discussion in which other members offered what they like and dislike about the process, and provided advice on how to conduct effective nonprofit performance reviews. The conversation, shared below, could provide useful advice to those thinking about their own employee performance review processes.

Stacy, Business Owner

In your opinion, what is the most painful part of the performance review process? It's nearly universal that people hate performance evaluations—whether they're giving them or receiving them. I'm interested in finding out from managers what they consider to be the worst or most painful part of constructing and delivering performance feedback. Your thoughts?

Comments (5)

Andie, Consultant

When an employee is an integral part of the evaluation process and challenges are considered opportunities instead of mistakes than performance reviews are not painful. A clear compelling vision and clear measurable goals outlined at the beginning of the review process set the stage for success.

It is helpful to have the employee identify their strengths, opportunities, and goals both at the beginning and ending of the review period. Generally, five to seven goals works best. The supervisor's job through formal and informal observations can guide this discussion to best help the employee. This does not exclude the difficult conversations. However, when there are ongoing self evaluations then there are no surprises during the formal evaluation process.

Another important aspect during the pre-evaluation process is to formally write down performance and attitude expectations. It is often the unwritten rules that make evaluations difficult.

A good quote: "There is no better discipline than self discipline." Anonymous

Encouraging our employees to further their self discipline helps everyone.

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Tony, Senior Account Executive

I agree with Andie's observations. The toughest reviews happen when the process is unclear or arbitrary. The best way is to include the team member in the process from the beginning. People really do support what they are a part of creating.

If the process has been entered into as a growth and support tool, even difficult news can be managed with very little challenge. Things seldom turn unpleasant or ugly when objectives and benchmarks are clear upfront. Too often managers use the process as a weapon to exact their own punishment and/or express personal whims. For team members, the performance review process should be an ongoing road map, visited frequently, for identification of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to success... with the opportunity and encouragement for fine tuning performance along the way.

The process must be a live one. When it is, everyone understands the responsibilities of all and the risks/rewards attached to performance at all levels, high and low. If managed clearly and consistently there should be no surprises.

Brian, Finance Administrator

Strong points for both previous posts. Regardless of the career aspirations of the employee, the employee should absorb the review as feedback about their brand. Regardless, whether the employee will be at the organization for very long (most likely) or whether the reviewer will be either (also likely), the review is an opportunity to learn how your brand is viewed and how you can improve upon it. It could also be an opportunity for you to develop a brand.

Rodney, Professional Trainer & Coach

In my opinion, the most painful part of a performance review is when it is poorly constructed and poorly delivered. A poorly executed performance review can be quite revealing about what type of manager you are dealing with. Is this person concerned about the employees' growth and development? The critiques should come with ways to assist the employee develop so that they can reach their full potential.

Jim, Nonprofit Operations Director/Team Leader

As a senior leader, I view ANNUAL performance appraisals as formal record of a review and strategy session with the employee to analyze their performance and growth opportunities within or outside the organization. My reviews focus on 4 areas:

1. Goals & objectives from the prior year and how they met the goals and expectations
2. Define the goals and expectations for the coming year (they should come to the meeting prepared with some of their own goals for discussion & inclusion for the coming year)
3. A discussion on what they believe their gifts are that are not being used within the organization (many employees have talents that are not part of their job description, yet they are willing to use

them if asked, and their commitment to the organization and its mission grows when they are able to use these gifts)

4. Where they want to be in the coming 1, 3 & 5 years. I found that many employees enter an organization in one department and as they interact with others in the organization they acquire interest in other positions and other departments. If we can agree on a plan to equip and cross-train them to grow into a new role / position in the future, they stay enthusiastic about the organization and their ability to grow with it.

An ANNUAL performance review should NOT have full of surprises for the employee. If it is, the leader is not doing their job properly. Feedback should be ongoing with staff where leaders offer constructive criticism, training and encouragement. If problems develop they should be addressed immediately.

The annual performance review should be more of a resource development strategy session.