Performance Appraisals That Transform Employee Performance
By Dr. Jan Ferri-Reed

Have you ever wondered exactly how many employees hate receiving regular performance reviews? The answer is ... probably most of them! No one enjoys receiving negative feedback and employee performance reviews are often viewed as one-way discussions leading to criticism of the employee. However, the reverse is also true. Few supervisors enjoy conducting reviews, because most people *don't* enjoy giving negative feedback either. But performance reviews don't have to be annual "torture sessions." With a little advance planning you can conduct performance reviews that you and your employees find informative, useful and (hopefully) effective.

The Form That Fits
Most use a "form" to guide performance reviews. Obviously not all appraisal forms are alike, but most have a few things in common, including:
- A general format with points to be discussed.
- A method for rating employee performance as either "excellent," "fair," or "poor."
- An opportunity for the reviewed employee to provide feedback to the supervisor.
- A section for setting goals to achieve before the next performance review discussion.
- Input from the employee about challenges they may be facing and suggestions for improvement.

Too often supervisors think that the secret to successful performance reviews is following the "right form." While it may be helpful to have a good form, the most important part of the review process is the discussion itself.

Hitting the Target
The importance of setting goals can't be overstated. Nearly everyone fails to achieve some goals. But, as hockey superstar Wayne Gretzky once said, you may miss *some* of the shots you take, but you'll miss 100% of the shots you *don't* take." So, an effective performance appraisal process must focus on goals. However there's an art to setting goals that are achievable versus goals that neither motivate nor guide employee performance. Following are five steps to follow when setting "smart" goals productive performance reviews.

Step #1 - Set S.M.A.R.T.
The secret to setting goals that are achievable AND motivational is to set S.M.A.R.T. goals. Smart goals are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Timely. Goals should be set at the beginning of the year and need to support your company's overall business plan.

Also, make sure your goals are consistent with the employee's job description. Don't ask them to achieve goals that aren't really part of their job. And don't "shove" a goal down your employee's throat. If your employee doesn't have a hand in setting their own goals they won't be motivated to achieve them!

<u>Specific</u> goals identify who is involved, what should be accomplished, the location, and a due date.

<u>Measurable</u> goals help keep you on track, specifying "how much," "how many" and how you'll know it's accomplished

<u>Attainable</u> goals mean you have to plan wisely and establish time frames for the goal. Consider the effort, time and other costs required to make the goal achievable.

<u>Realistic</u> goals must identify an objective toward which you are both willing and able to work.

<u>Timely</u> goals specify when and how much

Step #2 - Set a Date & Agenda for the Review
It's important to be specific in setting a date and time for the performance review. To avoid any "surprises" the manager should make a discussion agenda and share that with the employee prior to the scheduled date. The manager should also prepare by conducting a self-assessment of his or her expectations and support through the appraisal period.

Step #3 – Conduct the Performance Review
By this point both you and your employees should ready for a productive discussion. But make sure you not only discuss areas where the goals were missed. You should also discuss areas where there have been successes.

Step #4 – Create A Development Plan For Your Employee
This is where you and your employee together discuss his or her future in the form of an Employee Development Plan. This should be a constructive discussion about what motivates your employee. Find out what parts of the job they like and what parts with which they're frustrated. Address long-term career plans, if any. Consider giving the employee developmental assignments, outside training, online training, or workshops. Discussing the employee's future is very motivating since many people don't really look that far ahead.

Step # 5 -- Summarize the Discussion
A discussion summary will ensure that all points have been covered and there are no outstanding questions. As a result of this discussion both parties should come away with some sort of "To Do" list. Consider setting follow-up meetings that may be necessary to ensure that the employee understands the results of

the performance review. *This process will energize your reviews, leading to successful, effective, confident and motivated employees!*

Things You Should Never Say in a Performance Review

Performance review discussions can be tricky. It's rather uncomfortable to hear your own shortcomings. It's also uncomfortable to be delivering the "bad news." But there are some things that a manager should NEVER do during an appraisal discussion, including the following:

Don't Rely on Generalities
Don't tell employees that "they always do something wrong" or that they "never do anything right." Focus instead on specific examples of what your employees did or didn't do.

Don't "Gang Up" on your Employee
Using expressions like "you always," "you never," or "everybody says" won't fly with most workers. Generalized feedback almost always makes employees defensive and they may reject any suggestions for improvement.

Don't Threaten Your Subordinates
Telling an employee they must "shape up or ship out" is not going to win you any points. People don't respond well to threats so stick to giving fair and balanced feedback.

Don't "Gloss Over" Performance Problems
Everyone knows there are problems and conflict in even the best-run organizations. Pretending that everything is "A-OK" creates a false sense of security. That can backfire on you if the performance problems become widespread.

Don't Talk "Down" to Your Employees
Treating employees like they are "problem children" or idiots won't lead to better performance or happier employees. Always approach reviews as members of the same team. When you blame problems on the employee you're not going to make much progress towards improving performance.

Don't Make Accusations
Accusing your employees of bad performance or outright sabotage will create a hostile atmosphere. That makes it very hard to convince employees improvement is in their best interests and could ruin overall morale.

ABOUT JAN:

Jan is a seasoned consultant and President of KEYGroup®, a 35-year international speaking, training, coaching and assessment firm and co-author of ***Keeping the Millennials: Why Companies are Losing Billions in Turnover to This Generation and What To Do About It***, and the author of ***Millennials 2.0: Empowering Generation Y***. Jan's work focuses on creating productive workplaces and retaining talent while increasing the bottom line. Publications and media that have called on Jan and KEYGroup® for advice and guidance include Industry Week, TIME, Diversity Executive, NPR and Forbes, to name a few.