

THE EXCHANGE

This issue's featured subject is "Performance Evaluation."

TOP COMPLAINTS ABOUT PERFORMANCE REVIEWS

Very few people like to be judged unless they are going to come out on top. Most organizations have annual performance reviews to assess how a person has functioned and to head them in the right direction for the future. Both the manager and the employee often dread these reviews. The top complaints and the solutions to them are as follows:

Top Employee Complaints

- The information is a surprise. The employee did not know what was being judged. A performance that occurred six months ago is just now surfacing as a correction.
Solution: Give corrections immediately. The performance review is intended to be a summary of what the individual already knows (see No Surprises! by Ben Cairns on page 2.)
- The review is subjective. What is excellent to one person is acceptable to another. Many employees sincerely feel they have contributed more than the performance review reflects. They quickly become defensive and may leave feeling unappreciated.
Solution: Use the Keep-Stop-Start method (See "Keep-Stop-Start" by Vincent Phipps on page 4) that provides descriptions and details rather than relying upon numbers or ranking.
- The review is late. When a performance review does not occur in the month it is scheduled, the message is often that the process is not important and perhaps the individual being reviewed is also not important.
Solution: Schedule reviews annually for established employees and quarterly for new employees. Place the schedule in your calendar. Small departments or companies often will schedule all performance reviews in the same month. If this is the choice, make sure that the month selected does not conflict with other seasonal deadlines. Treat this appointment just like one with a valuable customer: schedule, plan, and execute.
- The employee does not get to give input in advance. Many employees come to the performance review like a sheep to the shearing house. In other words, they feel like they get ripped off because it is a one-way reviewing process.
Solution: Have the employees complete the same review on themselves and give it to the manager before the meeting. This makes it easier to handle expectations and the information they give can actually help the manager remember performances in the past.
- There is little or no real follow-through. Some employees leave the review thinking, "So what?" They have been judged and are given little

guidance on how to perform better.

Solution: Make sure that quality time is spent on what the person needs to do to improve. Ask for input. This portion of the review works best as a discussion.

Top Manager Complaints

- It is difficult to remember a year's worth of performance. Most performance reviews are heavily skewed to the last three months because that is the time period that is the easiest to remember.
Solution: Keep a file on outstanding and inferior performances throughout the year. These warrant a meeting or mention immediately after they occur, so the tracking process is "meet and document."
 - The meeting is a confrontation. Employees can take reviews personally and many managers would like to avoid them.
Solution: Discuss the behavior or performance rather than the person. Ask questions to gather input. A confrontation does not need to be negative, rather it can be a coming together to bring an issue to the front.
 - It takes too much time. Managers are busy and their other responsibilities are not excused or delegated during the time for completing the performance reviews.
Solution: Don't wait until the last minute. After meetings with your employees, make notations or actually go to the electronic form and fill it in as the year progresses.
 - It's hard to be objective. Managers want to be fair, yet selecting a number to represent a person's contributions will usually be somewhat subjective.
Solution: Use descriptions and examples to support the evaluation.
- Performance reviews are not likely to go away, so it is imperative that we get better at giving and receiving them. For specific solutions, call TLC and request a complimentary and confidential ten-minute consultation.



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LOOKING AHEAD:

- ◆ The October issue of **The Exchange** will focus on **Gaining Commitments**.

LOOKING BACK:

- ◆ For previous editions of **The Exchange**, go to our **back issues**.
- ◆ Re-read the **01/2002** edition: **Liking Your Job**.



Helpful Hints:

- **Be prepared to share specific or related examples.**
- **Define goals for improvement in measurable terms.**

When nobody around you seems to measure up, it's time to check your yardstick.

Bill Lemley



To learn more about it, click here!

NO SURPRISES!

Ben Cairns, M.A.



The annual performance review is the last place an employee needs to learn that his/her job performance is not up to acceptable standards. Because giving guidance and corrections can feel a lot like confrontation, managers often delay giving feedback to an employee who needs improvement. By the time they are forced to raise the issue in a performance evaluation, it is too late for the employee to go out and do something about it before it impacts their income and "permanent record."

Over the years I have seen and been part of this dynamic (from both ends), and have had the opportunity to learn from some great managers and leaders about how to provide a more fruitful and favorable work environment. Here are some things to keep in mind so that performance evaluations don't contain any anxiety-producing "surprises."

- **Be constructive.** Give feedback in specific, measurable information instead of general or ambiguous terminology. The feedback should also be neutral-to-positive in nature. Constructive feedback emphasizes solutions, as opposed to problems.
- **Be receptive.** Both parties agree to two-way constructive feedback.
- **Establish trust.** Both parties must trust each other to be open-minded to the dialogue and make a good faith effort to develop mutually agreeable outcomes.
- **Loop.** Agree on the frequency of checkpoints for constructive feedback. Even though the emphasis is on the manager-to-subordinate direction, looping goes two ways.
- **Give Latitude.** Everybody makes mistakes. Woody Allen once said "If you are not failing now and again, that's a sign that you're playing it too safe." Give latitude for mistakes or failures made as part of an effort to do the right thing in the right way. Learn from the mistakes and do not repeat them.

If feedback and guidance are given on a routine basis, there should be no surprises in the performance review. Although any ongoing or essential problems can be addressed with action plans for remedy during the review, the best-case scenario is that the evaluation yields an "On Target" or "Above Target" rating based on continuously improving performance.

NEW BOOK AVAILABLE

Our CEO, Beverly Inman-Ebel, has co-authored a new book titled, "Real World Communication Strategies That Work" by Insight Publishing. Everything from communicating at home to formal presentations, from humor to conflict, and networking are here with strategies to help you become more effective. For your autographed copy, just call TLC at 888-Because (232-2873). Price: 19.95 plus shipping.

What Our Clients Are Saying

"Since attending your workshop, everything is going GREAT! It makes a big difference when both parties can adjust to meet the needs of each other. There is less stress, too. I really enjoyed your class."

Toi Price-Jones, Atlanta GA

ASK THE EXPERTS



Dear TLC,

I have always received excellent scores on my annual performance reviews. This year, I had four areas that were marked "need improvement." I have not changed how I do my work. I am careful and accurate. The company is growing and suddenly I am expected to do the work of two people. I like my job and don't want to quit. Suggestions? Loyal Employee

Dear Loyal,

Sometimes people change, and, more frequently, the job people are required to do changes. First, I hope you were given specific goals to improve upon. If not, ask for a conference to determine the corrective course of action. Second, keep a time log for one month to determine where your time is being spent. Take note of interruptions and times when you might get distracted. Keeping track of time in 15-minute intervals for 4 weeks can give you a wealth of information. Third, after you have monitored your work habits, have a conversation with your boss to discuss what you learned and recommendations from the knowledge.

PEER EVALUATION AND FEEDBACK

Peers share a common experience that offers opportunities for continuous improvement that is difficult to reproduce in other ways. Peers know very well the challenges, routines, expectations, and pitfalls of the jobs they each perform. If the peers have different jobs at the same grade level, the opportunity to interact and provide feedback can have a similar effect.

Peer evaluation in a formal sense is usually conducted anonymously as part of a 360-degree review. Anonymity provides the safety screen that allows blunt and honest appraisal. These types of comments tend to contain a significant portion of opinionated and nonspecific language (often emotionally charged), and may be accurate or not. The downside is that they can be used to intentionally damage the other person. Also, there is not a forum for response, clarification, or dialogue.

Peer feedback in the informal sense is not anonymous to the person receiving the feedback because it is given verbally either individually or in a small group setting. Here are some tips for establishing constructive peer feedback:

- **Agreement.** Have an agreement up front about the nature and dynamics of the feedback. Discuss what type of feedback is acceptable, how the feedback will be shared, when and where is best to share it, and why it is given (constructive improvement). Make sure to establish agreement that this is a genuine, mutually supportive activity that is confidential. A few written ground rules or guidelines may be helpful.
- **Attitude.** A neutral-to-positive tone can be constructive, even if the issue is negative. The act of giving feedback itself is helpful, and thus positive. Tone of voice, timing, and body language need to be consistent with the intent of genuinely helping the other person.
- **Target.** Identify specific behaviors and skills for improvement. Because a lot of our behavior is executed automatically, we are often unaware of how we are coming across to others. Targeting these behaviors and getting timely feedback is an incredibly powerful behavior change tool.
- **Teamwork.** Know that peer feedback can be an essential team-building activity. Coworkers who help each other succeed

are likely to feel a sense of camaraderie, have better work performance, and be happier with their jobs.

A mid-ground option between the 360 evaluation and informal peer feedback is for a peer feedback questionnaire to become part of the annual evaluation process. Annual feedback questionnaires tend to generalize the content and nature of the feedback and preserve some of the confidentiality within the relationship, which can be an advantage in keeping dialogues focused on real areas for improvement.

Building a culture of continuous improvement through peer feedback can also solve a lot of management challenges because individuals can actively pursue solutions on their own. This process promotes independent thinking and problem-solving, saves time and money, improves productivity, reduces turnover, and makes those annual performance reviews a more positive experience for everyone. For more information on performance review and peer feedback, consider having TLC deliver our Performance Review module to your company!

SHAPE UP OR SHIP OUT!



During a performance evaluation, a manager who was retired from the military yelled at his subordinate, "You better shape up or ship out! GOT IT?" The employee could tell by his manager's tone that the only acceptable answer to that question was, "Yes, sir!"

"Shape up or ship out" is a common expression meaning to make immediate improvement in behavior or performance or get out. Originating in the 1940's during World War II, it meant that if a uniformed man in the Armed Services did not perform up to unit regulations or adhere to regime rules (shape up), he would be sent overseas (shipped out) to a combat zone. Although this saying was a situational expression specific to only the military, its direct connotations leaked out into the civilian world and into our corporate cultures.

During the next performance review, remember to tell the employee what it is you want them to do. Considering the inventions of mobile videophones, high-speed Internet access, transcontinental teleconferences, etc., the ability to clearly communicate with other people is more available than ever before. Remember to "shape up" by practicing effective people skills before you are "shipped out"!



Remember to...

- **Begin performance review meetings with StartProbes® ("how" or "what" questions) to give the employee an opportunity to speak on his/her behalf.**
- **Treat the scheduled meeting as important as it really is. A one-hour time slot usually works well if prior work has been done.**

What I need is someone who will make me do what I can.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

If I accept you as you are, I will make you worse; however if I treat you as though you are what you are capable of becoming, I help you become that.

Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe



Ability is what you're capable of doing. Motivation determines what you do. Attitude determines how well you do it.

Lou Holtz

Few things can help an individual more than to place a responsibility on him, and to let him know that you trust him.

Booker T. Washington

No one is perfect ... that's why pencils have erasers.

"KEEP-STOP-START" FOR BETTER PERFORMANCE REVIEWS

Vincent Ivan Phipps, B.S.

Thinking back to your last performance review, were you:

1. Told specifically what you did well?
2. Told specifically what to discontinue doing?
3. Given guidance on how to improve?

If you answered yes to all of the above, you and your team's evaluation methods are ahead of the game (but keep reading – the following information may help good practices become great practices). If you answered no to any of the above, there is room for improvement in the evaluation methods currently being used.

At TLC, we use a wonderful leadership philosophy about evaluating a person's performance. The method is measurable, practical, and effective - everything a performance evaluation should be. It is called the "Keep-Stop-Start" method.

"Keep" refers to the things a person is doing well that you want them to continue doing. Examples include being punctual, willingness to go the extra mile, and being flexible or creative. This is a great way to get them to keep doing the tough things with positive attitudes.

"Stop" refers to the things you want the person to stop doing. To alleviate the sting of defensiveness, strive to be as informative as possible in this area. These could include things such as remaining silent in meetings or cutting people off when they are still talking, or being possessive with critical team/project information, etc.

"Start" refers to anything that the person is not doing that you want them to start doing. In this area, create a plan for them or get them involved in developing a process that will get them to where you want them to be. People are more likely to implement a suggestion if they feel it is their idea or if they take ownership. Use "what" and "how" questions to involve them by getting their ideas. These could be actions such as creating ideas to boost morale, keeping a log of how time is being spent, or documenting key decisions made during a workday.

According to some of our clients, performance evaluations are unpleasant because the employee being reviewed is being told what they did wrong for 90% of the evaluation! The other 10% is spent in minimal dialogue where the employee feels the need to defend him/

herself from that painful 90%!

Performance evaluations are very effective for monitoring and nurturing professional growth. Show individuals where they were, where they are, and where they could be. For even better results, ask them to complete a Keep-Stop-Start file on themselves. Lead by example by blazing the trail of where you want your people to go.

PREPARE BEFORE YOU JUMP



If you ever decide to jump out of an airplane, we hope you have learned from an expert on how to fold your parachute. Even though your trust in others may be high, your motivation for a successful fold would certainly exceed anyone's.

Motivation is an interesting phenomenon. The person who has the most to gain or lose is likely to have the greatest amount of motivation. If this is true, how can this be used to motivate our employees?

First, it is important to delegate responsibility and authority. There are eight levels regarding the amount of authority given:

1. Get the information to me and I will make the decision.
2. Suggest alternatives and I will make the decision.
3. Make a recommendation and I will make the decision.
4. Decide and wait for my approval.
5. Decide and act unless I say no.
6. Act and report the results to me.
7. Act and report only if unsuccessful.
8. Act and no reporting is necessary.

Second, it is imperative to give feedback to let employees know how they are progressing. Don't wait for annual reviews, talk to your direct reports every week. Check their skill level and attitude and then coach them toward success. You don't have to have all the answers, just ask the questions to get them thinking.

Bottom Line: Don't slap a parachute on your employee's back, yell, "Trust me!" and push them out of an airplane. Prepare them. Make them responsible and make sure they know their level of authority. Coach them. It all adds up to motivation, and that is the only way to fly.

CEO CORNER: The Missing Piece

By Beverly Inman-Ebel, MA CCC-SLP

When I have some genuine downtime, like a family vacation that has me in one location for several days, my family and I enjoy the challenge and camaraderie of a jigsaw puzzle. Several years ago, I bought one that had 1000 pieces and promised a beautiful picture of Native Americans when completed. I was so impressed with the artistic beauty and so confident in our ability, that I bought the kit to enable us to frame it to admire our work forever!

Later it was easy to see how my optimism could have benefited from a healthy dose of realism. We had ten days and twice that number of people to contribute to the puzzle. When we didn't get finished, I carefully boxed the portion that was completed. For three years, various members of my family diligently labored over the little pieces of colored cardboard. It finally became apparent even to me that we didn't have all the pieces. The dream would not be realized because something little, but vital, was missing.

Performance reviews are a lot like puzzles. There are at least 365 pieces and by the time you start putting them together, something is missing. The difference is that with a puzzle, it is easy to see what is missing once you get near the end, and with a performance review we may not be able to see the whole picture without the missing piece.

In my experience with seeing thousands of performance reviews, often the missing piece is communication. It is missing in two ways. First, the information is not communicated correctly or early enough and that can lead to defensiveness. Second, the employee's ability to communicate is not one of the traits being assessed. What a pity! How a person communicates with his/her peers, customers, vendors, other departments, and boss may very well determine how successful they are in their job.



Target Training International research reports that 85% of firings and resignations are due to behavioral incompatibilities (communication) with customers, other employees, or managers. That is like buying a 500 piece jigsaw puzzle (hiring is expensive), opening the box (training is expensive too), and finding only 75 pieces!

At TLC, it is our purpose to give our clients understanding of how people want to be treated and to raise their skill level to accomplish that. Puzzles and performance reviews take time and energy. Please ensure that you include communication as you approach this vital task. Then you and your employees can live your dreams!

FEATURED SERVICE: Tele-Conference Training This Fall

TLC will continue to offer our most popular topics in convenient one-hour phone conferences. If your budgets are tight, this is an inexpensive way to bring quality training to people in new positions. Just \$25 a person* includes the training and materials.

In September: **"How to Communicate With Anyone!"**

- September 18, 10:00 a.m. EDT

In October: **"Improve Your Listening!"**

- October 6, noon EDT
- October 10, 10:00 a.m. EDT
- October 15, 2:00 p.m. EDT

To register, simply call in advance to reserve your spot: 1-888-BECAUSE. We will need the name, contact information of the participant and method of payment (credit card, check, purchase order, or verbal agreement with current clients.)

*Plus the long distance rate from your long distance provider.



Natural abilities are like natural plants; they need pruning by study.

Francis Bacon

Don't lower your expectations to meet your performance. Raise your level of performance to meet your expectations. Expect the best of yourself, and then do what is necessary to make it a reality.

Ralph Marston

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