

# ONGOING FEEDBACK AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

## A. Principles and Benefits of Ongoing Feedback

While it may seem like an added responsibility to managers already "full plate," managers that provide ongoing feedback and coaching against established goals and metrics are actually making their job easier. Also, your work group will have a greater likelihood of meeting and exceeding the department's academic and business goals.

- Your employees will always know what is expected of them
- They will appreciate your interest in their success

Managing performance and ongoing performance feedback should be an ongoing habit; the annual review then becomes a non-event, a formalization of the existing relationship between a manager and the employee. Feedback should be provided on an ongoing, year-round basis, not only during the annual performance appraisal. Remember, it is important to address strengths and successes as well as deficiencies and failures. If a manager has a good history of providing ongoing feedback, preparation is easy.

### • **Benefits of Providing Ongoing Feedback & Coaching**

During the year, you are responsible for coaching and mentoring your employees to assist them in reaching their goals and achieving optimal performance. Ongoing feedback and coaching are used to communicate about and correct performance deficiencies, to reinforce appropriate behavior, to teach the employee new skills, to motivate high performance, and to mentor employees so they understand their role in the Department and University.

- Regular feedback and coaching will make your job as a supervisor/manager easier when employees build their skills and independence
- Feedback and coaching also increases productivity, the quality of work and the effectiveness of the work group
- Employees' motivation and initiative is increased with effective feedback and coaching
- Creativity and innovation in problem solving increases with effective feedback and coaching
- Feedback and coaching can prevent problems from occurring

### • **When to Provide Feedback & Coach**

- Ongoing performance feedback and coaching is a continuous and continual process of providing help to your employees by analyzing their performance and other job behaviors for the purpose of increasing their job effectiveness.
- It is an integral part of performance development.
- Both informal day-to-day and regular feedback and coaching sessions are recommended. These can be short update sessions to check on progress, give feedback, and address problems that have arisen.
- It is important, when providing ongoing feedback and coaching for improvement, to schedule time with the employee in a private setting for the discussion.

- It is not appropriate to correct or discipline an employee where others can hear or see the conversation.
- If you are reinforcing positive behavior, however, doing it in a public setting may be appropriate and appreciated.
- **Characteristics of an Effective Coach. An effective coach:**
  - Is a catalyst for change, someone who sparks action in others
  - Helps others understand expectations of their work and live up to those expectations
  - Helps employees believe they can attain their goals
  - Expects employees to direct the improvement of their own performance
- **Principles of Effective Ongoing Feedback & Coaching**

There are five key principles for providing effective ongoing feedback and coaching.

*1. Maintain and Enhance Self-Esteem*

- Your employees need to feel respected and have a sense of self worth in order to be motivated, confident, innovative and committed.
- Employees who feel valued are more willing to share responsibility, confront challenges, and adapt well to change.
- It will be your job as a coach to provide useful responses that are empathic, supportive and exploratory.

*2. Listen Actively and Respond with Concern*

- Listening is a powerful way to build trust and improve communication.
- To listen actively means to pay careful attention to what the employee is saying.
- You can demonstrate that you are actively listening by being attentive and maintaining eye contact.
- You can show understanding and empathy by paraphrasing or reflecting back what was expressed.
- This encourages your employees to share their feelings and ideas with you.

*3. Ask for Help and Encourage Involvement*

- Employees want to have a say in how they do their work.
- They want to be involved in decisions that affect them.
- Involvement increases the chance that innovative ideas and solutions will surface.
- It is a sign of strength for a supervisor to ask employees for their suggestions on how to solve a problem or improve performance.

*4. Share Thoughts, Feelings, and Rationale*

- Employees want to know how you're feeling about them in relation to their performance.

- By being open with them, you'll encourage them to trust you, to be open in return, and to accept responsibility for improving.
- By sharing the rationale for your decisions, you will help them understand how their work contributes to the goals of the department/unit and the University as a whole.

#### *5. Provide Support without Removing Responsibility*

- As a supervisor/manager of others, you are in a special position to provide support to your employees.
- This may include advising, mentoring, and providing needed resources, re-assigning duties, and clearing roadblocks.

### **B. Characteristics of Ongoing Feedback**

To be most effective, ongoing feedback should be:

- Timely
- Specific
- "Owned" by the giver
- Understood by the receiver
- Delivered in a supportive climate
- Followed-up with an action plan
- Given with *no surprises*

#### *1. Timely*

- Provide feedback as close as possible to the occurrence of the behavior in question; it will be of little use to your employee otherwise.
- If you wait until the annual performance appraisal to address poor performance, your employee may resent that you did not give him or her the opportunity to correct the problem.
- Even if you are discussing an employee's excellent performance for the first time during the annual performance appraisal, it may be "too little too late" if that employee places a high value on recognition.

#### *2. Specific*

- Do not make vague generalizations when providing feedback to your employees; instead, describe the undesirable behavior in exact terms.
- Be able to substantiate, in very specific language, the importance of performing the job correctly and the consequences of continued poor performance.
- While you and your employee should work together to develop solutions, be prepared to identify specific alternatives if necessary.
- Any feedback you provide should address the employee's performance in terms of measurable outcomes that were developed together.

- Your employee will be less likely to dispute the existence of a problem if he or she was involved in the goal setting process.
- Employee agreement is an important first step in reversing poor performance.

### 3. *"Owned" by the Giver*

- Use personal pronouns such as "I" and "my" when providing feedback to an employee.
- These words enable you to take responsibility for your own thoughts and observations.
- Sentences worded in this way are less likely to be interpreted as accusations than those that use the word "you," reducing the possibility of a defensive reaction by your employee.

### 4. *Understood by the Receiver*

- Ask your employee to rephrase your feedback to ensure that his or her interpretation corresponds to your intent.
- Also confirm that your employee understands what is expected of him or her, including the available tools and resources that can assist in the fulfillment of these expectations.

### 5. *Delivered in a Supportive Climate*

- The setting in which you provide your feedback is as important as what you say and how you say it.
- Your employee's success in improving his or her performance – not to mention your continued working relationship with one another – can be greatly influenced by the framework within which your feedback is given.
- Provide feedback in a disruption-free environment in which there is no risk of being overheard.
- Make it clear that the purpose of the feedback session is to assist your employee in achieving success (not to punish or embarrass him or her), and that you are addressing a specific behavior (not the manner in which your employee performs all of his or her duties).
- Allow your employee the opportunity to explain why performance has been below expectations; perhaps he or she lacks the skills or motivation to perform the job properly, or there are other factors – beyond his or her control – preventing successful goal attainment.
- As a supervisor or manager, it may be within your power to address some of these issues. Otherwise, it may be necessary to re-evaluate and modify your employee's existing set of goals accordingly.
- Offer your help and support. Identify additional resources, such as training, books, or experienced co-workers, from which your employee can also learn.

- While it is very easy to tell an employee what he or she is doing wrong, don't forget to tell him/her what he is doing right!
- Even star performers need to be told they are doing a good job.

#### 6. *Followed-Up with an Action Plan for Performance Improvement*

- Together with your employee, formulate a strategy for improving his or her performance including the appropriate behavior to achieve results as well as the actual results.
- This may include skill-building activities, practicing in a dummy environment in which errors are not detrimental, and/or using an entirely different approach to performing his or her duties.
- Agree upon deadlines and measures, and schedule follow-up meetings to review progress against goals.

#### 7. *Given with NO SURPRISES*

Almost all managers can recall clearly a moment in their careers when they had a "surprise moment" in a performance review - - it can have a long-lasting impact. If one of the objectives of management is to improve employee performance, it seems odd to do something that triggers an employee's natural defenses and makes it that much more difficult to achieve that goal.

- One of the best rules to follow is the principle of no surprises-in other words, if it wasn't discussed during the performance evaluation period, it will not appear on the performance appraisal.
- Not only does this reduce the anxiety associated with the review, it tends to build a stronger relationship between the supervisor and employee.
- A practical rationale for following this rule is that any surprise sprung on an employee damages the credibility of the manager.
- After all, if it's important enough to put on the review form, why isn't it important enough to mention beforehand?

### C. Documenting Observed Behaviors -- Ongoing Feedback & Coaching

Ongoing feedback and coaching is a key to creating a year-round performance management system as opposed to an annual event. Creating a system that keeps track of critical incidents over the entire evaluation period helps managers avoid this trap. Managers should offer employees ongoing performance feedback as soon as they can after the fact, be as specific as they can, and describe the impact of a certain action on the department or organization. This approach can strengthen the feedback's influence on future performance.

- It is best to develop a system that allows the manager to let the paper documentation remember so that the manager can forget.

- Keeping some type of file that tracks both positive and negative events throughout the year for each employee allows a manager to evaluate the entire 12-month period, not just the past 60 days. A manager may prefer to enter comments on the performance assessment form throughout the year, so when the time comes for the formal review, notations have already been made.
- This "recentness error" is prevalent in many evaluation ratings because everyone tends to give more weight to something that happened recently.