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## The Dreaded Review

One of the most dreaded aspects held by supervisors is conducting the annual reviews of their employees. Even worse is the negative opinion that the majority of employees have in attending their own reviews. Supervisors' feelings largely center around the time it takes to prepare for the review, along with the sometimes difficult assessments that must be delivered. As for the employees, they don't look forward to being talked down to, hearing the multiple criticisms that are about to come their way.



This article is aimed at turning such attitudes around in the opposite direction by providing some impactful truths concerning the values of employee reviews and providing the steps to make employee reviews most meaningful to both the supervisor and employee.

First off, realize that employee reviews have a major impact on building a positive relationship between supervisors and employees, they should build the character and productivity of both the supervisor and employee, and that they should contribute to the profitable growth of the organization. Take special note of the fact that well groomed and delivered reviews should be as valuable to the supervisor as the employee. This first truth should foster the mindset that employee reviews require preparation by both parties, that they should be treated with the utmost importance, and should devote adequate time for completion. After all, remember that an entire year of joint work is being assessed and that an entire new year is being planned!

The second truth of conducting beneficial employee reviews is that they must center around the employees job description. Supervisors should also be prepared to review their own job description, which may be necessary if the employee would benefit by being reminded of the supervisors responsibilities. Such measures help to keep the discussion points on track and eliminate the risk of drifting into subject areas that are irrelevant.

Another truth that is vital is sticking to the facts. The reviewing supervisor had better be able to back up all subjects and related assessments with facts, which is another call of duty for supervisors to do their homework. It is shocking to hear how often supervisors offer assessments based on feelings or unsubstantiated opinions. Such actions destroy the potential value of reviews and can cause employees to lose their respect for the boss.

The final truth is for supervisors to realize that even though it's referred to as an "employee review," such meetings are a two-way street. Both the employee and supervisor are to share equally in delivering conversation on each topic to be assessed, and that the employee and supervisor should equally search out what actions each should take to continue with successes and improve on jointly discovered opportunities.

Now for the steps for supervisors to take in conducting effective employee reviews:

1. Planning and Scheduling: Employee reviews should be scheduled one month in advance for the sake of providing time for preparation by both the employee and supervisor. Setting up the review appointment should be accomplished through a live conversation, either in person or by phone. Only confirm what has been decided in writing.

*Continued*

1. Planning and Scheduling (*continued*): Within the invitation process, make sure that you, the supervisor, provide a positive disposition to the employee, assuring them that you look forward to the meeting and that you're confident that the outcome will be mutually beneficial. Define the homework that should be completed in preparation for the review, and how the employees' job description will be used as a platform to complete the review process. Schedule an adequate amount of time (2-4 hours) for the review and complete the review on neutral territory (somewhere other than your office.)
2. The Opening: Now that the time has arrived for the review, supervisors must create the proper environment to assure a positive journey. Pour a cup of coffee and begin with small talk, which is defined as "connecting." We're all in the "people business" and if supervisors fail in genuinely connecting with their employees, little else matters. The amount of time to complete the connecting step varies between employees; some requiring twenty-minutes while others may only desire five-minutes. Be genuinely interested in how things are going with the employee.
3. Only Review the Positive: Now that both the supervisor and employee are ready to get down to business, using the job description document as a cue card, ask the employee to share what has gone well by their efforts. It's imperative for the supervisor to take notes, and encourage the employee to tell it all. It's okay for the supervisor to lightly participate in the conversation, as the employee thinks through and delivers opinions on their accomplishments, but to NEVER interject, add to, or amend what the employee states. Then summarize everything that has been said. Remember that "summaries" prove the supervisors' interest and ability to listen well. Following the delivery of the summary, the supervisor is then to deliver a closed-ended question to gain approval, such as, "Did I get it all?" or "Did I miss anything?" If the employee feels the need for an amendment to the summary, do so. Then complete this step by adding at least one positive accomplishment that was not already mentioned. This proves that the supervisor has been paying attention to the work of the employee. Staying on the positive side of accomplishments is important and once the list is completed and added to by the supervisor, jointly critique what should be done to sustain those positive accomplishments.
4. The Break: Now that the positive aspects of the employees job performance have been identified and critiqued, there must be a short break in the action prior to moving into the corrective side of the review. Why this step is referred to as, "The Break," is that supervisors are NEVER to tie the positive to the corrective side of the employees' job performance; they must stand independent of each other. The break can be simply taking a restroom visit or getting a refill on your coffee. Such breaks can take as little as five minutes, but can extend longer if both the supervisor and employee desire.
5. Only Review the Corrective: Now that the positive side has been completed and confirmed by both the employee and supervisor, following the short break it's time to move to the corrective side of the review process. Key here is to get the employee to speak first on this subject category. Here is an example of how to kick off this discussion: *"Well John, I'd really appreciate taking the time to discuss any areas of our work that we could improve upon. How about leading off and sharing your thoughts on this subject?"* Within this example, note that the context moves from "what you've done well" to "what can we do better." The "we" creates a futuristic team approach.

5. Only Review the Corrective (continued): Once the employee completes their list of opportunities for improvement, summarize what they've said and use a closed-ended question to gain approval. Once that approval is provided, you, the supervisor, have earned the right to add to that list, IF NECESSARY. Here is where supervisors can cover those stated objectives and supporting activities within the employees job description that require improvement. Be prepared with fact-based proof to validate the need for improvement, because employees quite often may disagree with the supervisors assessment. Once the corrective list has been completed and agreed to, the discussion should move into what actions must be taken for improvement, using the "what can 'we' do..." opening.
6. Review Summary: As you might imagine by reviewing the steps taken at this point of the employee review, a couple of hours in completing this process is not, nor should not, appear to be a long reach. Once you reach this point of the review process, it's time to wrap up the meeting. The supervisor should assert their thanks for the time and effort taken by the employee to participate. Take a breath and then ask the employee to summarize the review, covering the positive and corrective subjects and related future efforts. This is an important step as it provides the supervisor with a snapshot picture of where the employee stands in terms of appreciation and agreement. If, for any perceived reason, the employees' summary is lacking, move back into the notes on what was agreed to both by subject and subsequent commitments toward action, then seek their agreement. The target outcome is a comprehensive assessment of the employees job performance, how to jointly maintain the positive accomplishments, and how to jointly make improvements in the areas of opportunity.
7. Leave the Employee with a Vote of Confidence: Now that the review is finished, a great and proven step of value by supervisors is to leave the employee with a vote of confidence that defines your appreciation of their being part of the team and your confidence in their ability to help grow the organization's success. Such statements must be genuine and true.

Final Points:

- A. It's advised to conduct a mid-year review along with the annual review.
- B. If there is unresolved conflict between the employee and supervisor following their review, the formal corrective action policy and procedure held by the organization may need to be implemented.



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