

Everything you need to know about: Performance feedback

Author: Tatenda Sayenda . September 2020

Business leaders want employees to succeed. Employees are an integral component of the overall business' success. *Performance feedback* is critical to helping employees understand expectations, make adjustments, and get the coaching necessary to improve and succeed. Organizations need to provide feedback to employees to engage in job performance and employee motivation. Due to COVID-19, employers may be shying away from reviewing employee performance, preferring to deliver feedback in person as opposed to over the phone or in a virtual video conference. Due to the pandemic, some employees haven't received *performance feedback* for over two months. Alex Rizzuto, a talent management leader, believes now, more than ever, consistency in communication and strong leadership is critical.

According to research, 69% of employees say they would work harder if they felt their efforts were better recognized. Nearly one-quarter of employees that don't feel recognized when they do great work have interviewed for a job in the last three months, compared to just 12% that do feel recognized. And recognition is the number one thing employees say their manager could give them to inspire them to produce great work. According to Alex Rizzuto, a talent management leader, *performance feedback* is important, "Not only do you need to share with your team what is changing, as quickly as possible, but you also need to keep communicating what is NOT changing. This will help dispel any rumors of what might be changing and focus your team on what is important."

What is performance feedback?



Performance feedback is the on-going process between employee and manager where information is exchanged concerning the performance expected and the performance exhibited. Constructive feedback can praise good performance or correct poor performance and should always be tied to performance standards.

When done consistently and well, the *performance feedback* process results in better performance on the individual and organizational levels, higher satisfaction and morale among staff, retention of strong performers, and an effective means for correcting poor performance. There are also costs for failing to manage performance effectively. Unresolved performance issues lead to lower productivity, poor department morale, and, ultimately, more time and energy spent resolving issues that could have been addressed by ongoing performance feedback practices.

Benefits of Performance Feedback

There are many benefits of performance feedback. It allows employees to gain a better knowledge of their duties and consider how to improve and refine their performance (Humphrey et al., 2007). Feedback is important because it also helps identify gaps in current knowledge so is related to training

analysis that identifies training needs and shows strengths and developmental opportunities. Organizations become successful when employees develop and grow through performance feedback and learning (London, 1997). Providing effective performance feedback, as part of an effective performance management system, also enables organizations to identify individuals for promotion and to facilitate lateral transfers through identifying current individual strengths. On the other end, managers who use performance reviews effectively can easily recognize high performing employees, correct issues before they become insurmountable, communicate expectations, encourage growth and development, and foster employee engagement.

Benefits to Employees

- A clear understanding of expectations
- An opportunity to receive ongoing coaching and feedback
- The creation of an action plan to develop skills that are required to perform successfully in a current role or to prepare for future opportunities
- The receipt of a documented overview of performance

Benefits to Supervisors

- The establishment of clear, measurable expectations
- Timely feedback on how effectively employees are applying job knowledge and skills to achieve the goals established for their positions
- Identification of performance issues and the ability to set a clear course for correcting or improving them
- Help in getting feedback, resources, and training to meet performance goals

When one employee receives useful performance feedback, it will benefit other team members as well. In this way, providing individual employees with frequent performance feedback can benefit and transform your team as a whole. In addition, providing feedback to the team as an entity (say in a meeting, conference call, or group message) can give your team a single goal to work towards that increases company output and effectiveness (Pollock, 2018).

Pollock (2018) goes on to say that *Performance feedback* helps employees grow because it trains them in effectively corresponding with their managers, following directions, and thinking critically. Each of these skill sets helps the employee become a little better at their job, making the whole operation better as well. If your employees don't know where they are lacking, where they can improve, what they're doing well, or what they should start/stop doing all together, how will they ever grow? *Performance feedback* sparks growth by bringing awareness that leads to action, which leads to positive change.

Examples of Performance Feedback

The phrases you use in a performance review makes a difference in the overall effectiveness of the review. An effective review should discuss an employee's strengths and areas of improvement in a way that is constructive and motivating.

Below are examples of *performance feedback phrases* that can be used when conducting a performance review:

Creativity and Innovation

- *“Applies creative thinking to implement a vision for the company”*
- *“Continuously suggests new ideas in meetings and on projects”*
- *“Shows initiative with developing new ways of thinking to improve projects or company performance”*

Adaptability

- *“Willingly adjusts their schedule to be available when needed”*
- *“Quickly adapts to changes in the performance of required duties”*
- *“Responds well to change in various situations”*

Communication

- *“Effectively communicates with colleagues, supervisors, partners, and customers”*
- *“Clearly communicates ideas and thoughts in team meetings and conferences”*
- *“Is a constructive communicator and is capable of discussing difficult issues effectively and to the point”*

Accountability

- *“Takes ownership in the company’s success and accepts responsibility for oneself and contribution as a team member”*
- *“Admits mistakes and errors and informs others when unable to keep a commitment”*

Attendance and punctuality

- *“Exceeds expectations in arriving on time for work, including meetings and conferences”*
- *“Has good attendance and doesn’t violate the standard attendance policy”*
- *“He begins each day fully refreshed and prepared for any challenges”*

Productivity and quality of work

- *“Positively contributes to the overall performance of the company through consistent and high-quality work”*
- *“Continuously strives to improve profits, productivity and performance targets”*
- *“Shows strong time-management and organizational skills”*

Achievement

- *“Sets well thought-out goals and continuously strives to achieve them”*
- *“Improved xx by xx%”*
- *“Made an effective system to streamline xx work processes by doing xx”*

Cooperation

- *“Displays a cooperative spirit by performing xx task to contribute to xx project”*
- *“Promotes cooperation well to ensure colleagues work as a team to meet deadlines”*

Coaching and training

- *“Accepts coaching in various job duties and applies training to improve xx ability”*
- *“Asks for more training when xx processes aren’t clear or understood”*

Improvement

These phrases identify common areas of improvement:

- *“Struggles to effectively overcome new challenges and find solutions to new issues”*
- *“Should work on developing and maintaining professional relationships”*
- *“Tends to focus more on what can’t be done instead of what can be done”*

Interpersonal skills

- *“Works effectively within a team environment to achieve specific tasks or projects”*
- *“Develops constructive working relationships with internal and external stakeholders”*
- *“Is an effective team player as demonstrated by their willingness to help out and contribute as required”*

Problem solving

- *“Displays the capability to independently solve complex problems”*
- *“Breaks a problem down before analyzing it in a more detailed manner”*
- *“Knows how to collaborate with others effectively to find solutions to problems”*

How to provide *Positive and Negative Performance Feedback*

Constructive feedback can praise good performance or correct poor performance and should always be tied to performance standards. Below are examples of how to provide *positive feedback* and *negative feedback* (<https://hr.iu.edu/training/ca/feedback.html>):

Giving negative feedback: correcting poor performance

- Note poor performance immediately upon observing it.
- Specify what does not meet expectations.
- Refer to [performance standards](#).
- Note the effect of observed performance on workgroup/organization.
- Model or restate appropriate performance.
- Describe negative consequences.
- Obtain agreement on the problem.
- Mutually seek solutions.
- Agree on an action plan.
- Encourage improvement.
- Set date for check (if appropriate).
- Don't belabor a point.
- Move forward after the discussion.
- Avoid giving correction in public.

Giving *positive feedback*: praising good performance

- Praise immediately on observing good performance.
- Be specific about what was good about performance; refer to [performance standards](#).
- Note how meeting (or exceeding) standards help workgroup/organization meet strategic objectives.
- Encourage maintaining this level of performance.

How to conduct Performance Review

Organizations need to provide feedback to employees to engage in job performance and employee motivation. The feedback needs to be clear, specific, and detailed so that employees gain information on their strengths and weaknesses. According to Towler (2018) organizations must ensure the following when providing performance feedback:

1. **Use Effective Performance Rating scales**-research shows that it is important for organizations to utilize solid and clear performance rating scales that are accepted by all employees in the organization.
2. **Ensure raters receive quality training**-It is best to train raters in best practices rather than focusing on what not to do or how to avoid errors such as rater bias. The best way in which to provide training is in establishing concepts on what represents effective vs. ineffective performance. It is also important to train raters on which behaviors and competencies constitute performance.
3. **Be Transparent and involve employees in performance appraisal process**-participation in the appraisal process is important because it is related to employee reactions (Cawley et al., 1998). In fact, justice perceptions are an integral part of performance ratings and can be aligned with effective performance management systems (DeNisi & Murphy, 2017).
4. **Align Performance Appraisal with Staffing, Feedback and Compensation**-One of the best ways in which to link individual and firm performance is through acknowledgment that

performance appraisal, as a human resource practice, is a component of a parcel of activities that align staffing, performance feedback, and compensation with the strategic goals of the firm (DeNisi & Murphy, 2017).

- 5. Understand the context in which feedback is provided**—One of the other features of effective performance feedback is in understanding the context in which feedback is provided (DeNisi & Murphy, 2017). Research in organizational psychology informs us that the climate and culture within the firm shapes the beliefs concerning talent and this can impact the appraisal system (DeNisi & Murphy, 2017).

A recent research paper, *The Future of Feedback: Motivating Performance Improvement through Future-focused Feedback*, by Dr. Jackie Gnepp, President of Humanly Possible, Inc., and Dr. Joshua Klayman, Prof. Emeritus, University of Chicago Booth School of Business, concludes that feedback is more effective when managers focus on future performance instead of assessing (or obsessing over) past performance. Their research suggests that employees are more motivated to improve performance when the feedback conversation is collaborative and future-focused. Gnepp and Klayman contend that employee motivation to improve performance is greatly enhanced when the feedback conversation is collaborative and focuses on how the employee can improve—and not a causal analysis of past performance. Lisa Mullen, Manager of Corporate Human Resources at Halogen Software, believes that the review process should be a year-round activity.

“Managers should take the opportunity to discuss and record milestones, accomplishments, successes, and challenges as they occur when the details are fresh.”

Even during this pandemic where some teams are working virtually, *performance feedback* is still important, and managers need to ensure they continue to provide feedback to their employees. Employees are turning to their leaders and their organizations for stability in our uncertain world of divisiveness and environmental unrest. Some leaders and organizations will emerge more successfully than others, having better prepared and honed new leadership skills in managing talent (Carter, 2020).

Tatenda Sayenda-Havire is a Consultant at Industrial Psychology Consultants (Pvt) Ltd, a management and human resources consulting firm. Phone +263 (242) 481946-48/481950 or email: tatenda@ipccconsultants.com or visit our website at www.ipccconsultants.com

<https://thehumancapitalhub.com/articles/Everything-You-Need-To-Know-About-Performance-Feedback>