

PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL – HINTS & TIPS

Performance appraisals are essential for the effective management of staff. The appraisal process develops individuals, improves organisational performance and informs the annual business plan. It enables managers and employees to jointly monitor work performance and agree expectations, objectives and workloads. Performance appraisals review individual performance against previously agreed objectives and competencies and allow the identification of learning and development needs. Done well, appraisals motivate staff, reinforce desired attitudes and behaviors, communicate organisational aims and build positive relationships between managers and team members. Appraisals provide a formal, recorded, regular review of performance and a plan for future development.

Appraisal should be a positive experience for both parties. The better skilled the manager is at the process the more likelihood of a positive outcome. Employees should fully understand the appraisal process and know what to expect from the meeting. Appraisal should never be used to handle disciplinary matters which should always be dealt with elsewhere.

The appraisal cycle

In most organisations the appraisal cycle consists of two or three meetings during the year:

1. Agreement of objectives and work priorities for year to come
2. Half year (or more frequent) informal review
3. Year-end formal review meeting

In practice, meetings 1 and 3 are often held at the same time. Holding regular informal reviews reduces the time required for the annual formal appraisal meeting and builds performance management into everyday working life.

The appraisal process

Prepare

Prepare all materials and documents in advance, including the previous appraisal documentation and an up-to-date job description. Your organisation will probably have an appraisal policy and documentation available. A good appraisal form will provide a template for the meeting so do use it. Whatever you use, ensure that you understand how it works. Organise your paperwork to reflect the order of the appraisal and write down the sequence of items to be covered. If the appraisal form includes a self-assessment section and/or feedback section (good ones do) make sure this is given to the appraisee in advance of the appraisal with guidance for completion (at least two weeks ahead of the meeting).

Inform

Ensure the appraisee is informed well in advance that their appraisal is due, and agree with them the time and place. Give them enough time to put together relevant documents and information, and to think about what they want to achieve for the following year. If the appraisal paperwork does not give a natural order for the discussion then provide an agenda of items to be covered and ask the appraisee what they would like to add to it.

Venue and layout

Make sure that the venue is private and free from interruptions and that phones, beeps and pagers are switched off or diverted. Room layout and seating has a huge influence on the way an appraisal meeting goes. Arrange the furniture to create an informal and relaxed atmosphere – appraisal should not be conducted across a desk or with you in a higher chair than the appraisee. You need to create a relaxed situation, preferably at a meeting table or in easy chairs. Position the chairs at an angle to each other - 90 degrees ideally – and avoid sitting directly opposite the appraisee as this can be intimidating and confrontational.

Introduction

The role of the appraiser is to relax the appraisee. Open with a positive statement, smile, be warm and friendly, offer tea or coffee. The appraisee may be feeling apprehensive and it is your responsibility to create a calm and non-threatening atmosphere. Set the scene properly. Explain how the meeting will proceed and that you would like as much input as possible from the appraisee - tell them that it is **their** meeting not yours. Follow the 80/20 rule – they do 80% of the talking and you do 20%. Begin with some general discussion about how things have been going but avoid getting into specifics, which are covered next (and you can say so). Ask if there are any additional points to cover and note them down so that you can include them when appropriate.

Review and measure

Invite the appraisee to review last year's activities, objectives and achievements one by one. If you have done your preparation correctly you will have an order to follow. If something off-subject comes up then note it down and say you'll return to it later (and make sure that you do). Concentrate on facts, figures and solid evidence and avoid conjecture, anecdotal or non-specific opinions, especially about the appraisee. Being objective is one of the greatest challenges for an appraiser. As with interviewing, resist judging the appraisee in your own image, or according to your own style and approach. For each item agree a measure of competence or achievement according to whatever measure or scoring system is built into the appraisal system. This might be simply a yes or no, or it might be a percentage or a mark out of ten, or an A, B, C rating. Reliable review and measurement requires reliable data - if either you or the appraisee do not have the necessary information to hand then you may need to reschedule the meeting. If a point of dispute arises you need to get the facts straightened out before making an important decision or judgment, and if necessary defer to a later date and seek the advice of your manager.

Agree an action plan

An overall plan should be agreed which takes into account job responsibilities, the appraisee's career plans, the departmental and whole organisation's priorities, and the reviewed strengths and development needs. The plan can be staged if necessary with short, medium and long-term aspects, but importantly it must be agreed and realistic.

Agree specific objectives

These are the specific actions and targets that together form the action plan and/or Personal Development Plan. When helping people to develop, you are not restricted to job-related objectives, although most objectives tend to be work-related.

Agree necessary support

This is the support required for the appraisee to achieve their objectives, which can include training and development activities (e.g. external courses and seminars, internal courses, coaching, mentoring, secondment, shadowing, distance-learning, reading, watching videos, attending meetings and workshops, workbooks, manuals and guides); anything relevant and helpful that will help the person develop towards what is required. Unless you are the budget holder avoid committing to training expenditure before approval has been confirmed - if necessary discuss likely training requirements with the budget holder before the appraisal meeting. Raising false hopes is not helpful to the process or your working relationship.

Invite any other points or questions

Make sure that you capture any other concerns and have covered anything the appraisee wanted to discuss.

Close positively

Thank the appraisee for their contribution to the meeting and their effort throughout the year, and commit to helping them in any way you can.

Record main points, agreed actions and follow-up

You can write up the appraisal yourself or ask the appraisee to do it. Whichever you choose the paperwork should be completed soon afterwards. Ensure that documents are filed and copied to relevant departments (HR and your own line manager typically). Note in your diary the dates for review so that you keep on top of the appraisal cycle.

Please let us know how you used these hints & tips and what others you would find useful
Email miles@enthiostraining.co.uk