

# Performance Appraisals

## Building Management Skills for Prevention Professional Video Series



New England (HHS Region 1)

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**PTTC**

Prevention Technology Transfer Center Network  
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

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## *Before the Appraisal Discussion*

*Consider addressing the following suggestions before the appraisal discussion:*

- **Review appropriate documentation.** Revisit the job description for the person you're appraising, as well as their goal statements from previous appraisals. It's important that people are clear about what's expected of them in their roles, both in terms of their duties, and in terms of the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) that they need to develop. As you do this, think about whether these documents reflect the work that this person actually does. If there's a difference, you may need to rethink the job description, and consider whether past goals are still relevant.
- **Ask for a self-assessment.** Consider asking the person you're appraising to evaluate his own performance before the appraisal meeting. They can complete this in essay format, where people write down how they think they've done, or by using a "forced choice" or "multiple choice" scale, where people choose statements that best describe their performance. (If you're using one of these questionnaire-type formats, make sure that the options you present reflect the competencies you ask for within the job description.) At the same time, ask if there are any issues outstanding that you may need to prepare for. That way, you can address these issues fully and comprehensively at the appraisal interview. (See the next section on Sample Questions for a team member Self-Evaluation)
- **Complete an assessment of the individual yourself:** Use your organization's performance appraisal document to complete any corporate-sponsored assessments. If you asked the team member to complete a self-assessment, then also complete the same task from your own perspective. Be prepared with examples to support your ratings. These examples are critical to justify your ratings and to explain any issues with which the team member disagrees with your ratings/evaluation. Use the team member's job description to identify core competencies that you use to assess the quality of the team member's performance. Avoid common appraisal rating errors (see below).
- **Where necessary, draft a performance improvement plan.** This gives you ideas and approaches that you can draw on during the appraisal discussion, and you can refine this during the appraisal meeting itself. Your team member may have suggestions for how to improve their performance.

### **Tip:**

When you have a performance review meeting scheduled, do your best to avoid having to postpone it. Moving it is like saying to the person concerned "there's something more important than you and your success." This is a particularly bad message to be sending when you're discussing something as personal as performance.

## ***Before the Appraisal Discussion:***

### **Sample Questions for a Team Member's Self-Evaluation**

#### ***Job Components***

- Review your job description.
- Identify any components of the job description that you no longer do or that now take additional time.
- Describe any new goals, responsibilities, or added challenges you have taken on since your most recent performance evaluation. Identify those that require additional decision making, responsibility, accountability, or oversight of the work of other team members.
- Identify what you like most about your current job.
- Determine the components of your job that you would you like to change or eliminate. Why?

#### ***Achievements***

- What are your most significant accomplishments and contributions since your most recent performance evaluation?
- What accomplishments and achievements are you the proudest of since your last performance evaluation?
- What goals do you wish you had accomplished since your last performance evaluation but did not?
- What would have helped you to accomplish these goals? How could your manager/supervisor have better helped you to accomplish these goals?
- In what other major projects and initiatives did you participate and contribute since your most recent performance evaluation?
- What work are you performing that is outside the scope of your current job description?

#### ***Goals***

- What job-related goals would you like to accomplish during this evaluation period?
- How can your supervisor help you to accomplish these job-related goals?
- What additional support can this organization or your team provide so that you are able to achieve these goals?

### *Professional Development*

- What professional job or career growth goals do you hope to achieve within three years?
- What resources and support can this organization provide so that you can accomplish this professional job or career growth goals?
- What professional and personal goals will help you improve or develop your performance in your current job?
- What additional support can this organization provide so that you can accomplish these goals?
- When completed, please send copies of this self-evaluation to your supervisor and Human Resources (if appropriate) prior to your performance evaluation meeting.

## *Before the Appraisal Discussion:*

### **Common Performance Appraisal Errors/Biases**

When completing performance reviews, psychologists and researchers alike agree that managers naturally exhibit bias in their ratings. Appraisers must be on guard against anything that distorts reality, either favorably or unfavorably. To be fair and objective, a performance evaluation must be based on the team member's job-related behavior, not on the team member's personal traits, work situation, or other factors unrelated to team member performance. Though subjectivity never will be completely removed from the process, it is important to keep some of the most commonly seen prejudices in mind when completing performance reviews.

*These are some of the more frequent rating errors/biases in the performance evaluation process:*

#### **Excessive Leniency**

- Excessive leniency occurs when the manager rates all team members higher than their performance warrants to look good; to be kind, supportive, well-liked; to be able to give more compensation.
- Sometimes the manager's underlying motivation is the belief that an underperforming team member will be motivated by a positive performance review.
- Other managers simply prefer to take the path of least resistance.
- It is important to accurately rate each team member according to their performance during the rating period, or the entire performance evaluation system might be rendered ineffective.

#### **Excessive Severity**

- Managers tend to demonstrate severity bias when hoping to motivate average-performing team members.
- A manager with this bias tends to rate all team members lower than their performance warrants to inspire average team members to improve their performance.
- Again, it is important to accurately rate each team member according to their performance during the rating period, or the entire performance evaluation system might be rendered ineffective.

## **Central tendency**

- Clustering everyone in the middle performance categories to avoid extremes of good or bad performance; it's easy, but it's wrong.
- This isn't fair to team members who are really trying, and it can be demoralizing.

## **Personal Bias**

- Allowing a personal bias to influence a team member's rating.
- Personal biases can come from attitudes and opinions about issues such as race, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, hair color, weight, height, intelligence, etc.

## **Favoritism**

- Overlooking the flaws of favored or "nice" team members, especially those whom everyone likes.

## **Similar-to-Me Bias**

- This bias occurs when the manager gives higher ratings to team members who are similar to the rater.
- We tend to like and relate well to people who remind us of ourselves; however, this resemblance should not spill over into performance review ratings.

## **Opportunity Bias**

- Opportunity bias occurs when the manager either credits or faults the team member for factors beyond the team member's control.
- If my team member's success is due to factors beyond their control, I attribute their success to their skills, etc. (Example: Highly rating a sales team member, even though the true cause of their exceptional performance was pure luck, rather than through normal sales channels such as meeting cold-calling and prospecting goals.)
- If my team member fails for reasons beyond their control, I attribute their failure to their skills, etc. (Example: Poorly rating a team member, even though the true cause of their poor performance was lack of proper training or instruction from their manager.)

## **Halo Effect**

- The Halo Effect occurs when a team member possesses one exceptional strength, and the manager allows this to carry over into other rating categories or to dominate the overall evaluation score.

- For example, if a team member excels in the category of “job knowledge,” then their manager automatically assumes that this team member excels in the categories of “attendance” or “work production.”

### **Horns Effect**

- The Horns Effect occurs when a team member has one hindering weakness, and the manager allows this to seep into other rating categories or the overall outcome of the team member’s performance appraisal.
- For example, if a team member is especially weak in the category of “customer satisfaction,” then their manager automatically assumes that this team member may need to make improvement in the categories of “job knowledge” or “problem solving.”

### **Contrast Bias**

- A manager experiencing this bias tends to compare performance to other team members rather than comparing performance to an established company standard.
- It is important that the manager does not consider the performance of other team members to “rank” team members in the performance review process. Every team member deserves their performance review to be based solely on individual performance, not performance as compared with other team members.

### **Grouping**

- Excusing below-standard performance because it is widespread; “Everyone does it.”

### **Guilt by Association**

- Rating someone based on the company they keep, rather than on the work that they do.

### **Holding a Grudge**

- Never try to make team members pay for past behavior.

### **Recency Bias**

- Recency bias occurs when the manager bases a team member’s evaluation on only more recent events, the last few weeks, or months, rather than the entire evaluation period.
- Make sure that you’re keeping performance records so that you can accurately describe performance over an entire performance period.



### **Job vs. Individual Bias**

- Some jobs seem to be more vital to the organization than others.
- A particular job may be crucial to the company's success, but it does not necessarily mean that the team member is performing well in that job.

### **Length-of-Service Bias**

- It is important to remember that length of service is not a factor in evaluating performance.
- Therefore, long-term team members should be evaluated according to the same established standards as other team members.

### **Conformation Bias**

- When a manager has an already existing belief or expectation for a team member, the manager may see and hear only the performance data that confirms the manager's expectations for that team member.
- The manager may or may not be aware that they are doing this, subsequently evaluating the team member's performance inaccurately and unfairly.

- It's a great idea to assess your own biases prior to completing performance evaluations.
- It is also important to review these common biases with your management team prior to the commencement of performance appraisals, so your performance reviews are more accurate and objective in nature.
- When you can remove some of the bias from the evaluation process, performance appraisals become much more meaningful for organizational decision-making and compensation adjustments.
- In addition, they become much more useful to the team member in assessing valid areas that need improvement and valid areas in which they meet or exceed expectations.

## *Before the Appraisal Discussion:*

### **How to Identify and Correct Performance Review Bias**

#### **1. Develop a clear evaluation structure**

A lack of guidelines for the evaluation process almost inevitably leads to bias. This means the “open box” review process, which consists of open-ended questions that managers answer in each review, makes an evaluation prone to bias.

To solve this problem, create a clear evaluation structure for all managers to follow and train them how to use it rather than leaving the review to their own discretion. This clear structure will help improve the accuracy of evaluations.

By taking this step, your organization will improve equality and accuracy in its performance reviews. For instance, a lack of structure in a performance review tends to advantage men, leading their managers to perceive them as possessing more leadership strengths than women. Include a list of clear, specific criteria for each evaluation question to help eliminate this and other biases.

#### **2. Agree on specific goals**

Managers can avoid some bias by asking employees what their goals are before the performance review, allowing them to track employees’ progress over time.

Remind managers to review their agreed-upon goals for the employee before beginning an evaluation so that they’re fresh in their mind. That way, they’ll be using fair criteria to judge each of their team members.

Similarly, to avoid Recency Bias, managers should keep a log of employee progress, so they won’t forget the value of what employees did throughout the year.

#### **3. Find common ground**

Managers can work to avoid Similar-to-Me Bias by striving to find common ground with each employee.

Before the review, they might discuss a work-related event that they both took part in, like a recent volunteer day or work party. They should also strive to find common ground all year round so that each employee becomes part of their “in-group,” which will minimize the unfair impact of the Similarity-to-Me Bias.

#### **4. Look at performance metrics**

Use analytics to track performance so you can compare data against a performance review if necessary. Analytics allow you to evaluate employees more objectively.

If necessary, your HR department can review this data, compare it against the results of the performance review, and discuss any discrepancies with the manager to determine whether their evaluation is accurate.

#### **5. Gather feedback from multiple sources**

Seek input from different people who work with a team member, like direct reports, peers, and customers.

Getting multiple perspectives through a 360 review may give you a clearer understanding of how the employee is performing.

#### **6. Ask relevant questions**

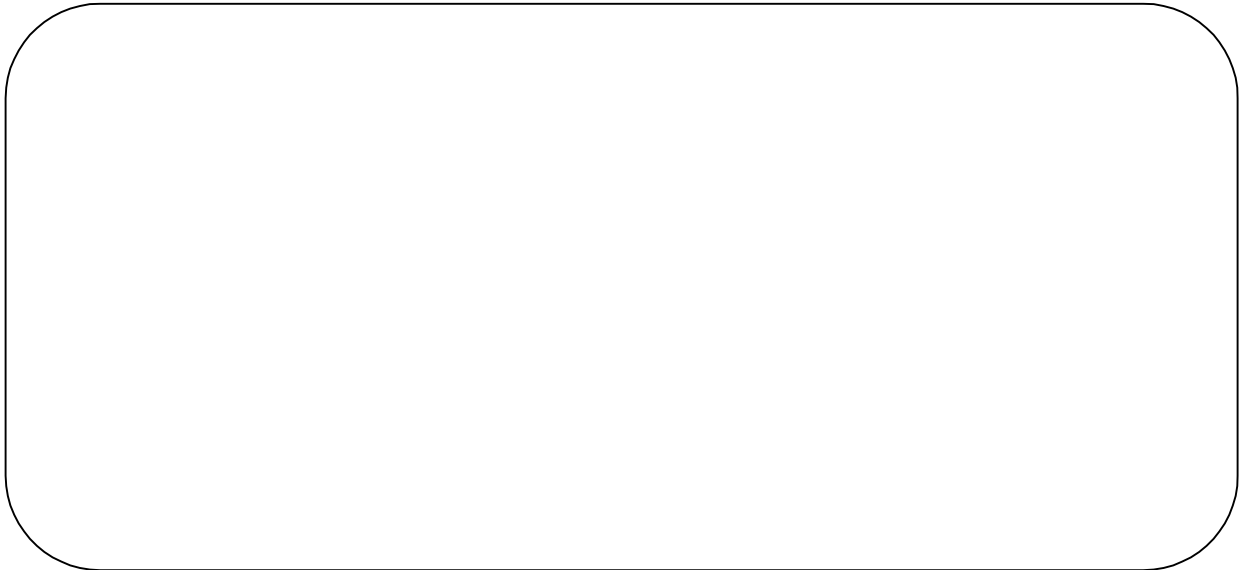
Reevaluate your evaluation questions as well.

A strong question could ask managers to name three strengths of a team member in a specific area. That way, they won't write lengthy lists of goals for the team members they may be biased toward while ignoring the strengths of others. Such questions challenge them to dig deep for answers rather than allowing their preconceptions to guide them.

## **Avoiding Bias During Performance Appraisal Ratings & Discussions**

**Instructions:** Please take another look at the list of performance review biases that can interfere with any appraiser's memory, interpretation, assumptions, ratings, and subsequent decisions and team member coaching. Please consider all your team members or identify one team member whom you may have the most difficulty evaluating objectively . . . Then please answer the following questions, with no names:

Which bias or biases do you think you might experience more often, when thinking about others with whom you work? (Consider pp. 4 - 7 content)



In what way/s might these biases interfere with your ability to be fair at work?



How might you try to minimize the impact that these biases may have on your memory, interpretation, assumptions, ratings, and subsequent decisions while evaluating your team members' performance? (Consider pp. 8 - 9 content)

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## During the Appraisal Discussion, Current Performance

*Consider addressing the following suggestions during the performance evaluation discussion:*

- **Create a supportive environment:** First, find a time when you can close the door, and make sure that you won't be interrupted: it's important that you're able to focus solely on the appraisal. Be enthusiastic but businesslike in your approach. Explain the agenda for the meeting, and then cover everything you said you would: performance relative to job descriptions/responsibilities, expectations, goals achieved, future goals, any issues which may be getting in the way of goals being achieved, and so on. This helps to keep things objective and minimizes defensiveness. And remember to stick to specific results and issues: don't generalize.

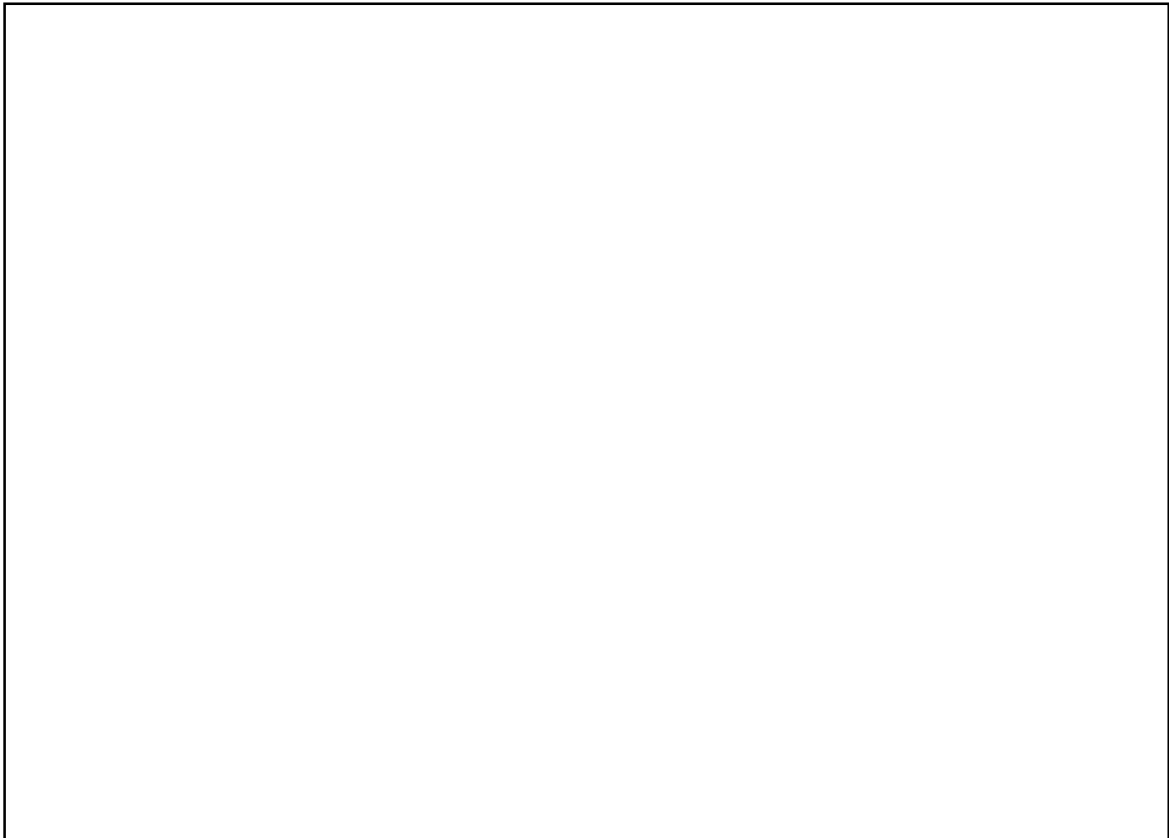
*What are some specific things you can/should do to create a supportive environment?*

- **Consider sharing the positives first:** As a manager, you want people in your team to play to their strengths, so that you and they can make the best possible contribution. During appraisals – and any other feedback session – it's all too easy to dive in by looking at problems and then spend most of your time on these. Don't fall into this morale-busting, performance-sapping habit: make sure that you leave plenty of time to cover the positives!

*Why put the positives first? Suggestions for remembering to cover the positives and for sounding sincere, using our Constructive Feedback ground rules?*

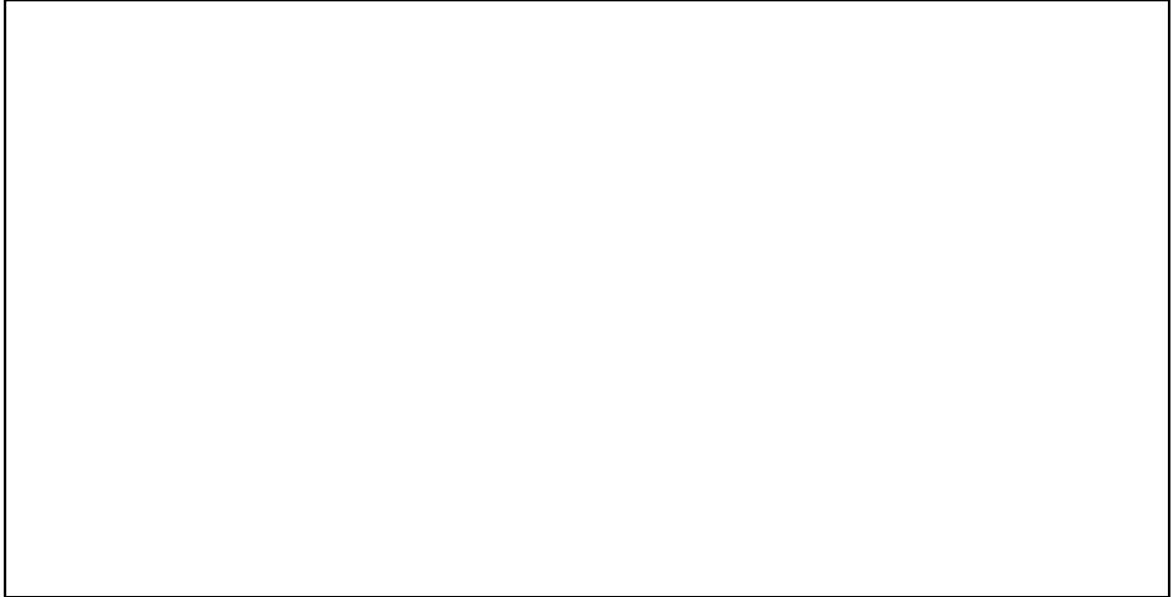
- **Address any areas for improvement:** Encourage the other person to volunteer their own observations about weaknesses or performance missteps. This again tends to reduce defensiveness, and it sets a good tone for the rest of the meeting. When the other person is talking, actively listen and, where appropriate, repeat information to make sure that you understand exactly what is being said. As part of this, consider comparing your evaluation of the person's skills with their pre-session self-evaluation and note and discuss any significant differences. When you give and receive feedback, be sure to focus on the situation – not the individual. And where there are disagreements, allow the person to describe their point of view and try to reach consensus before moving on. Don't forget your detailed documented examples, to justify your evaluation and to add weight to areas where your team member disagrees with you, but there is no room for negotiation.

*Advice on how to address improvement areas with clear language, with confidence, with open-mindedness, and to avoid you and your team members defensiveness?*



- **Identify obstacles:** Is there anything that's stopping your team member from performing at their best? Perhaps a colleague in another department is routinely late in providing necessary information, or maybe your team member is spending increasing amounts of time on a process that could be automated with help from IT?

*What are common root causes for performance problems, in your experience?*



- **Discuss solutions:** With problems clearly identified and agreed upon, you can now concentrate on a plan for improvement. Agree what each of you will do and set specific goals to resolve problems.

*What are your secrets for identifying good solutions and for exercising the necessary creativity to find these solutions?*





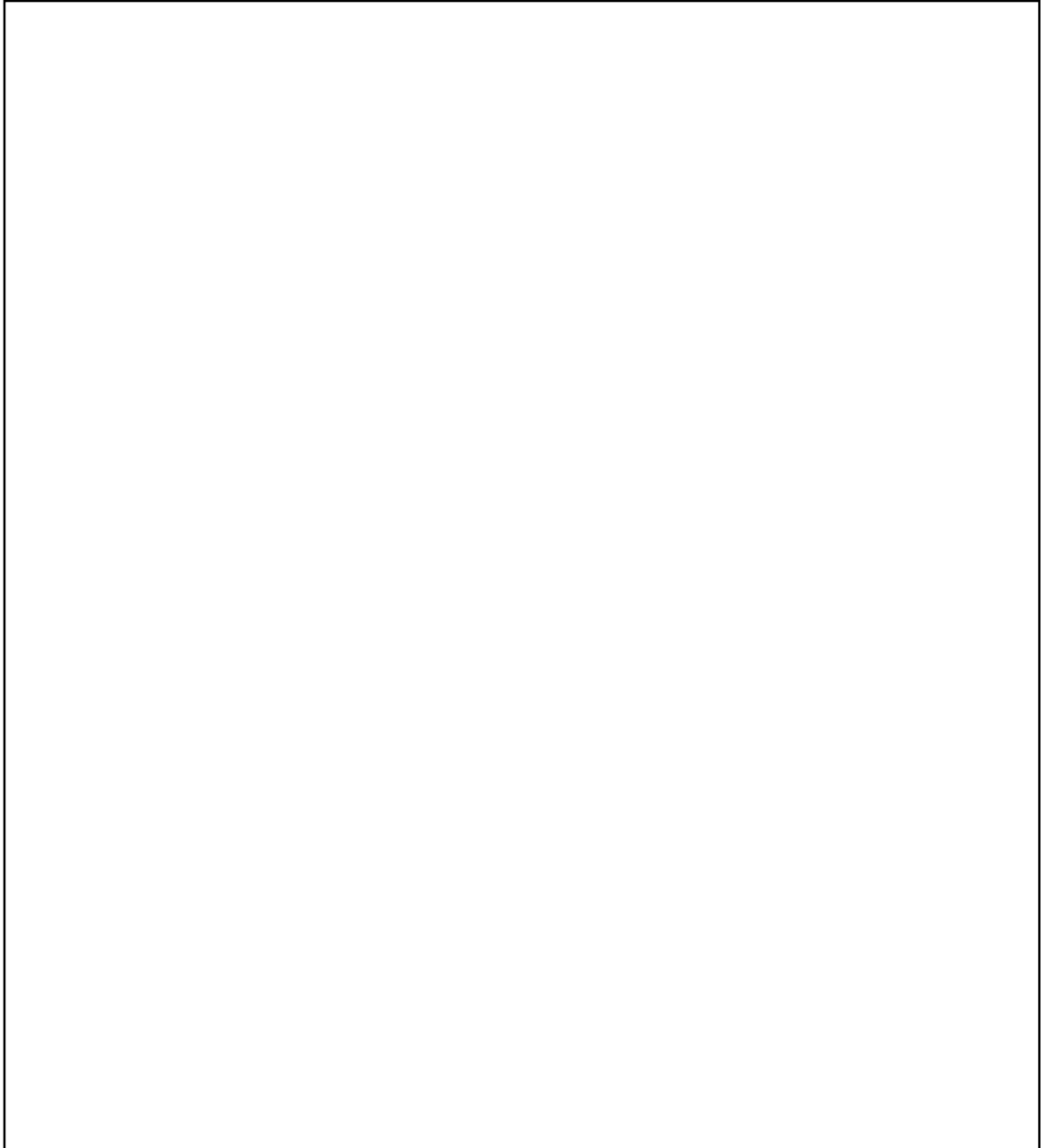
- **Set new goals too:** The appraisal is a chance to look at how to improve performance, as well as to make plans for future growth and development. Take some time to explore ways in which this person can contribute to the organization's success and set goals accordingly. And agree how the person can develop their skills further, so that they can be ever more effective in the future. This is also a good time to ask the person about her own career goals. Find out what these are and discuss ways that you could provide relevant opportunities or craft/modify the team member's role to help them achieve these goals, while still working towards the organization's objectives. (This may not be appropriate in all situations.)

*Has a team member ever surprised you when you learned that they had an unexpected interest in learning something new at work or developing a new skill? What happened?*



- **Summarize:** End with a clear summary of what was discussed and what was agreed. Plan another meeting if you need to follow-up about anything. End on a positive note, and make sure that this is the start of an ongoing feedback process, rather than the end of the discussion until next year.

*What do you recommend that a supervisor do, at the end of the performance appraisal discussion? How can you be sure this discussion was worth your and your team member's time and will lead to something constructive?*



# **During the Appraisal Discussion, Future Performance Growth**

## **The GROW Model for Professional Development Planning**

### **About the Model**

GROW stands for:

- **G**oal.
- **C**urrent **R**eality.
- **O**ptions (or **O**bstacles).
- **W**ill (or **W**ay Forward).

A good way of thinking about the GROW Model is to think about how you would plan a journey. First, you decide where you are going (the goal) and establish where you currently are (your current reality).

You then explore various routes (the options) to your destination. In the final step, establishing the will, you ensure that you are committed to making the journey, and are prepared for the obstacles that you could meet on the way.

### **How to Use the Tool**

To structure a professional development planning session using the GROW Model, take the following steps:

#### **1. Establish the Goal**

First, Supervisor and their team member need to look at the skill that the Team member needs to learn or improve, and then define this skill as a goal that the Team member wants to achieve.

Make sure that this is a SMART goal: one that is Specific, Measurable, Action-Oriented, Realistic/Relevant, and Time-bound.

When doing this, it is useful to ask and answer questions like:

- How will you know that the Team member has achieved this goal? How will you know that the skill has been learned? (See your Work Process Schedule and Progress Report for ideas)
- How does this goal fit with the Team member's work competencies?
- When will the Team member need to be able to apply this skill? Under what conditions? In what kinds of situations?
- Why should the Team member learn this skill?

## **2. Examine the Current Reality**

Next, ask the Team member to describe their current reality or skill level.

This is an important step: Too often, people try to solve a problem or reach a goal without fully considering their starting point, and often they are missing some information that they need in order to reach their goal effectively.

As the Team member talks about their current reality or skill level, the solution may start to emerge.

Useful planning questions in this step include the following:

- What steps have you already taken to accomplish this goal?
- In what areas do you need to improve?
- What can I/your Supervisor do to help you?

## **3. Explore the Options**

Once the Team member and Supervisor have explored the current reality, it is time to determine what is possible – meaning all the possible options for reaching this objective.

The Supervisor should help their Team member brainstorm as many good options as possible. Then, discuss these and help the Team member decide on the best ones.

The Supervisor should offer their own suggestions in this step. Let the Team member offer suggestions also. Have a two-way conversation about the options. It is important to guide the Team member in the right direction, without making decisions for them, whenever possible.

Typical questions that you can use to explore options are as follows:

- What else could you do?
- What if this or that constraint were removed? Would that change things?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of each option?
- What factors or considerations will you use to weigh the options?
- What do you need to stop doing to achieve this goal?
- What obstacles stand in your way?

## 4. Establish the Will

By examining the current reality and exploring the options, the Team member will now have a good idea of how they can achieve their goal.

That is great – but this may not be enough. The final step is for the Supervisor to get the Team member to commit to specific actions in order to move forward towards their goal. In doing this, the Supervisor will help the Team member establish their will and boost their motivation.

Useful questions to ask here include:

- So, what will you do now to meet your goal, and by when? What else will you do?
- What could stop you moving forward? How will you overcome this?
- How can you keep yourself motivated and moving forward towards your goal accomplishment?
- When do you need to review progress? Daily, weekly, monthly?