

Performance Review Process Guidelines Nova Southeastern University

for classified and administrative/professional employees

Statement of Purpose and Philosophy

The *annual performance review* is a key element in the performance management process. When used effectively, the performance review can provide accurate feedback on past performance and offer feedback to employees on areas of strength or areas in need of improvement, thus, setting the stage for *performance development*. For that reason, performance management is one of the most important responsibilities of supervisors/managers.

The performance management system at Nova Southeastern University has the following objectives:

- To create an environment that encourages open and on-going communication between managers and employees.
- To honestly identify employee's strengths and developmental needs to be successful their current (and future) positions.
- To provide timely and accurate feedback to employees concerning performance of job duties in relation to established position requirements and standards.
- To provide an objective method to evaluation of employee performance.

The characteristics of an effective performance feedback process are as follows:

1. Feedback should be given frequently, not once a year.
2. Create the right context for the discussion.
3. Ask the employee to rate his/her performance before the session.
4. Encourage the subordinate to participate in the session.
5. Recognize effective performance through praise.
6. Focus on solving problems.
7. Focus feedback on behavior or results, not on the person.
8. Minimize criticism.
9. Agree to specific goals and set a date to review the process.

Noe, R.A., J. R.Hollenbeck, B. Gerhart, and P. M.Wright. *Human Resources Management: Gaining a Competitive Edge* (Boston: Irwin, McGraw-Hill, 3rd ed. 2000)

For assistance with employee performance issues, please contact the Office of Human Resources.

Evaluating Employee Performance

- 1) **Review the Job Description** - The performance management process starts as soon as a person begins work and is an ongoing process. The first step in the review process with any new employee is to review and discuss the employee's job description. Discussing the job description and setting expectations is particularly important when an employee transfers from another department. If the employee is doing the same job, but acquires a new manager, that new manager must also take time to discuss goals and expectations. The employee may be accustomed to a different style or set of expectations and may be shocked if their review is negative and they had no forewarning of changes in expectations from the new manager.

Reviewing the Job Description is an opportunity to get off to a good start by discussing goals and objectives and clarifying expectations of the position. Make sure the job description is up-to-date. If not, make appropriate changes and review them with the employee.

- 2) **Using the Employee Performance Review Forms** - Discuss the appropriate Employee Performance Review form with the employee:

Exempt – Salaried employees who are exempt from earning overtime. Administrative duties. Not responsible for supervising others.

Exempt Managerial – Supervisors. Salaried employees who are exempt from earning overtime. Administrative duties with responsibility for direct supervision of others.

Non-exempt -- Hourly paid employees who complete timesheets and are eligible to earn overtime.

Senior Administrator – Those administrators who report to Executive Office Administrators (i.e., President, Chancellor, Executive Vice President)

Make sure employees understand-of all the categories to be evaluated in the review. Identify categories that are critical to the position's success (i.e., Communication, Planning). If certain areas need to be weighted more heavily than others, discuss those critical categories with the employee clarifying the importance of those categories to their position.

- 3) **Encourage Employee Self Evaluation & Stated Personal Goals** -- Employee self-evaluations are also a useful tool. The self-evaluation should include a list of what they believe they accomplished during the

year. This gives you information on where the employee sees himself/herself and may be helpful in case you have overlooked some goals he/she accomplished during the year. At this time, also ask new employees what their expectations are - What are their goals—both professional and personal. Keep this information in mind as you coach employees and build on their interests and strengths.

- 4) **Provide Continuous Honest Feedback** -- The process of performance appraisal is an on-going process requiring continued communication through out the year and fostering two-way communication. There should be nothing on an employee performance review that the employee has not either heard or seen before. By providing honest feedback during the year the employee will not be surprised by the review.

Using index cards during the year to jot down notes on performance - negative or positive - give employee verbal feedback at that time and then drop the card into your departmental file to use when writing the review. Writing the review will then take less time and be more accurate. The writing of the review should take a relatively short time if you follow this process during the rest of the year. It will become a summation of what the employee and you are aware of already.

5) **Writing the Performance Appraisal**

- Work on it away from the workplace or set aside a block of uninterrupted time at work.
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- Use a pen or type the performance appraisal (completing the appraisal in pencil is not acceptable). It will look more professional, copies are easier to read, and there is less chance for unauthorized changes. We have also found that pencil tends to deteriorate over time.
- Edit and re-edit.
- Check for subjective comments incorporated into the appraisal unrelated to the performance categories.
- Contemplate employee's future with the University. For example, consider the employee's career development within position or their next likely position.

6) Understand the Performance Ratings

EXCELLENT (Exceeds Standards)

- These employees are clearly considered to be exceptional performers.
- Consistently exceed the communicated expectations of the job function, responsibility or goal.
- Demonstrate unique understanding of work beyond assigned area of responsibility.
- Contribute to the organization's success by adding significant value well beyond job requirements.
- Identify needs and provide unique, innovative and workable solutions to problems.
- Achievements and abilities are obvious to subordinates, peers, managers and customers.

GOOD (Fully Meets Standards)

- These employees are "on track" and fully achieve expectations.
- Independently and competently perform all aspects of the job function, responsibility, or goal.
- Performance consistently meets the requirements, standards, or objectives of the job.
- Occasionally *exceeds* requirements.
- Results can be expected which are timely and accurate.
- Recognizes, participates in, and adjusts to changing situations and work assignments.

ACCEPTABLE (Usually Meets Standards)

- These employees are considered to be "satisfactory" performers.
- Generally, meet expectations required for the position.
- Competently perform most aspects of the job function, responsibility or goal.
- May require improvement in one or two areas of consistent weakness.
- Employee requires coaching in a weak area or may need additional resources or training to meet expectations.

- Improvement in weaker areas should be acknowledged and documented.

UNSATISFACTORY (Fails to Meet Standards)

- Employees with this rating fail to satisfactorily perform most aspects of the position.
- Performance levels are below established requirements for the job.
- Employee requires close guidance and direction in order to perform routine job duties.
- Performance may impede the work of others and the unit.
- Performance deficiencies should be discussed between the employee and supervisor.

Common Mistakes Made When Completing a Performance Appraisal

- 1. Labeling** -- Avoid labeling of employees. Behaviors should be listed. For example, instead of saying "very dedicated", write, "works long hours, always proofs work before sending it out; expresses interest to take on more responsibilities". Instead of writing "lazy" or "poor work ethic" - write, "high incidence of absenteeism, work is incomplete, work quality is poor - for example, the ABC forms have had errors on them 40% of the time". If you state an employee's communication skills (or other skills, etc.) need improvement, be specific - what do they lack and what do they need to improve - how can they improve? Example - "Mary Jo could be more assertive" - what does this mean? What does the supervisor wish for her to do? Moreover, why is it important for the job?
- 2. Recency** -- Too much focus on the most recent examples of behavior rather than considering overall performance. This can occur because of inadequate record keeping.
- 3. Central Tendency** -- Managers tend to rate everyone about the same, or, at least, they avoid extreme ratings. The reviewer should use the ends of the scale as well as the middle.
- 4. Leniency** -- Managers shun low ratings to avoid conflict or because they believe that low ratings reflect badly on the reviewer. This can happen when the reviewer is rushed or under pressure to complete the appraisal.
- 5. Horns/Halo Effect** -- A tendency to rate the same individual "Excellent" on every trait or "Unsatisfactory" on every trait. This may happen when the supervisor feels that the employee has some shortcomings and then rates them poorly on everything as a result (or conversely, rates too high on everything based upon a few high ratings).
- 6. Constancy** -- Some managers rate their employees in rank-order rather than on an individual basis and adjust scores to match the ranking order. **7. Similarity** A tendency to rate employees, who have similar values and interests to the reviewer, higher.

Additional Factors Affecting Performance Appraisal Ratings:

- Length of service and the "compliance" of the person being rated can affect ratings significantly.
- Previous review ratings influence current reviews, whether the previous review was done by the current manager or a former one.
- Supervisors "guess" when they are not sure or do not have a lot of experience with a given employee's behavior.

Pointers to Keep in Mind Regarding Performance Appraisals

1. Make performance appraisal part of an ongoing process Feedback should be given regularly so that there are no "surprises" at the time of the review. A close

working relationship seldom results in misunderstandings.

2. Look at all aspects of an employee's performance Do not be influenced solely by one or two negative personality, performance, or behavior factors. A working relationship could be damaged by overlooking an employee's good qualities, or those areas in which the employee has made real efforts to improve.

3. Make specific and constructive judgments Keep comments as objective as possible. For example, if addressing attendance problems in the appraisal, mention days absent and number of occurrences. Focus on unexcused absences. Avoid mentioning the specific details surrounding an absence. Be prepared to have supporting documentation to support the rating.

4. Criticize work habits and behavior, not the person If the focus and the tone of an evaluation are professional, the employee will be more receptive to the constructive criticism, and the channels of communication will remain open.

5. Don't let marginal employees slide When nothing is done to document or address an employee's performance that is below standards, you are giving tacit approval to the situation. It will be difficult to apply a disciplinary process. **6. Keep complete written records for all performance appraisals** Keep documented records of all performance deficiencies (i.e. attendance records, any memos of warning, etc.)

Some pitfalls to avoid -

- Unclear communication
- Improper or lax record keeping
- Inaccurate or exaggerated performance ratings
- Lack of follow up

Other Considerations -

It is important to keep consistent records, reports, and appraisals on all employees. It is also important to:

- document both the positive and negative aspects of employees' performance
- never deviate from NSU's established procedures for conducting performance reviews
- use objective standards in evaluating performance (i.e., initiative)

Suggestions for Giving Difficult Feedback During a Performance Review

If rated "unsatisfactory", we recommend that a performance improvement plan be completed. We recommend that the employee play an active role in developing this plan. Individuals in the professional/administrative category could do their own plan, which is reviewed and edited by the supervisor. Contact the Office of Human Resources for assistance.

1. Address the issue(s) - do not put off documenting and discussing poor performance.
2. News of poor performance should never be a surprise to the employee at the time of their review. Instead, feedback, discussions, and additional training should be given at regular intervals throughout the year.
3. Practice how you plan to communicate the negative feedback either by yourself or with a peer. The Office of Human Resources can also assist you with this. You might phrase negative feedback as follows; "Joe, on this project, I would have preferred to see things go differently. Here is what I thought did not go as well as it should have. Here is what I would like to see done differently next time" and explain.
4. Never leave the employee to read the appraisal without first having a face-to-face discussion about the poor performance areas.
5. Do not build up the employee with praise or compliments before breaking the bad news. You are only going to be perceived as insincere.
6. Encourage the employee to express his or her reaction to your feedback. Suppressed feelings will be vented elsewhere - not necessarily to the benefit of either the employee or NSU.
7. Do not take a strong emotional reaction personally or try to defend anyone's position. Such attempts generally lead to more resistance.
8. Do not react to any strong feelings expressed by the employee by commiserating or communicating any acceptance. While this may seem like a positive thing to do at the time, the employee may misunderstand it as your agreement with statements expressed.
9. Feel free to say positive things about the employee after you have communicated the bad news and the employee has had a chance to vent his or her feelings.
10. Make sure that there are clearly defined action steps to improve performance.
11. When an employee receives a review completed by several "supervisors" the employee needs to know which comments come from which person. In particular, if the comments are negative, that person must give the feedback face to face with that person and not leave it to someone else to explain.