

The Supervisor's Role in the Performance Review and Development Process

Maintain a Development File for Each Staff member

This will be your informal record of the staff member's development and could include such items as:

- The current job description for the staff member's position
- Performance standards and objectives for the staff member's position, work unit, and/or department
- Copies of any performance development or other action plans you and the staff member worked on during the review period
- Records of any verbal or written counseling on performance issues
- Copies of prior performance reviews
- Records of the formal and informal training the staff member has completed
- Records of the staff member's noteworthy projects or accomplishments
- Records of any formal and informal feedback you have received from the persons served by the work performed by the staff member, his or her colleagues and coworkers, etc.

Understand the Objectives

Know the relationship between the mission and objectives of the University, the department, the work unit and the various positions you supervise. Know how the work of each staff member relates to the larger plan of the department and the University.

Know the Performance Standards

Know the performance standards for each position you supervise and how performance will be measured. Be able to identify the source of those standards and communicate that to the staff members involved. Consider the following as possible sources of performance standards:

- The current job description for the staff member's position
- Expectations of the persons served by the work the staff member performs
- Performance appraisal criteria
- Professional standards
- Performance objectives
- Unit, department, University mission or objectives
- Knowledge, skills or abilities required for the position
- Existing guidelines, policies, contracts or regulations

Assess Performance

Become familiar enough with a staff member's performance to provide an objective and constructive assessment. Observation will be your best source of information, along with the staff member's own assessment and feedback from those served by the staff member's work and other supervisory staff. Many staff members work in teams making input from team members another source of valuable information.

Meet with the Staff Member

Schedule time for a formal performance review at least annually with each staff member you supervise. Conduct the review at a time and place when you can give your undivided attention to the staff member. Then, don't limit performance feedback to an annual, formal meeting. The performance development plan is an excellent tool for providing ongoing coaching and performance assessment. Frequent, brief meetings can keep performance focus fresh and allow for timely assessment and recognition.

Complete the Process in a Timely Manner

Prepare the Staff Performance Review Form normally within two week of meeting with the staff member.

Keep Development in Mind

Remember that the University hires the best possible individuals. Your first task is to help the new staff member learn the job and successfully meet the performance standards. The initial review period is designed both as a learning time and as the last step in the selection process. Once competency is established, the focus shifts to continued development of those skills and abilities to a consistently high level of excellence.

“Best Practices” for Supervisors

If you have experienced a review of your own work performance, you are likely to be a better evaluator of work performance as a result. The following is a collection of “best practices” to consider using when conducting performance reviews:

Be Timely with Performance Reviews and Development Plan Reviews

Give the staff member several weeks’ notice that a performance review or development plan review is coming. This gives the staff member time to prepare and sends the message that you consider performance and development important.

Make Sure the Tools are Available

Have either paper forms available or make sure the staff member has access to the electronic form. Make sure you or someone else can answer the staff member’s questions about the forms and/or the process.

Remember the Learning Curve

This is a new process for you as a supervisor and for staff members who may never have participated in a review process. It takes time to learn how to use any new tool effectively.

Be Ready to Talk About the Standards

Standards aren’t new, but talking about them with staff members might be. Standards come from many sources: University policies, external laws, codes and/or regulations; professional associations; job descriptions; University, department or work unit missions or objectives. Two of the best sources for identifying the standards are (1) the person who receives the product or service and (2) the staff members who are doing the job.

Use Time, Space and Attention and Intention

When you meet with the staff member, make sure it is at a time when and in a place where you can give this meeting your full attention. Limit distractions and let the staff member know this time is important to you as well.

Include Full Consideration of Staff Comments when compiling the Final Document

This process is intended to be collaborative, a trait so valued by the University as to be included in the University’s performance appraisal criteria. You have an opportunity to demonstrate that you value the staff member’s time and perspective in this process. If you agree with the staff member’s comments, say that. If you disagree, say that as well and explain why your perspective is different.

Continuous Development is a Partnership with the Staff Member

Consider what the job will require in the next one to two years, and then work with the staff member to chart a course for development. Look for ways you can provide support, coaching, encouragement and opportunities for the staff member to use newly acquired knowledge, skills and abilities.

Understand that this is a Flexible Process

This is a flexible tool that can be used as an annual performance review or as an ongoing coaching and development tool.

Understand Common Reviewer Errors

Halo Effect: Allowing a recent example of outstanding performance in one area to positively impact your assessment of the staff member's performance in other, unrelated areas.

Tendency: Evaluating all performance higher than usual because of a single outstanding event.

Risk: Establishes an all-or-nothing pattern in which it becomes difficult to target specific areas for improvement. Areas where improvement is needed can be overlooked, conveying a message that performance is satisfactory. Opportunities for growth and development can be missed.

Instead: Measure each staff member's performance against objective performance standards (job description, performance appraisal criteria, professional standards, performance objectives, for example) in all areas of responsibility over the course of the entire review period.

Horns Effect: Allowing a recent example of substandard performance in one area to negatively impact your assessment of performance in other, unrelated areas.

Tendency: Evaluating all performance lower than usual because of a recent example of poor performance.

Risk: Fails to recognize what the staff member is doing well in some areas. Serves to demoralize the individual, which can lead to further performance problems. The danger is triggering a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Instead: Measure each staff member's performance against objective performance standards (job description, performance appraisal criteria, professional standards, performance objectives, for example) in all areas of responsibility over the course of the entire review period.

Stereotyping: Rating performance based on the staff member's similarity to or difference from a stereotypical model (all men, all women, everyone under 30, etc.)

Tendency: Assessing staff members' performance positively because they are similar to (or different from) the reviewer in personal style, perspective, or perceived "group membership." Using self as the standard for others' performance. Giving a high evaluation to staff members like the reviewer or a low evaluation to staff members unlike the reviewer regardless of job performance.

Risk: Discrimination on the basis of age, gender, culture, etc., is contrary to University policy and illegal. Uses a standard for performance that is not relevant to the job being performed. Conveys a message that performance standards are arbitrary and meaningless. Reinforces stereotypes within the workforce. Demoralizes by establishing standards that are impossible to reach. Establishes a high-risk, personal competitiveness with the reviewer.

Instead: Measure each staff member's performance against objective performance standards (job description, performance appraisal criteria, professional standards, performance objectives, for example) in all areas of responsibility over the course of the entire review period.

Loose, Tight or Central Tendencies: Rating everyone the same whether it's "good," "poor," or "neutral."

Tendency: Assessing performance positively for all staff members in the unit in order not to hurt anyone's feelings. Evaluating performance negatively for all staff members because perfection is impossible for all but the genius few. Evaluating everyone's performance the same because it's easier.

Risk: Areas of weakness remain uncorrected. Opportunities for development can be missed. Creates the impression that performance standards are meaningless. Establishes an unrealistic appraisal of performance. Demoralizes by creating a sense of impossible or meaningless expectations.

Instead: Measure each staff member's performance against objective performance standards (job description, performance appraisal criteria, professional standards, performance objectives, for example) in all areas of responsibility over the course of the entire review period.