CONDUCTING A PERFORMANCE REVIEW:
FACILITATING EMPLOYEE GROWTH,
PROGRAM OVERVIEW

About the Training Program

This program is designed primarily for managers and other supervisory personnel who conduct performance reviews. The goal of the training is to make participants aware of the important leadership opportunity the performance review presents and to demonstrate and practice guidelines for effective written and verbal communication to be used during a review. The fundamental principle behind this program is that, regardless of how technical or global an industry is, its core is people working together. The more involved and worthwhile people feel, the greater the potential for productivity. The performance review provides a chance to involve people in planning their future growth.

Participants explore the skills to make the performance review a unique opportunity for supervisors to act as facilitators and trainers for their employees’ personal and professional growth. The skills of effective written documentation, active listening, constructive feedback, and goal setting are practiced. As this is a one-day program, it purposefully keys in on these four skills and avoids other issues (e.g., where to conduct the review, how often, etc.).

Training Objectives

Participants will have the following opportunities:

- To explore the importance of the employee performance review as a leadership opportunity;
- To define and practice a formula for giving constructive feedback and active listening skills;
- To expand their vocabulary to develop clear, written evaluations; and
- To practice the steps to co-create a future performance plan that increases involvement and motivation.
# PROGRAM OUTLINE

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**PROGRAM DIRECTIONS**

**I. Opening Activities**

A. *The Performance Review and Leadership (Presentation)*

1. Introduce yourself and your experience with performance reviews.
2. Review training objectives and topics (on flip chart or overhead).

B. *This Is the Way I Want It to Be (Mental Imagery; Materials: Audiocassette Recorder)*

1. Assist participants in relaxing during this activity by providing background music, dimming the lights, or using breathing exercises. Use the following script to help you lead the group through experiencing the positive feeling that results from a successful performance review.

   Close your eyes for a few moments as you experience the positive feelings that result from a successful performance review. Breathe in slowly through your nose and exhale slowly through your mouth. Repeat this deep breathing three times.

   Picture yourself preparing to conduct your next performance review. You are seated at your desk looking down at the performance-review sheets you’re previewing one
last time before your employee arrives. You feel confident and eager for the meeting to begin, because the sheets that were filled out ahead of time are detailed and accurate and will be a constructive source for helping your employee in the future. (Pause.)

There’s a knock at your door and you get up, open the door, smile, and warmly greet your employee. Notice that his or her face relaxes and that the smile is returned. (Pause.) You both exchange observations on the performance factors. You are energized, open, and full of creative ideas for your employee’s growth, which you pour into the conversation. (Pause.) When you disagree on a point, you listen openly and attentively as your employee shares his or her concerns in a nondefensive manner. As you respond to the concerns, the employee also listens, giving consideration to your points and noting them as you speak. You are feeling relaxed, involved, and very accepting, yet firm. (Pause.)

As both of you finish putting the final touches on the improvement plan, you see that even though you have discussed some negative behaviors that need to be changed, neither one of you was angry or defensive, and most of the conversation was involved in developing a future performance plan. Both of you sign the review and your employee sits back, says, “Whew,” smiles, and thanks you for your time and energy. The employee also mentions looking forward to the next few months to work on the plan. You both stand and shake hands, and the employee leaves: As the door shuts, you are deeply satisfied that this was an easy and constructive performance review. (Pause.) Slowly open your eyes and return to this room.

2. Ask participants to share some of the things that made this performance review positive. Record their ideas on the flip chart. As you do this, you may find that some participants believe that the review was “hard to believe.” Accept these perceptions for now.

3. Compare their responses to this list:
   - Performance-review sheets were prepared ahead of time with thought and detail.
   - Employee was warmly greeted.
   - Exchanges were shared, energized, creative.
   - Listening was open and attentive.
   - Disagreements were shared nondefensively.
   - The future performance plan was co-created.
   - Employee expressed gratitude.

4. Explain that the skills practiced during this program are designed to create more positive and constructive performance reviews.
C. **What Do I Want? (Icebreaker)**

1. Pair off participants.

2. Explain that each individual will have two minutes to interview his or her partner to obtain the following information:
   - The name of the partner.
   - What the partner is charged with accomplishing in his or her job at this time (not a job description, but an immediate, significant assignment).
   - As a result of the mental-imagery activity, two things the partner would like to learn to do better during this program and what doing them better would mean.

3. At the end of two minutes, ask pairs to switch roles. Ask for a pair to volunteer to come to the front of the room.

4. Ask one partner to sit while the other introduces him or her in one minute. Then they switch. Continue until all the participants have completed their introductions. Demonstrate by introducing yourself. (Skip these introductions if the group is too large to sustain interest in hearing several introductions.)

II. **Describing Employee Behaviors**

A. **A Poor Performance Description (Demonstration; Materials: Form A)**

1. Indicate that a performance description filled out prior to a performance review serves as a guide the employee can refer back to as he or she works toward improved performance. Therefore, it is vital that the description contains factual, accurate, and detailed information.

2. Display (with overhead projector or flip chart) and distribute Form A, a performance-description sheet that uses repetitious and general wording to describe employee behavior.

3. Ask participants to share their responses to these questions:
   - If you were the employee, would you know exactly which behaviors were ineffective?
   - Have you ever received a performance description similar to the sample? What was your reaction?

B. Disadvantages of Poor Performance Descriptions (Small-Group Discussion; Materials: Newsprint, Marking Pens)

1. Divide participants into small groups.

2. Indicate that assisting employees to have the information needed to choose more effective behaviors is one of the steps in leadership. Ask each group to brainstorm a list of disadvantages to written reviews that use a general and repetitious vocabulary. Also have them share problems they have experienced as givers or receivers of performance reviews. Request that each group appoint a spokesperson who will report the group’s data.

3. Reunite the full group and have each spokesperson share two disadvantages. Record responses on a flip chart. Compare responses to the following list of disadvantages:
   - Incomplete information to create a future performance plan.
   - Employee frustration and confusion concerning his or her performance, future, worth, etc.
   - Manager perceived as disinterested.
   - Specific behaviors to be changed not communicated.
   - Insufficient documented evidence on file to support a dismissal.
   - Manager unable to explain satisfactorily a final review rating.

C. Descriptive Words and Phrases (Writing Task; Materials: Form B)

1. Distribute Form B. Point out that accurate and specific information communicated about behavior increases the opportunity to change the behavior. Direct the participants to look over the list.

2. Refer participants back to Form A. Pair off participants. Ask pairs to use the space titled “Your Description” on Form A to record a specific description of inappropriate behavior of the performance factors. Encourage participants to use the words and phrases listed on Form B to achieve a clear description. Illustrate your point (e.g., instead of “use of time not good” say, “does not start projects early enough; late from breaks; does easier tasks before difficult ones; inattentive to deadlines”).

3. Reassemble the full group and invite a few individuals to share what they wrote. Record responses on the flip chart. Post sheets on the wall.

4. Invite observations and insights.
III. Giving Constructive Feedback

A. Nonconstructive Feedback (Demonstration)

1. Demonstrate a situation in which a supervisor is giving nonconstructive feedback concerning employee behavior on a performance factor. Conduct the demonstration, consciously avoiding the advice found on Form C.

2. Divide participants into trios and have them discuss the consequences of such nonconstructive feedback. Reunite the group and have a few participants briefly share their observations.

B. Feedback Guidelines (Read-and-Discuss Group; Materials: Form C)

1. Demonstrate how a manager might give constructive feedback by using the steps in Form C, or provide the following script:

   I become angry when you are late, because I think it is wasting the time of all other team members and we are never able to get through our agenda items. I would like for you to consider finding some way of planning your schedule that lets you get to these meetings on time, because that way we can be more productive at the meetings and we can all keep to our tight schedules. What do you think?

2. Pair off participants and distribute Form C. Ask them to read and discuss this form in light of your demonstration.

3. Display the guidelines on newsprint. Explain each step on Form C. Cover these key points:

   - There is a way to communicate dissatisfaction with an employee’s behavior without making things worse.
   - The most important skill a manager can have to solve problems is the ability to give constructive feedback. It is clearly the only way employees will know what needs to be worked on.
   - Don’t give feedback when you do not care about the person, when you do not have the facts, or when the timing is inappropriate.
   - Use “I” messages first, not “you” messages. (Give examples.) It keeps the person from feeling attacked.
   - Describe the person’s behavior specifically without using words like “irresponsible,” “great,” “bad,” or “better.”

4. Ask for participant questions and comments.
C. A Real Situation (Writing Task)

1. Invite participants to turn Form C over and recall in writing a performance review feedback situation they have observed or were directly involved in that was nonproductive. They should indicate the management goal of that review session.

2. Ask several participants to share their situations. Explain that these recollections will be used as the basis for a skill-practice activity.

D. Skill Practice (Role Play; Materials: Form C)

1. Divide participants into groups of three. Each person will take the role of supervisor, employee, or observer.

2. Using Form C as a guide, ask each supervisor to utilize his or her previously recorded “real situation” to give an employee feedback about one factor affecting his or her performance (e.g., interpersonal relations, dependability). Instruct the employee to react minimally so that the supervisor can focus on giving the feedback according to the guidelines. Invite the observer to coach the supervisor on understanding and following the guidelines. Circulate around the groups to provide coaching as needed.

3. Rotate roles within each trio until each participant has an opportunity to play the supervisor.

4. About half-way through the allotted time, invite participants to ask any questions about the activity.

5. Ask for any observations or insights.

6. Invite participants to resume and complete the cycle.

7. Have the trio discuss the differences between their original interaction and the interaction when using the guidelines. Suggest that they look at internal feelings, tone of voice, clarity of message, criticism, etc.

E. Personal Benefit Summary (Full-Group Discussion)

1. Reunite the entire group. Ask participants this question: “Considering your goal(s) in this program, what benefit will accrue from the feedback approach you just practiced?”

2. Suggest that any new skill feels uncomfortable to use at first. Use a sports analogy, making the point that with practice it becomes more natural. Invite participants to express their feelings of confidence or lack of confidence in using this approach back on the job.
IV. Verbal and Nonverbal Responses of Active Listening

A. Activity Review (Dyadic Discussion)

1. Pair off participants and request that they explain to their partners two key points to remember when giving constructive feedback.

2. Explain that participants will now work on skills to respond to an employee’s reactions to supervisory feedback.

B. What Did You Say? (Game; Materials: Two Sets of Three Blocks, Different in Size, Dimension, and Color)

1. Indicate that on the job, an effective listener has a significant edge over those who are not effective listeners. When workers are asked: “What is the single most important attribute of an effective manager?” the most frequent response usually is “I like my boss; he listens to me; I can talk to him.” Explain to participants that the next activity will explore the ease or difficulty of communicating and listening.

2. Ask for two volunteers to come to the center of the room and sit in chairs back to back. A table top will be needed in front of each volunteer.

3. Invite the rest of the participants to form a circle around the volunteers.

4. Place an identical set of three blocks in front of each volunteer. Each set will contain three blocks that are different in size, dimension, and color.

5. Instruct volunteer number one to arrange his or her blocks any way he or she prefers. Tell volunteer one to explain to volunteer two how to create the identical arrangement (one instruction for each movement). Do not allow either participant to turn around, and restrict volunteer number two from asking questions. At the end of three minutes, let the two participants look at their progress.

6. When the time is up, ask for two more volunteers to start over. Half way through, allow volunteer two to clarify instructions with a question that can be answered “yes” or “no.”

7. After a number of volunteers have attempted the activity, ask participants to respond to the question, “What did you learn about communication and listening from observing or participating in the activity?” Write responses on a flip chart and ensure that the following points are covered:

- Explanations must make one point at a time.

- Vocabulary must be equally understood.
• Directions must be accurate and precise.
• Feedback needs to be encouraged for clarification.
• If the listener mentally wanders for a moment, he or she can miss important points.

■ C. What Active Listening Sounds Like (Demonstration)

1. Demonstrate active listening with a prepared participant or use a videotaped example.
2. Encourage participants to share their reactions. Invite any reservations participants may have about active listening.

■ D. Types and Purposes of Active Listening (Peer Teaching)

1. Discuss the purposes of active listening. Make these key points:
   • Lets the other person express strong emotions, thereby lessening the chances it will complicate communication.
   • Lets the other person know you are listening and care about his or her feelings.
   • Helps an employee to work through a solution to a problem.
   • Allows you to check your impression of the other person’s message.
2. Describe these four types of active listening:
   a. Door Opener. As a listener, you indicate your willingness to listen to the other person by saying, “Would you like to talk about it?” or “Tell me what’s on your mind.”
   b. Passive Listening. You remain quiet so the other person can talk.
   c. Acknowledgment. Without interrupting, you encourage the other person to keep talking and let him or her know you are listening by saying, “Mm-hmm,” “Really,” “Oh, yes,” “I see,” etc., or by maintaining eye contact and nodding
   d. Paraphrasing. You occasionally tell the other person in your own words your impression of what he or she just said.
3. Divide participants into four groups and assign each group one of the four types of active listening just described. Ask groups to plan a two-minute skit that demonstrates their assigned type.
4. Have each group present its skit. Invite participants to ask questions and share their reactions to this presentation.
E. Active-Listening Samples (Read-and-Discuss Group)

1. Pair off participants.
2. Distribute written samples of active-listening exchanges between sender and receiver.
3. Request pairs to read the sample exchanges orally, taking different parts.
4. Reunite the full group. Invite participants to share their reactions to the active-listening samples.

F. We’ll Go First (Observation)

1. Obtain two participants to volunteer to role play one of their original cases, switching from constructive feedback to active listening when appropriate.
2. Ask the group to serve as observers and offer suggestions at the end.
3. At the completion of the activity, ask the two volunteers to state briefly what they learned from the activity. Invite the full group to discuss its learnings.

G. Putting It All Together (Role Play)

1. Re-form trios that practiced the skill of giving constructive feedback during the “Skill Practice.” Using their original cases, have trios take turns practicing combining constructive feedback with active listening.
2. Rotate participants until all have played the supervisor.
3. Request the observer to again act as a coach to the supervisor, assisting him or her to stay in the active-listening mode.

H. Personal Planning (Writing Task; Materials: Blank Paper)

1. Ask participants to create a plan on a blank sheet of paper on how they will personally use constructive feedback and active listening in their performance reviews and why. Urge them to reflect on their past reviews and assess how active listening and constructive feedback will allow them to take a leadership position during performance reviews.
2. Request participants to share their plans with the other members of their trios and get feedback.
V. Co-Creating a Future Performance Plan

A. The Value of Goal Setting * (Game; Materials: Three Darts and a Dartboard for Each Pair of Participants)

1. Form pairs. Instruct pairs to decide which member will first be the “employee” and which will be the “supervisor.”

2. Distribute three darts to each pair. (Other simple games—flying paper airplanes, memorizing the sequence of a set of playing cards, etc.—can be substituted for playing darts.)

3. Ask “employees” to take one practice round (throw three darts) and have their “supervisors” record their scores.

4. Instruct each pair to confer and set a realistic goal (what the score will be) for the employee before he or she takes another round. The supervisor records the goal and, after the darts are thrown, records the achieved score. This joint goal-setting process and round of darts is repeated twice. (The employee has a total of one practice round and three goal-set rounds.)

5. The employee and supervisor reverse roles. The new employee now completes a practice round and three more rounds, jointly setting goals and keeping score, as before.

6. Reunite the full group and process the activity. Have the group examine the value of joint goal setting for the supervisor-employee relationship.

B. Effective Goal Setting (Lecturette; Materials: Form D)

1. Ask participants to reflect on their experience as managers in setting personal goals for themselves or their employees. For example, they may ask, “What guidelines were used? How detailed were the steps? How would they know whether they were successful? Were others involved? What helped them stick to the goals? When did goal setting fail? How often were they reviewed?”

2. Conduct a discussion of their ideas for effective goal setting. Record the ideas on the flip chart and post.

3. Distribute Form D.

4. Explain the Future Performance Planning steps and give the following examples:

   a. Long-Term Goal:
     
     *Time will be managed more effectively to attain the quarterly production goals.*

   b. Objectives:
     
     • Weekly inventory reports delivered on time
     • Be on time to meetings
     • Attain weekly production goals

   c. Tactics:
     
     *Weekly inventory reports will be delivered on time.*
     
     • Mark inventory report due time on calendar for each week in red.
     • Designate time to work on report on calendar.
     • Create a file titled “Inventory” and stock with blank reporting sheets.
     • Request another team member to assist with inventory.

     *Be on time to meetings.*
     
     • Mark meeting times in green on calendar as soon as received.
     • Review agenda and set aside time to prepare reports or presentations for meeting.
     • Review and organize the week’s activities to avoid a last-minute rush.

     *Attain weekly production goals consistently.*
     
     • Review goals and place on calendar in purple as soon as received.
     • Meet with production team on Mondays at 7:30 a.m. and create a weekly planning grid and post it.
     • Check availability of supplies/parts needed before Monday a.m. meeting.
     • Call short team meeting daily to check progress against planning grid; conduct brainstorming meeting if progress is blocked.

   d. Targets:
     
     *All targets to appear in next performance review written by manager.*
     
     • All weekly reports delivered on time and inventory supplies available for projects.
• Arrival at meetings no later than one minute prior to starting time, allowing for
time to get to know peers better.

• Quarterly production goals met; customer orders filled on time; profits in com-
pany up.

C. Setting Performance Goals (Writing Task; Materials: Form D)

1. Ask participants to create their own performance plan for the next six months on
Form D.

2. Urge them to be as concrete and realistic as possible.

D. Sharing Goals (Role Play)

1. Request that participants form pairs with someone they have not worked with in the
program. Ask them to share their plan with their partner and get feedback.

2. Next, have each partner role play a supervisor explaining the benefits of creating a
future performance plan to an employee You might say, “Imagine that you have
come to the point in the review where it is time to set goals. You notice a look of skep-
ticism on the part of your employee. Explain your enthusiasm and commitment to
goal setting.” Include some of these points with your own:

• Goal setting leads to a plan to follow to reach more growth potential.

• Goal setting focuses on the future, not the past.

• By goal setting, an employee is more involved and in control of the direction of his
or her career.

• Mutually developed goals make future reviews more predictable.

• Setting goals assures employee is working toward goals to meet his or her needs as
well as those of the company.

E. The Future Performance Plan and Leadership (Guided Teaching)

1. Invite pairs to discuss the following question: “How does using the ‘Future Perfor-
manace Plan’ give you an opportunity for leadership with your employees?”
2. Ask participants to share their ideas with the group. Ensure these points are covered:

a. The objectives of the future performance plan are:

   • To end a low-rating review on a positive and hopeful note.
   • To keep focusing on specific steps to be taken to improve the rating.
   • To let the employee take an active part in creating the plan, thus improving the chances for change.
   • To set up opportunities for the supervisor to give recognition.
   • To increase the incidents of agreement at the next review as both parties are working with a co-created plan.

b. You may want to use the following questions to help employees to begin thinking about goals:

   • “What do you want to accomplish in the next six months?”
   • “What are your goals for doing a more effective job?”
   • “In which of your job functions do you feel the need for improvement?”

c. Key points for supervisors to remember:

   • Think of your employee as your associate; you need his or her help to attain your goals.
   • Secure agreement on the goals to be accomplished.
   • Keep the discussion forward looking. The past is gone.
   • Elicit employee’s ideas and feelings first.

VI. Closing Activities

A. Participant Review (Full-Group Discussion)

1. Invite participants to summarize the major points developed during the day. Post these categories:

   • Describing employee behaviors
   • Giving constructive feedback
   • Active listening
   • Performance planning
For each category, have participants recall what they have learned.

2. Ask them to answer this question on the back of Form D, “Considering your goal(s) in this program, what ideas have you picked up that will help you to reach your goal(s)?” Invite participants to stand up individually to share one of their answers to the question.

■ B. Closing Remarks (Story)

1. End with a teaching and motivational story of your own about leadership, skill development, goal setting, etc., or use the following:

   Tom Peters, co-author of *In Search of Excellence*, was asked by the interviewer, “Any advice for managers?”

   Peters responded with what a group of people in the Ford Motor Company had told him after they retraced the authors’ steps in talking to the excellent companies about management innovation. Peters said, “They said we had underestimated what could be accomplished by a truly enthusiastic work force. They were inspired by what could be achieved through informality and enthusiasm and teamwork in the place of bureaucratic rule. I’m not talking about 2 percent compound annual productivity increases, but 300 to 400 percent. To do it, managers must create an enthusiastic team of people who are turned on by the excitement of working toward worthwhile goals. To me, business is life. Where do you want to spend your life? On top or at the bottom?”

   The point of sharing this with you is that taking a leadership position in the performance review is that opportunity Peters talks about helping employees catch the excitement of working toward worthwhile goals.

2. Explain that participants can share final reactions, insights, stories, and so forth they have connected to this program, as the spirit moves them.

3. After this period of sharing, thank participants for their attention and enthusiasm and charge them to use the skills they have to enhance future performance reviews.
CONDUCTING A PERFORMANCE REVIEW
FORM A

Sample Performance Review Form

Name __________________________________________    Date __________________

PERFORMANCE FACTORS

1. Job Knowledge:
   Shows acceptable amount of information.

   [Your description]

2. Quality/Productivity:
   Use of time not good. Quality O.K.

   [Your description]

3. Interpersonal Relations:
   Gets along O.K.

   [Your description]

4. Dependability:
   Never know where you are.

   [Your description]
CONDUCTING A PERFORMANCE REVIEW
FORM B

Written Evaluation

Below are some words and phrases that can be used for specifically describing both positive and negative behaviors in written performance reviews. This list may help you when you are searching for the right description. Mere adjectives, however, should be supported by examples of the employee’s behavior.

POSITIVE BEHAVIORS
methodical
generates enthusiasm
willingly accepts difficult assignments
gives attention to deadlines
avoids risks
gets task done
accountable for own work
sets and completes goals
sensitive when showing disapproval
willing to help others succeed
obtains needed information
shares information with others
maintains high standards
 flexible
becomes adaptable to those in authority
gives recognition to others
takes on challenges
works calmly in unpredictable environment
good organizer
good listener;
  team player
innovative
makes good decisions quickly
diplomatic with people

NEGATIVE BEHAVIORS
needs many explanations
perfectionist
slow in getting things done;
  resists difficult material
overreacts to criticism
tends to daydream
unprepared
shifts blame to others
disorganized
unfriendly to customers;
  inefficient
does not check work before handing it in
resists changes
disrupts meetings
takes shortcuts
sensitive to criticism
resists participating in a team;
  displays a superior attitude
overuses enthusiasm
displays frustration
under pressure becomes soft and persuadable
easily intimidated
fails to communicate information,
  feelings, directions, etc.
has shown little imagination
makes decisions too fast
abrupt with others
CONDUCTING A PERFORMANCE REVIEW
FORM C

Guide to Giving Constructive Feedback

Steps Explanation

1. “I feel . . .”  
   In a word or two, tell how the person’s behavior affected you (emotion).

2. “When you . . .”  
   Describe the person’s behavior in factual and specific terms.

3. “Because . . .”  
   Tell what the consequences were (will be) of the person’s behavior.

4. Pause  
   Let the other person respond.

5. “I would like . . .”  
   Describe the change in behavior you want the other person to consider.

6. “Because . . .”  
   Explain how the change will solve the problem or what the benefits will be.

7. “What do you think?”  
   Be open. Active listening may be appropriate.
CONDUCTING A PERFORMANCE REVIEW
FORM D

Future Performance Planning

One of the most important segments of the performance review is the development of goals and objectives with employees and setting the periodic feedback meetings conducted between reviews.

Performance planning includes the following four steps:

1. Long-Term Goals: a specific statement of the goal to be accomplished by the next review.

2. Objectives: usually short-term goals that will achieve the long-term goals.

3. Tactics: Actions taken to achieve short-term objectives that lead to achievement of long-term goals.

4. Targets: Criteria that specifically demonstrate success in achieving what was set out to be achieved in the objectives. They will let the manager and the employee know when the goals are being achieved.