

Preparing for Performance Appraisals

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Spring seems to be the season for performance appraisals. For decades now employees have been afraid of them and managers dread doing them. In fact earlier this year Google scrapped their twice-yearly performance review process in order to “improve morale!”

The problem is: most performance appraisals look backwards - how was your performance and what can be improved? The backwards approach can damage employee performance by up to 27% according to [A Quantitative Analysis of the Effectiveness of Performance Management Strategies](#) conducted by the Corporate Leadership Council.

This article is intended to turn that scenario on its head by helping you to structure the conversation to look forward and create a mutually gratifying conversation for both leader and employee.

STEP 1 - ACKNOWLEDGE THE EMPLOYEE’S ROLE IN THE COMPANY’S WORK

When employees understand the big picture and how their role fits into it, they develop a shared purpose and are more motivated and engaged to do their best work. [Recent studies](#) have shown that continuous reminders about role clarity result in employees who are 53% more efficient and 27% more effective in their work. Even better, 75% of employees who understand how their role fits within the organization are significantly more passionate about their job and report higher levels of job satisfaction. So start the conversation with a review of what the company (or their department) has accomplished in the last six months to one year, and how their role fits into those accomplishments.



STEP 2 - HELP THE EMPLOYEE BE SEEN AND NOT JUDGED

While it might be a natural inclination as a manager to jump in and give advice or tweak an employee’s performance - what really improves performance is asking how they feel about their performance, but in a specific, open-ended way.

- » How is your work going on the X-project?
- » I am pleased you wrapped up at X-site - what is your assessment of the project?
- » As you transition to the X-team, what do you see as concerns?

Asking for specific input acknowledges their work and leads to a more productive conversation than a simple, So, how did things go?

STEP 3 - OFFER ASSISTANCE AND ADVICE

During the prior step you may hear an opportunity to provide advice.

Ask permission before you give any.

It sounds like this:

- » You sounded frustrated by the frequency of change orders - may I give you a few tips?
- » I've had those kinds of conversations with inspectors before, may I suggest something?

STEP 4 - BRIDGE TO THE FUTURE

Step four begins the mutually beneficial and forward-looking part of the conversation. The recent 2023 [Workplace Learning Report](#) from LinkedIn Learning declared that only 26% of employees say their employer challenged them to learn a new skill in the last six months and only 15% said that their organization encouraged them to move to a new role.


This is discouraging news because it means that many employers are not considering how the company will continue to grow in the future through its employees. On the bright side however, high performing employees thrive on being able to improve and grow. So, in this step your focus is on helping the employee to continue to grow, learn, and contribute to the organization.

You can accomplish this through any of these open-ended questions:

- » When it comes to your work, what's one thing you would like to improve on or something that you could do better if you had more training or practice?
- » What are your strengths and how do you apply them on the job?
- » What are two or three ways you think you can (or would like to) grow in this role?
- » **What are you learning right now? (Note: If the response is something "personal" ask them about it; you may gain insight into what they are passionate about.)**
- » What would you like to learn about the business?
- » Are you interested in moving to another department to learn more about the business?

It is important for managers to provide employees with a sense of choice. In doing so, you create an environment that encourages employees to take ownership of their work and contributions, which in turn helps to move the whole organization forward.

NOTE: If you are an employee reading this article, be accountable for your own development by telling your manager your goals, asking for specific learning opportunities – both within the organization and outside of it, and linking what you want to learn and accomplish to the success of the organization.

Performance reviews shouldn't be a daunting process but rather part of an ongoing conversation that prioritizes growth and development – both for the organization and for the individual. When you take this "forward looking" approach to performance reviews, you will see your employees become energized to take on new responsibilities and contribute to the organization in new and innovative ways - which is critical for survival in the 21st century. 



About the Author

Dr. Nanette Miner is a leadership development and workplace-learning strategy consultant. Through her firm, [The Training Doctor](#), she has revolutionized the way that individuals are prepared for leadership roles in their organizations. Rather than a chosen few, her process is aimed at ensuring everyone in the company has the skills and business acumen of a leader. This approach ensures both immediate and long-term return-on-investment (ROI) for an organization.

She has written articles for *Chief Learning Office magazine*, *Forbes*, and *MBA World* and is a frequent guest on workplace training and career podcasts and talk radio such as *Inc. Radio* and *America's Workforce Radio*.

Nanette regularly speaks at industry conferences and corporate learning events on how to integrate leadership capabilities throughout an organization. An author of eight books, her most recent is *Future-Proofing Your Organization*.

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