



Four Ways to Make Your Existing Performance Review Process Better

Kris Dunn (/authors/163-kris-dunn/articles)

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As the year winds down, many human resources people are getting ready to lead a companywide performance review process based on an annualized calendar.

Rather than get all high and mighty regarding the effectiveness of an annual feedback loop or waste energy talking about whether performance reviews even work, let's do something different.

There are ways to help make the effectiveness of the process better. Rather than say, 'You're doing it wrong,' here are some thoughts that can maximize what you have in place.

Let's start with a list of what most companies do well related to the performance review process. This is going to seem a little mundane, but these things are universal across most companies.

- **You have a form.** It contains goals and objectives that you hope the team member has reviewed. Hopefully, the team member has actually had a conversation about the goals with his or her manager.
- **Your managers know they have to complete the form in question.** This is the first part of what many HR pros affectionately term as the "cattle call." Attention managers: Please complete the form, offering strategic insights while not causing your team members to become openly hostile upon delivery.
- **You've got a meeting schedule.** Managers must have the forms completed and hold meetings to deliver the news to their team members within a particular time frame. This is where you police those who don't deliver by the date in question, using equal parts begging, intimidation and public humiliation to drive compliance. If none of that works, you do what any reasonable person would do. You tell their director.

- **Your managers plow through the meetings.** They hope the sessions go well and they don't get trapped in awkward conversations. How do they do it? They don't stop talking and limit the session to 30 minutes.

That's a quick rundown of the common process most companies use related to performance management. It's how 80 percent of companies in America still approach performance management. Of the remaining 20 percent, 10 percent does nothing—nothing!—related to performance management, and the other 10 percent are experimenting like crazy.

Most of you are in the 80 percent category. The rundown captures most of what you do, which begs the question: What can you do to make this traditional process better without putting your company through waves of change?

Simply, there are four ways you can make the traditional performance review process dramatically better. There's no dramatic process engineering. And, there are no new forms.

1. Ask managers to provide examples to back up the rating and ensure those examples aren't what I call "glittering generalities." You rated Johnny a 3 (on a scale of 1 to 5) on his second objective. Now give a couple of examples to back up that rating and make sure they're specific so they can lead to deeper conversation.

Bad: "Johnny does a good job in this area. Nice work, Johnny."

Worse: No written examples to back up the rating, which is the equivalent of a caveman grunt.

Better: "Johnny does a good job getting the reporting deck in on time. I especially like the improvements he made in the churn report, which helped us more accurately monitor the segments in which we were losing customers. Nice work, Johnny."

2. Once managers have provided specific examples, have them weave in language that clearly ties the examples to a specific rating. Now that you have an active example of someone's work in the area in question, you have a shot to tie it to the rating. Believe it or not, this actually helps set expectations with the team member and sets your manager up to ask for more in the future.

Example: “Johnny does a good job getting the reporting deck in on time. I especially like the improvements he made in the churn report, which helped us more accurately monitor the segments in which we were losing customers. *Getting the reports in on time and occasionally looking for improvements is consistent with what I expect out of Johnny to meet my expectations in this area.* Nice work, Johnny.”

3. Once managers have specific examples and have linked those examples to the actual rating, they should coach the team member by asking for more performance. Your managers want to deliver the review and get out of the room. You need them to be more—to be a coach. Have the manager list at least one example of what the team member could do to raise his or her rating. By doing this, they have a visual reminder of the need to coach for improved performance:

Example: “Johnny does a good job getting the reporting deck in on time. I especially like the improvements he made in the churn report, which helped us more accurately monitor the area in which we were losing customers. Getting the reports in on time and occasionally looking for improvements is consistent with what I expect out of Johnny to meet my expectations in this area. *Moving forward, Johnny can get to the next level in this area by reviewing each report in the deck on a quarterly basis to determine if improvements can be made and executing on the changes he recommends. Our company would benefit greatly from that type of continuous improvement.* Nice work, Johnny. Look forward to seeing more!”

4. Give managers the skills to deliver in-person coaching from the written comments they’ve generated. Work hard as an HR pro and you can implement the changes above and improve your existing performance review process in a dramatic fashion.

But your work’s not complete. To this point, the improvements you’ve made have been accomplished by enhancing the written product.

To truly capitalize on the potential of the enhanced written performance review, your managers need to be able to deliver the performance review verbally as well as in writing.

That means they need to be comfortable having a free-flowing conversation with the team member, using the rating, the supporting examples listed and the areas the team member can grow in as talking points. They need to let the team member share their feelings. It takes time, and the best place to start is through controlled practice in a training environment where they can get feedback.

You've got forms. You've got deadlines. Don't have time to revamp the process in its entirety? Focus on these four things and you're on the road to maximizing the benefits of the performance review process.

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Kris Dunn, the chief human resources officer at Kinetix, is a *Workforce* contributing editor. He is also the founder of "The HR Capitalist" (<http://www.hrcapitalist.com/>) and "Fistful of Talent" (<http://fistfuloftalent.com/>) blogs. Comment below or email editors@workforce.com (<mailto:editors@workforce.com>). Follow Dunn on Twitter at [@Kris_Dunn](https://twitter.com/Kris_Dunn) (https://twitter.com/Kris_Dunn). You can also follow him on Google Plus (<https://plus.google.com/101631255799420860100/?rel=author>).



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