**FEEDBACK AND COACHING GUIDE**

The purpose of this guide is to provide supervisors with information on the performance management process, the importance of coaching and feedback, and how to set goals and follow-up to set up employees with their best chance for success.

This guide will cover the following topics:

1. Performance Management
2. Feedback - the importance of providing consistent feedback
3. Coaching - how to be a great coach and the importance of questioning
4. Performance Meeting - how to set the stage to have meaningful conversations
5. Employee Input - the importance of ensuring that employees participate in the process
6. Performance Plan - what this should look like
7. Goal-Setting - how to set SMART goals and why those are needed
8. Following-Up - why you need to document and follow-up on results, positive and otherwise

Section 1: Performance Management

The purpose of performance management is to ensure that all employees are provided with accurate and appropriate feedback and coaching regarding their performance within their company. As a supervisor, valuing your workforce is critical and helping them to achieve their objectives will also help you succeed in the achievement of your own objectives.

Performance management is also utilized as a tool to help ensure the alignment of individual performance goals with that of the strategic direction of the company through the use of collaborative performance planning, consistent and timely coaching and feedback, and performance meetings.

In utilizing a performance management system, supervisors are able to work with their employees to ensure that organizational objectives are met through the achievement of their individual performance goals and objectives. Supervisors need to regularly review the requirements of an employee’s job and develop achievable performance expectations, detailing any related tasks and activities associated with a goal or objective.

Performance reviews themselves are designed to help keep employees on the right track with direction and goals that will lead to their continuous improvement and provide career advancement opportunities. Performance reviews assist in the identification of strengths and areas of opportunity in organizational abilities and capacities that will aid in the development of effective training, employee placements, succession planning, and productivity forecasts.

Section 2: Feedback

Feedback Is:

Feedback is a critical component of a successful performance management system and process. This feedback needs to be provided more often than one a year or once a quarter - feedback should be an aside remark or comment as soon as the behaviour or action is observed or reported. It doesn’t need to be a big deal or a formal meeting - it’s a way of showing that you are aware of what is happening with the employee. It’s also a way of showing them that you are consistently going to be speaking with them as soon as you notice something, and not leaving it until their performance meeting.

This will also help you to gain buy-in during your formal performance meeting because you will be able to provide concrete, specific examples of behaviours or actions and this will show the employee that you are fully invested in their growth and development. It’s important not to hold anything back until the performance meeting; taking five minutes to provide quick feedback will help set you up for success during the employee’s performance meeting.

Feedback is based on:

* What you saw
* What you heard
* What was reported to you

Feedback is telling them what you saw/heard/observed and then leading them to draw their own conclusions from what you are telling them. This may also involve their assurance that they will reconsider how to do it a different way in the future.

Providing Feedback

Any feedback provided should be private (not in a group setting). The only exception to this is if you’re in a team meeting and you want to provide some congratulations to an employee for succeeding in a task. Constructive feedback should always be provided privately.

There are some who term formal feedback sessions as performance meetings. However, since feedback should be provided in a timely way - as soon as the behaviour/action is observed or heard, feedback should not wait until the performance meeting. Instead, the performance meeting should be an amalgamation of all previously-received feedback and there shouldn’t be any comments made that come as surprises to the employee during the meeting.

Section 3: Coaching

Why Coach?

Supervisors can use coaching for a variety of reasons including mentorship, knowledge sharing, career development, or performance improvement. As mentioned above, they should provide coaching on an ongoing basis using a variety of methods, both formal and informal.

The goal of any coaching session should be to provide clear direction and support to an employee so they can learn a new skill, overcome a challenge, or make corrections or modifications to a behaviour that is problematic. Supervisors should stick to providing coaching on topics that directly pertain to the issue/goal at hand, or what is needed to help an employee towards their goals and objectives.

It is important for supervisors to convey the message they are on the same team as the employee they are coaching. Working together toward a common goal is a key element to a great coaching relationship. So, even when coaching topics may be difficult, such as when completing performance reviews or delivering difficult messages, the goal of the coach should be to unify the parties toward a mutually beneficial solution. This can be done by communicating to the employee that they are valuable and respected, and assuring them the objective of the interaction is to resolve an issue, find a solution, or learn together.

The Importance of Questioning

When providing coaching, the biggest difference between coaching and feedback is that feedback is what you saw or heard, and coaching is not only what you saw or heard, but also what was important about what you saw or heard and how to move forward from there.

This will involve using open-ended questions with the employee, like:

* How would you describe what happened in your own words?
* What is working well right now and what isn’t?
* What outcome were you trying to achieve?
* What is the ideal outcome?
* What have you tried to do differently (if anything)?
* How do you think the outcome could have been different?
* What would you change about the behaviour/action and why?
  + This ensures that they have the chance to consider why the behaviour/action might be a concern and they aren’t just saying what they think you want to hear

These questions may lead to a deeper understanding between you and the employee, which is a great outcome of a coaching conversation.

How to be a Great Coach and Supervisor

Great supervisors must be open to advising and listening. Two-way communication is important. Supervisors providing coaching should keep the lines of communication open by letting their employees know they’re available for support, clarification, or further discussion as needed. Supervisors who are great coaches should look for cues on when to push harder, versus when to provide support. Coaching is a difficult skill to master and it takes work and practice.

Section 4: Performance Meeting

Performance meetings should occur every quarter, unless monthly supervision is a standard. Performance meetings may occur more frequently when an employee is on a performance improvement plan or when an employee has recently transferred into a new role or was promoted to a new position.

1. You should be consistently noting any observations and feedback so that when it comes time for a formal performance review, you are able to complete the form in a timely manner. This should be done two weeks in advance so that you aren’t letting any recent event cloud your judgement and so that you have a chance to revisit it before you sit down with the employee.
2. At least two weeks prior to the performance meeting, you should be letting the employee know that there is a meeting coming up and that you will be discussing their performance with them. If you have a self-evaluation document, this is the time to provide it to them and request that they return it to you within a week.
3. A week out from the performance meeting, you should have reviewed their self-evaluation for any surprises and determined where the gaps between what you have observed and what they see of their own performance lie.

The meeting should always:

* Be in a quiet spot, away from any distractions
* It may help to break the ice to focus on a positive first
* Then, you will need to open the conversation to why you are there
* The discussion will involve observations, feedback, and you should be seeking solutions and input from the employee in turn
* You will be fully reviewing their performance in the review period based upon the goals and objectives previously established
* You will also be setting goals for the next period, or updating goals that were previously set
* It is very important to request employee feedback from them during the meeting - it won’t change the outcome, but it will provide you with a better idea of how they view their own performance
* You should also be asking them how you can help them achieve their goals and whether they foresee any barriers to succeeding in their role
* At the end of the meeting, you should sum up some of the basic ideas that you discussed and remind them of when their next formal meeting will be
  + It’s also important to ask them how the feedback cycle is working for them - do they need more? Do they need it in a different way? Everyone communicates differently and receives feedback differently and this is your chance to find out what works best for each individual employee
* At the conclusion of the meeting, both you and the employee should sign the performance review and the employee should be provided with their own copy.

Section 5: Employee Input

Employee feedback and input has been mentioned before, but it can’t be emphasized enough. It is critical to getting buy-in from the employee that they have a chance to “have their say” and reflect on their own perceptions of their performance. The self-evaluation that they complete will give a critical window into their own thoughts and how they see their own performance. You will not get employee engagement with a performance plan unless the employee understands what you’re saying; understands what you’re expecting; and understands how they can achieve it.

Let Them Talk It Out

Opening the door to encourage employee input will ensure the success of your organizational goals and objectives. The performance meeting should have an equal amount of the employee talking as compared to how much talking you do. If you’re the one speaking the whole time, the chances for success are lower.

Note: some employees may not be able to discuss their own performance in detail during the meeting - if you see them shutting down, you can ask them if they need a moment, or if they would prefer to take some time to consider what they want to say instead of forcing the issue. It is important to emphasize to them that even though they may not be ready to have the conversation, the conversation will take place, but they can request when it should take place and if they need additional time, that’s okay.

**Complaint Process**

Should you notice that an employee is completely disengaged or upset by the contents of their performance meeting (which ideally should never happen because they will have received feedback throughout the previous evaluation period), you need to let the employee know that they may request to have their performance review amended.

This could take the form of an open door communication; it could take the form of a complaint to the next level of management, etc. Employees who feel they have been subject to an unfair performance review or who believe their performance plans to be out of the scope of their normal duties and responsibilities should have the opportunity to discuss it more.

Upon receiving a request, the issue should be looked into and if necessary, a formal investigation will be conducted which could include a formal review of any performance management forms submitted, review of previous performance plans and reviews, interviews with the employee and the supervisor, and an investigation into current and past employee performance.

Section 6: Creating a Performance Plan

During your meeting, you should be providing the employee with a performance plan for the next review period. Each performance plan should include the following information:

* A set of specific goals and objectives for achieving the requirements of the job (see goal-setting section)
* An action plan or outline of how these goals or objectives will be met; this may include plans for training and development
* A timeframe for when goals or objectives should be met by the employee
* Additional comments and areas of concern or anticipated restraints

The performance plan needs to be reviewed with the employee to gain their buy-in and engagement. Any amendments that need to be made to it should be done at the moment. The performance plan will be utilized to not only establish performance objectives but will also act as a tool for which actual performance can be measured against.

All information, including performance management forms and discussions in performance management meetings, must be kept strictly confidential to ensure that the supervisor retains their employee’s trust.

*Note: These plans are changeable and can be amended throughout the course of the performance review period.*

Section 7: Goal Setting

Behavioural change is difficult at the best of times, and something that helps is goal setting. There are different theories on how to set goals most effectively. One common goal setting method is to follow the S.M.A.R.T method which stands for specific, measurable, achievable, reasonable, and timely.

When setting a goal, things to consider are:

* What are you and the employee trying to achieve? Is it specific and clear? Will the goal you’re setting move you toward a positive outcome?
* How will success/improvements be measured?
  + Consider adding some type of measurable results, as it helps people reach their goals. People like to keep score and be able to clearly see how they are doing.
* Is your goal a shared goal or are you telling the employee what their goal is?
  + Creation of employee goals and objectives should be a collaborative effort between the employee and the supervisor
* How will the goal be achieved/what do you want to see moving forward?
* Is the goal achievable? What support will be provided to the employee so goal attainment is possible?
  + Training, technology, accommodation, etc.
* What items might hinder goal attainment and what can be done about this?
* Is there a set timeline to achieve the goal?

Other goal setting theorists (Locke and Lantham) suggest additional items that can make or break success. Goals that are challenging, in addition to being clear, lead to better success. Obtaining the commitment of the person who is trying to achieve a goal (or buy-in) is also helpful.

As a supervisor, when you’re meeting with an individual to make a plan or set an objective, encourage them to make a verbal commitment to work toward something that’s a bit of a stretch goal, within reason. If the goal is too easy, it’s not as motivating to work toward and it won’t be as rewarding to achieve.

Once the goal has been set and agreed to, remember to turn back into a coach! Provide feedback, cheer the person on, offer constructive feedback or tips. Show that you are invested in their success and react to work as a team member. Be there to hold them accountable as well -- to their commitments, their timelines, and anything else that was discussed. Hold yourself accountable to providing what you offered the employee as well.

Section 8: Documenting and Following-Up

Document, Document, Document

As a supervisor, it’s not enough to notice behaviours or actions - you need to react to what you see or hear and you need to document both what you observe and what you do about it. You could be the most observant supervisor, but unless you have consistent, thorough notes with dates and observations on them, it won’t matter.

Why is this so important? Consider a performance review meeting where the employee disputed everything you said. Everytime you tried to describe an action or behaviour, they refuted it completely. How would you go about arguing your point without the discussion devolving into a confrontation where it was your word against the employee’s? However, if you had notes accessible that you could consult to outline specific instances, this would go a very long way to ensuring that the employee accepted your observations and then you could both move forward from there.

Then Follow-Up

Having consistent performance reviews is important, but unless you are mentioning what they’re working on throughout the next review period, or observing how they’re doing in reaching their goals; they might set aside the performance meeting altogether because it is discussed once and then never again. Instead, you should make it a part of their work lives - this is why the goals that are set need to have such a connection to the employee’s job duties.

You are demonstrating that you care about how the employee is doing on accomplishing their goals when you check in on them outside of the performance meeting and are taking note when they achieve a task that was one of their goals. You are showing that you are invested in them and that will carry a lot of weight with your employees.

Following-up also gives you the chance to ask the employee: “what’s next?” If they’ve completed a task, “should we set a new one?” Do they want to put their energy towards something else? Ensuring thorough follow-up is a key to success.