

The Essentials Ingredients for Effective Review Discussions

To make Performance Review Discussions objective throughout the working year it is important that managers recognise that they may have conscious or unconscious biases. Many of these can be reduced by the preparation of both parties and then a full, open discussion of different views during the interview before the review form is completed.

For the review to be fully effective in achieving what most Performance Management and Appraisal schemes set out to do, the following core elements have been identified as essential ingredients for success:

Show OHT 1 MAKING STAFF REVIEW OBJECTIVE.

Discuss each point giving examples based on your own experience.

SUBSTANTIAL INTERVIEWEE PARTICIPATION.

The more that both participate in the discussion, particularly in terms of the extent that individuals feel able to express fully their ideas, feelings and attitudes, the more likely both parties are to express satisfaction with the meeting and its outcomes.

EMPHASIS ON PERFORMANCE NOT PERSONALITY.

Personality is notoriously difficult to either define or alter. Discussions that focus on the facts and concentrate on actual performance and its consequences are usually the best guide to forecasting the future and are highly rated for content and motivation by both parties involved.

JOINT PROBLEM-SOLVING STYLE.

The more effort that is given to analysing and identifying the nature of problems and together exploring the effects of possible options, compared with situations where the manager imposes their solution with little or no discussion, the more likely that changes in behaviour and performance will occur.

POSITIVE AND SUPPORTIVE INTERVIEWER.

An effective interviewing style that promotes a climate of trust, openness and constructive criticism, rather than one that is either blaming or bland, is more likely to produce a favourable response to the discussion and action on the steps agreed.

COLLABORATIVE GOAL SETTING.

The setting, together, of specific goals which the individual job holder feels capable of attaining will have a powerful effect on subsequent performance. The greater the participation the greater the sense of ownership and commitment to achievement.

PREPARATION - How to set yourself up for success

Remind the participants of the well know saying:

“PLANNING & PREPARATION PREVENTS PATHETIC PERFORMANCE”

Ask the participants for suggestions of what can you do before the discussion to ensure its success. Their ideas should include:

Show OHT 2 “ESSENTIAL INTERVIEWING PREPARATION”

*** SET YOUR OBJECTIVE.**

- What do you want to achieve by the end of the discussion.

A typical objective for a Performance Appraisal discussion would be:

To improve / maintain current job performance by setting and reviewing job objectives and assessing training and development needs.

*** MATERIAL PREPARATION**

- What information do you need for the discussion?
- Have you read and understood it

Ask the group for suggestions on the material they should read before a typical appraisal discussion. They should identify:

- Current Job description;
last years objectives and action plan with amendments where required
- Any written data or documents showing job holders’ performance;
- Notes for guidance on organisations performance appraisal scheme;
- Details of anticipated training courses;
- Copies of organisations Performance Management Report form.

*** ENVIRONMENTAL PREPARATION**

- What sort of room should you use?
- How should you arrange the furniture?
- Have you eliminated any distractions?

Again ask the participants for suggestions on preparing the environment. They should identify:

- Freedom from interruptions (telephones, callers etc.)
- Adequate privacy - so you are not overheard
- Comfortable temperature - Well lit and properly ventilated
- Appropriate seating arrangements - avoid confrontation across a table
- Comfort of seats
- Coffee table for notes, cups, water carafe` and glasses
- Clear your desk of superfluous paperwork

*** PREPARE THE JOB HOLDER**

- Advise of date, time and place
- Encourage them to review their own performance

Ask for suggestions of questions the job holder could answer to encourage self-review. Possible suggestions could include:

- What did we agree last year?
- What have I achieved in the year under review?
- What documentation have I to gauge this performance?
- What are my strengths and weaknesses?
- What have been the opportunities and threats in my job last year?
- What obstacles got in the way of effective performance?
- How helpful was my manager in overcoming these obstacles?
- What training course did I attend?
- What practical use did I make of training provided?
- What would I like to achieve in the coming year?
- Have I completed any interview preparation form?

*** MENTAL PREPARATION**

- How should I structure the interview for maximum effectiveness
- How should I open the discussion and which direction should I move
- What response can I anticipate from the job holder?
- How can I manage that response?

Ask the participants to suggest some benefits they would gain from having a structured approach to the interview.

Typical benefits they should identify of a structured approach are:

- a structure helps the interviewer manage the interview.
- it ensures that all the items are covered, in a logical and concise way.
- joint agreement on the preferred structure will demonstrate to the interviewee that the interview is a two way communication process.
- a structure will make the interviewer feel professional and in control, and demonstrate that to the interviewee.
- both parties will start with a basis of confidence.

STRUCTURE YOUR DISCUSSION

Point out that whilst the exact structure will vary with the type of discussion the following stages will usually apply.

Issue Handout 1 “STRUCTURE AND CONTENT OF THE REVIEW DISCUSSION”

Discuss the main points giving examples from your own experience where appropriate.

IMPROVING POOR PERFORMANCE

Point out that the majority of performance review discussion will proceed smoothly. Any disagreements will usually be minor, particularly if the line manager has been giving the job holder regular informal feedback throughout the year. There will be times when performance or behaviour has fallen below what is required. Many managers rate these types of interviews as among the most stressful experiences of their management role. In addition to the material mentioned above there are other factors that need to be taken into account.

Explain to the group that Employment Tribunals are concerned with four key aspects of dealing with poor performance:

Show OHT 3 “Key aspects for dealing with poor performance”

Tell the participants that each organisation differs about the level at which action is initiated and that this will usually depend upon the circumstances and seriousness of the offence.

Point out that they should always check their authority before acting, but that it is often the timely intervention by the line manager conducting an informal review which has the desired effect in alerting the person concerned and resulting in a change in work behaviour.

Discuss the following points which can be used either as part of a formal appraisal interview or as a informal review aimed at correcting poor performance at an early stage of the appraisal cycle.

- Introduce the topic and say why you want to discuss it
- Make your specific criticism, don't waffle but come straight to the point
- Describe exactly what the individual is doing that is causing concern
- identify the impact their behaviour is having on the team and what you are all trying to achieve
- Make sure that the employee understands the seriousness of the situation

- Give the employee the opportunity to respond, state their case and present any evidence.
- Consider and evaluate any explanations given
- Look for solutions, ask for suggestions to remedy the situation
- Specify what they have to do to get back to the standards required
- If there is an adequate explanation make it clear that no further action will be taken.
- Summarise the main points discussed and highlight any areas that need to be checked.
- Agree an action plan, where appropriate, complete with review dates
- Point out which stage of the disciplinary procedure you are at.
- Emphasise the possible consequences of failure to change or improve.

FOLLOW UP

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Tell the participants that whether the interview is formal or informal, the manager needs to take some follow up action.

Ask what they would advise should be the next steps. They should include the following points:

- Make a note of the interview in your diary or file
- Wait for the agreed time period to elapse before evaluating performance against agreed standards
- If satisfactory performance or behaviour has been achieved have a quiet word of congratulation with them.
- If progress is unsatisfactory, review your organisations disciplinary procedures to determine the next step.

Issue Handout 2 “IMPROVING POOR PERFORMANCE”

OHT 1 MAKING STAFF REVIEW OBJECTIVE.

SUBSTANTIAL INTERVIEWEE PARTICIPATION.

EMPHASIS ON PERFORMANCE NOT PERSONALITY.

JOINT PROBLEM-SOLVING STYLE.

POSITIVE AND SUPPORTIVE INTERVIEWER.

COLLABORATIVE GOAL SETTING.

OHT 2 “ESSENTIAL INTERVIEWING PREPARATION”

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* MENTAL PREPARATION

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OHT 3 “Key aspects for dealing with poor performance”

- Employees should know the standard of performance they are expected to achieve and the rules to which they are expected to conform.
- Employees should be given a clear indication of where they are failing, or the rules they have broken.
- Employers should ensure that there is no disciplinary action until there has been a thorough investigation.
- Unless circumstances are exceptional employees should be given an opportunity to improve, and there should be no dismissal for a first offence.

Handout 1 “STRUCTURE AND CONTENT OF THE REVIEW DISCUSSION”

INTRODUCTION.

- Break the ice with a friendly chat
- Discuss purpose of the staff review scheme
- Emphasise the joint nature of the discussion
- Suggest the benefits likely to be gained by both manager and the individual job holder
- Encourage the individual to refer to any notes they may have made earlier
- Build a joint agenda of items to cover in the discussion

MAIN BODY OF THE DISCUSSION.

- Jointly review the individual's achievements in comparison with the agreed objectives
- Discuss the function of their current job
- Identify areas where the individual's performance needs to be improved
- Explore strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, problems
- Discuss individual's ideas for change and views development of their job
- Identify and explore areas where the individual is concerned about the support received from their manager
- Discuss next year and agree how performance may be maintained or improved
- Widen the discussion to cover the individual's aspirations for the future
- Identify and agree training and development plans
- Agree objectives for the next review period
- Consider the course of action to be taken by both parties

CONCLUSION.

- Summarise what has been agreed in the discussion
- Summarise who is responsible for what actions by when
- Record the agreed action in writing on the review form

Handout 2 IMPROVING POOR PERFORMANCE”

THE INTERVIEW

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