



Common Thread

Ask yourself, "What are some of the things in my workplace that we all have in common?"

If you said client service, paycheques, team meetings or desks - you're absolutely right.

But there is one other activity common to everyone - employees, team leaders, middle and senior management - that we don't always think of.

I'm talking about our performance agreements.

No matter what position you hold, you will probably have some form of performance agreement that outlines the expectations of your role.

Though there may be some differences around the content, most agreements focus on items that can be linked back to various themes: client service, managing conflict, values, teamwork etc.

Another Common Thread

Besides the actual physical document, there is also something else many of us share when we hear the words 'Performance Agreement' - the feeling of anxiety.

Whether you are giving or receiving feedback there is usually some degree of uncertainty, which may lead to worry, concern or fear about having the meeting. And that's okay!

Whether you are a Director or an employee, it's important to acknowledge that each person goes through similar feelings when they have to sit with someone else and discuss their performance.

The person giving the feedback struggles with their own concerns:

- Do I have all the information I need to support my comments?
- What if I or the other person gets emotional?
- Will I be able to stay on topic?

The person receiving the feedback may wonder:

- What if I don't agree with what my supervisor says?
- What if I get emotional?
- How will the performance agreement make a difference to my current situation?

Here are some tips to make your meeting more effective:

Be Understanding

Know that there will be a certain amount of nervousness from everyone involved.

Be patient - acknowledge that it is difficult to provide feedback - especially when you need to discuss a course of action for improvement.

On the flip side, know that it can also be difficult to hear feedback (positive or negative). So when giving feedback, choose your words carefully, but even more so, choose your approach carefully.

- Make the meeting less confrontational by committing to working with the person on issues that need addressing.
- Ensure there is privacy.

Be Focused

Before the meeting, make a list of significant observations or questions you want to discuss. You may want to print these for the other person to consider ahead of time so that everyone feels a little more prepared.

Employee

If you want to know where you are 'at' with your team leader, make sure you are clear about what you need to know.

Be specific:

- What information are you going to provide or what information are you looking for?
- Do you need to clear up assumptions about your work, your dependability, your interactions with others?
- Do you want to update your learning goals?

Supervisor

Form your questions/comments around the top 2 or 3 areas you would like to cover in the discussion. Ensure you have specific examples (stats, witnessed behaviour) that support your comments (positive or negative).

Some possible topics include:

- Work quality and quantity
- Dependability
- Interactions with others

Of course you should also allow time to discuss other areas that are important to your employee.

Listen

Take the time to listen - don't be preoccupied with what you want to say while the other person is talking - instead, paraphrase to ensure you have understood what the other person has said. Then after, you can start talking about what you need to share.

Where Do You Start?

Here are some intros that you may find helpful to get you started:

Supervisor

- "It's been six months since the start of your performance agreement, so I'd like to meet with you to discuss where you're at with your goals."
- "I've noticed a change in (how the work is being done/your attendance/your interaction with others). And I wanted to get together to talk about this change - to hear how you see it."
- "Part of my role as a supervisor is to be aware of changes that happen around me. I need to talk with you today about some things I've noticed lately."

Employee

- "I'm curious about my performance. Is my production at a 'meets'? How about my interaction with others?"
- "I've been concerned lately because I don't seem to be getting the same project opportunities that I used to. I need to know if there is something I've done that has taken me out of the running or is there something I need to do differently now?"

And in the long run, it's better to discuss concerns now, rather than have them stew until later in the year when the performance period is over. After all, no one likes to be surprised by something that they could have addressed earlier in the year.

Reverse Feedback

The performance discussion is also an opportunity to reinforce that you and your team are in the same ballpark when it comes to expectations of each other.

As a team leader, you need to be open to getting feedback from the team about your performance.

Questions you may want to ask your team...

- Have I been meeting the team's expectations?
- How well do I communicate with the team?
- What do I do well? What could be done better?

Essentially, you are giving your team permission to give you feedback - something that a lot of employees have been asking for.

Remember

It is in everyone's best interest to have a productive discussion.

If for any reason you and the other person can't come to an agreement on concerns raised or on future plans - pause, summarize what you've talked about so far and schedule a later meeting to conclude the discussion in a more focused way. The time between meetings can be used to reflect on the first meeting and to gather additional information to help address any unresolved issues.

Also, feedback of any type doesn't have to wait for the six-month or the year mark. Throughout the year, if you would like to know how you are performing or if there is an issue that needs immediate attention, I encourage you to talk about it.

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