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TREC HR & SUPERVISION RESOURCE

Using the Performance Review Template

Providing relevant, helpful feedback to employees is an important part of every supervisor's job. While at best this is part of ongoing workplace communication, most organizations also have a formal performance evaluation process that is typically completed annually.

TREC has worked with many organizations to implement or improve this annual review process. From this, we have distilled a simple and effective method for structuring and completing reviews in an efficient manner.

In order to streamline the overlapping functions of supervisors in providing clarity and guidance to staff around performance, this TREC template builds on those we have created for job descriptions and work plans. Refer to these documents in the TREC Resource Library for more information.

As a general introduction to the topic of performance reviews, a short piece that details the philosophy and practice that TREC employs with its staff has been added to the end of this document.

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Implementing a review process for your organization

Planning for reviews

Here are some factors to consider in planning the review process:

- Fit the review into your annual planning cycle. For instance, if your fiscal year begins January 1, then your budget is likely in development during autumn. As proposed compensation changes inform the budget process, completing the reviews during summer can provide the foundation for making salary adjustments in a timely manner.
- Announce the review schedule well before it begins, so staff can plan appropriately.
- Provide guidance and training to staff in how the review process will work and how to prepare. Pay special attention to the needs of supervisors in learning the system and administering it fairly.

Adapting the review template

- Each position in your organization has unique measurements of success and these should be mirrored in the review document.
- Begin by creating headings for each major area of responsibility, task or output the person is responsible for. Often these can come directly from the job description or work plan for that position.
- Assess the behavioral expectations for the position. This includes factors such as leadership, taking initiative, customer service and others. Often these factors are common to everyone in the organization.

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- From the samples provided below, select the task, output and behavioral factors that best fit the position and your organization. Add to these any other factors needed to provide a comprehensive and relevant picture of the job and the performance measures best associated with it.
- If you choose to use a numeric rating scale, we suggest a minimum of a five-point spread. The template uses a seven-point scale to provide more refined gradation of assessment.
- Customize the form with your organization's logo, mission statement or other branding information.
- Share a draft of your review document with senior staff or other trusted advisors. Seek input to make the entire process as relevant, simple and useful as possible.
- After the first round of using a revised performance review template (or any document affecting people's jobs) take time to gather input on how the process was received. Use this to make refinements in future years.

Producing reviews

- Start early. Get organized by taking good notes on the person you will be reviewing, getting self and peer review information out, and otherwise preparing for the process.
- Reserve adequate time for writing and giving each review. Doing a good job may take more time than you might think.
- Remember that you should concentrate on behavior, not personality. Reviews should be as objective as possible, and should focus on the employee's action plan and goals for the year.
- Use concrete examples whenever possible. This is much easier if you have taken good notes on a person's performance throughout the year.
- Good record keeping not only makes the review process easier and more accurate, it also protects you and your organization from some very real legal complications that could result from inaccurate statements on reviews.
- The content of the review should not be a surprise to the employee—rather, it should be the culmination of a regular process of giving feedback throughout the year.
- Encourage employees to take the time to write a thorough self-evaluation. Their self- evaluation becomes part of the final review documents going into the employee's personnel file.
- The employee should also provide feedback to his/her supervisor on the quality of their interaction throughout the review period, and the employee's thoughts about how that relationship can be improved.
- The employee is also asked to make some initial notes about their plans for the coming review period. Respond to these in a thoughtful manner. This is another opportunity for the supervisor to strengthen communication with the employee.
- The employee may suggest peer reviewers, but it is up to you to select peers, request comments, and incorporate them into your review. Peer review documents

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are typically not included in the final review.

- Clarify any questions you have about the review process with your TREC consultant.
- Take it seriously. Most of us are understandably sensitive to comments on our work and how we go about it. The review gives the supervisor an excellent opportunity to strengthen their relationship with the employee. Reviews become part of the employee's permanent record, and the way you handle the review is an important part of your relationship with that person.

Writing reviews

- Read all past reviews and any notes you have on each employee. Did they complete their goals for the past year? What accomplishments do you want to highlight? What areas were deficient? Be as specific as you can.
- Note when the written reviews are due, and work backwards to make sure you've scheduled enough time to be done by the deadline. If you have several people to review, make sure you have given yourself enough time to do each of them thoroughly.
- Give your employee ample time to complete their self-assessment. Consider their point of view carefully as you respond in your own written comments.
- Outline the key points you want to make in the review. These might include accomplishments for the year, a review of the person's goals and objectives, and feedback you'd like to give for improvement.
- When delivering "bad news" in a review, strive to have any issues well defined and backed up with examples. Hopefully these issues have been noted and discussed throughout the review period. Avoid bringing them up for the first time in the review setting.
- Remember that a written review is a permanent record in the employee's personnel file, so accuracy and thoughtfulness are important.
- The review is a legal document. If you have any questions about the legal implications of performance reviews, seek the advice of qualified legal counsel.

Holding reviews

- Book a conference room or other location for the review if you prefer a neutral venue.
- Give your employee at least two-weeks notice on when and where the review will take place.
- Provide the completed review document to the employee a day or two ahead of the meeting, allowing them to absorb comments before the discussion.
- Set a comfortable tone that is consistent with your other relations with that employee.
- Work from an outline or notes to be sure you cover all the points you want to make.

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- Remember that positive feedback is as important as giving constructive criticism. Strive to incorporate encouragement and acknowledgement in your review.
- Be aware of your own point of view and inherent bias when delivering the review. Are you being fair and impartial? Strive to appreciate the perspective of the employee and speak in their language as much as possible. See the treatment of common rater errors later in this document.
- Ask open-ended questions to allow employees to express themselves fully.
- When discussing poor performance, remember that the review is not the time to "debate" these issues. Rather, the goal should be to summarize the issues and set expectations for the next review period.
- While you certainly want to hear the employee's point of view during the review, remember that the supervisor is the decision maker on the overall assessment.
- Allow time in the discussion for training needs and requests for the coming year.
- Don't make promises for promotion or merit increases that you may be unable to keep.
- Solicit feedback on your own performance, and give the employee time to do so.
- Have both employee and supervisor sign the review, indicating that the conversation has taken place.
- If the employee has a grievance with the review, they have the right to write a rebuttal, but not to amend the supervisor's assessment.
- End the review on a positive note.

Participating in your own review

- Make note of your accomplishments throughout the year, so that you can speak effectively to what you have done well.
- Be realistic about your shortcomings. Most of us set goals that are more ambitious than we can achieve, or that change for a host of reasons.
- Meet regularly with your supervisor to discuss performance, especially when you feel stressed.
- It is also a good idea to have thought through your work plans for the coming year in a "big picture" way. What are you hoping to accomplish? What has changed in your work environment that you need to adapt to? What's the outlook on how you approach your work?
- Write a professional development plan for yourself and share it with your supervisor.
- Learn as much as you can about how the appraisal process works. You may be the one holding the appraisal meeting sometime soon. Best to be prepared!

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Task and output measures

When building your performance evaluation system, consider any of the following task, responsibility or output measures. These define the "what" of the job. Choose measures that best suit the position, recognizing that each position in your organization has a unique mix of these measurables.

Most of these should be found in the person's job description or work plan. Whatever measures you choose or invent, for each, provide a definition and example whenever possible. We have provided several here.

- Strategic planning

  The Executive Director cultivates and communicates a "big picture" orientation of the work of our organization. Maintains a strategic focus. Planning is up to date and forward-looking. Sets priorities effectively.

- Budget and financial management

  Budget documents are accurate and prepared on time. Plans are made for future financial needs. Maintains adequate financial reserves to contend with unexpected contingencies.

- Community engagement

  Projects a positive image of our organization to the community. Participates in relevant community events. Ensures that agency and stakeholder relationships are managed effectively. Positions us as a conservation leader in our county and beyond.

- Staff management

  Effective in the selection, supervision and motivation of staff. Fosters a team environment. Creates a positive and supportive work environment. Confronts and resolves staff performance issues when needed.

- Relationship management
- Use of technology
- Project management
- Meeting facilitation
- Program management
- Any skill or knowledge area key to success in the job

Behavioral Factors

Your evaluation process should include assessment of not just what the person does, but how they do it. Consider any of the following as examples of behavioral factors that underpin success in your organization.

Behavioral expectations tend to be consistent across the organization. Whatever measures you choose or invent, for each, provide a definition and example whenever

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possible. We have provided several here.

- Leadership

  Takes the lead on all aspects of her work. Develops and articulates long-term vision for her part of the organization. Actively innovates. Demonstrates a commitment to professionalism and excellence.

- Teamwork

  Maintains positive working relationship between staff, board, volunteers, donors and community members. Works for the best outcome for all parties. Resolves conflict as it arises.

- Self-management and resilience

  Effectively integrates work and personal commitments. Delegates effectively. Provides a positive example to staff of appropriate work/life balance.

- Role modeling for staff and clients

  Exemplifies commitment to our values and principles. Acts ethically. Leads others by personal example.

- Safety
- Equality and empowerment
- Personal responsibility
- Integrity
- Confidentiality
- Initiative
- Respect
- Accountability
- Supporting the mission
- Flexibility
- Collaboration
- Innovation
- Communication

A note about 360 feedback in reviews

The use of "360 degree feedback" tools has become increasingly common in organizations throughout our industry. Essentially this means giving people all around the employee in question the opportunity to provide feedback on their performance (hence the phrase "360").

360 tools are typically web-based and have become relatively easy to administer. Most have preset questions, often tied to a research base, making it easier to demonstrate the validity and relevance of the resulting assessment.

In most cases, the person being evaluated chooses 10-20 people to provide anonymous

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feedback, and assigns each to one of several categories such as manager, direct deports, colleagues and community members. Evaluator comments are aggregated by category, allowing the person to see how he is perceived by group as well as by individuals.

360 assessments are most commonly used as *developmental* tools, that is for the long-term professional advancement of the person being assessed. In some cases, 360 tools can be used effectively for performance *review* as well. See the bibliography for links to several such tools. We suggest checking with your TREC consultant or another human resources professional for more information on the use of these tools before proceeding.

Common errors in employee evaluation

Achieving a good outcome with employee evaluation, like any complex task, requires attention, perspective and self-awareness. Rating others on their performance and behavior is subtler that it may appear, and takes deliberate practice to master.

Here are some common errors made in the performance evaluation process:

Lack of differentiation

Because raters often lack confidence in their ability to provide accurate assessment, or are reluctant to exercise their authority, they may rate everyone pretty much the same. This can take the form of leniency (everyone gets high ratings), severity (everyone gets low ratings) or a universal feeling that everyone is doing just fine (and everyone gets rated in the middle).

This reluctance to differentiate can often be attributed to poor training, or the failure of an organization to make it clear that performance-based judgments are a critical part of the supervisor's role.

Strive to provide accurate assessment in all situations. The goal is to assess the person against the criteria of the job, and not against the performance of other employees.

Recency Effect

When supervisors are not diligent in continuously measuring performance, providing feedback and documenting results, they often cannot remember what happened in the earlier part of the performance period. As a result, they weigh the most recent events more heavily than is appropriate.

To counter this tendency, create a file for each employee and make entries throughout the year on the person's achievements, challenges and difficulties, and the conversations you have with them about their job performance. When compiling material for the review, present the entire year's data in a balanced way.

Personal Bias/Favoritism

It is easy for supervisors to allow their impressions of employees or their personal feelings about them to overly influence the performance rating process. Focusing on the specific job and predetermined criteria and standards is the best tool for avoiding bias.

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Halo/Horns Effect

The “halo” or “horns” effect may occur when an employee is highly competent or incompetent in one area, and the supervisor rates the employee correspondingly high or low in all areas.

Step back from your relationship with the employee to ensure that you are not painting your picture of the person’s performance with an overly broad brush. Make critical distinctions of the relative strength or merit of the person’s performance in each area.

Inaccurate Information/Preparation

Supervisors sometimes fail to take the time to solicit relevant information about the employee’s actual performance from those who work most directly with the employee, resulting in an inaccurate assessment due to the manager’s lack of knowledge.

TREC’s performance review philosophy and process

TREC has evolved a number of elements that contribute to a productive and healthy workplace. Here are a few that relate to staff performance and communication that may provide a useful contract to your own organization’s approach to these issues.

An environment of feedback

TREC believes that timely and accurate feedback, delivered with courage and compassion, is essential to high performance and employee confidence. We regularly discuss projects, programs and each person’s contributions through a lens of what worked well and what we are learning might work even better. This emphasis on evidence-based feedback has helped us create an atmosphere that is both innovative and supportive.

Quarterly work plans and feedback

Each staff member completes a comprehensive work plan at the beginning of each quarter. In it, we document:

- Commitments to the delivery and improvement of training programs
- Commitments to specific clients
- An assessment of capacity available for emerging projects or client needs
- New projects we are implementing to provide the highest level of support to our clients
- Professional development activities
- Relation of all planned activities to the Annual Operating Plan
- Relation of commitments to personal resilience

The work plan provides common ground for performance discussions between staff and their supervisor. All staff work plans are posted to our internal website so that we can be aware and supportive of each other’s commitments

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Peer review

On alternate years, we engage in a peer review process within TREC. This involves three staff members giving both confidential and conversational feedback to the person being evaluated. Dimensions reviewed include:

- Qualities of personal and leadership effectiveness
- Effectiveness of client service delivery
- Teamwork
- Professional development and personal resilience
- Program management

Upon completion of the assessment, the staff person meets with his/her supervisor to review results and make plans and commitments for the coming year.

360 assessment

On alternate years, all staff members complete a 360 assessment using the Panoramic tool. This allows us to get feedback from staff, clients and others on these dimensions of performance:

- Knowledge, skills and confidence (4 questions)
- Quality and results (6 questions)
- Communication and collaboration (8 questions)
- Personal integrity and resilience (8 questions)

Results are displayed in numeric form (1-10 scale) and also as randomly reported narrative comments. Upon completion of the assessment, the staff person meets with his/her supervisor to review results and make plans and commitments for the coming year.

Resources

There are myriad sources of information on the review process. For your own long-term development, consider reading broadly on this area so that you develop your own best practices in this important area.

Web-based Resources on Performance Appraisals

Performance appraisal article A useful overview of the topic
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Performance_appraisal

Performance management overview
Useful site with background applicable to appraisal, in topic format
http://humanresources.about.com/od/performancemanagement/Performance_Management_Evaluat ion_Review_Improvement.htm

Performance management article

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Another useful general introduction to the topic
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Performance_management

Preparing for a review
Useful overview of how to be prepared for a review
http://careerplanning.about.com/od/performancereview/a/reviews.htm

Tips to succeed in your performance review
Written from an employee perspective, simple tips to ensure a positive review
http://www.boston.com/jobs/galleries/performance_reviews/

How to do performance review
right Interesting article from
Forbes
http://www.forbes.com/2009/07/29/performance-review-employees-leadership-managing-pay.html

Sample comments for performance appraisal
There are many sample statements that may be helpful in writing appraisals
http://www.jerm.com/2008/03/annual-performance-reviews-sample-comments-phrases-for-how-to- say-it/

360 assessment tools

Panoramic Feedback
A practical, customizable 360 assessment platform often used for performance review with TREC clients
http://www.panoramicfeedback.com

The Leadership Circle Profile
A deep and valuable tool for assessing leadership practice and potential, used in TREC leadership and coaching programs
https://leadershipcircle.com

The Leadership Practices Inventory
Based on worldwide research, a valuable tool for measuring and developing leadership competency http://www.leadershipchallenge.com/professionals-section-lpi.aspx

Books

- Armstrong, S. and Mitchell, B. (2008) The Essential HR Handbook. Franklin Lakes NJ: Career Press
- Armstrong, S. (2010) The Essential Performance Review Handbook: A Quick and Handy Resource for Any Manager or HR Professional. Franklin Lakes NJ: Career

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Press

- Kaye, B. and Jordan-Evans, S. (2006) Love 'Em or Lose 'Em: Getting Good People to Stay. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler
- Kessler, R. (2008) Competency Based Performance Reviews; How to Perform Employee Evaluations the Fortune 500 Way. Franklin Lakes NJ: Career Press
- Lloyd, K. (2009) Performance Appraisals and Phrases for Dummies. Hoboken: Wiley
- Putzier, J. and Baker, D. (2011) The Everything HR Kit, A Complete Guide to Attracting, Retaining and Motivating High-Performance Employees. New York: AMACOM
- Runyon, M. and Brittan, J. (2006) How to Say It Performance Reviews: Phrases and Strategies for Painless and Productive Performance Reviews. New Jersey: Prentiss-Hall

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