Performance Communication Process Guide for Supervisors

Introduction

Effective performance feedback is critical to the success of the University and the individual employee. A strong performance communication process:

- helps employees improve what they do and how they do it, enabling them to give greater support to the goals of their department and the University
- fosters an environment of continuous feedback and professional growth
- creates a shared understanding of the skills and abilities or the demonstrated "know-how" necessary to be successful on the job
- gives employees the opportunity to assess their own performance and describe their contributions
- provides employees with an action plan to develop the skills and behaviors that will ensure their success and the success of the unit

The NYU Performance Communication Process evaluates job performance in two basic ways:

- **What** the employee does: the duties, tasks, and projects expected of the employee during the cycle. These are called the **key responsibilities**.
- **How** the employee accomplishes these tasks: the skills and behaviors used when carrying out duties. How well these skills are used can make the difference between just getting the job done and doing it in a way that is most successful for the organization. These core competencies are called **skills and abilities**.

Overview of the Performance Communication Process
The cycle usually is one year.

1. Performance Planning: the beginning of the cycle

- Meet with the employee and establish performance objectives
- Identify key responsibilities; align with unit objectives
- Create a shared understanding of the core skills and abilities

2. Performance Feedback: throughout the cycle

- Monitor progress on key responsibilities and execution of skills and abilities
- Conduct progress meetings and coaching discussions
- Document performance

3. Performance Evaluation: summarizing at the end of the cycle

- Prepare to meet with the employee by reviewing the <u>employee's self-evaluation</u>
- Complete the <u>performance evaluation</u>
- Summarize the employee's accomplishments and development areas

4. Performance Review Meeting: the final step

- Review <u>performance evaluation</u> with the employee
- Discuss strengths and developmental needs
- Agree upon individual development plans

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1. Performance Planning

Identifying Key Responsibilities and Clarifying Expectations at the Beginning of the Cycle

Performance planning means meeting with the employee to identify key responsibilities and review the core skills and abilities necessary for his or her job.

- The **key responsibilities** are *what* the employee does: the duties, tasks, and projects expected of the employee.
- The **skills and abilities** are *how* the employee accomplishes these tasks: the skills, abilities, and behaviors used.

The meeting's outcome should be an established set of performance expectations for the year.

Use the position description as a starting point. If it has not been updated to reflect the current responsibilities of the position, that should be done at this time. For assistance in preparing the position description, contact your Human Resources Representative.

Before the Performance Planning Meeting

- Review the employee's previous performance evaluation (if available), the employee's position description, goals of your department and your school/division.
- Ask the employee to review the same materials.
- Identify for yourself the key responsibilities of the employee for the coming cycle, including critical duties, projects, and goals. Consider what you and your customers expect of the employee.
- Review the performance evaluation form. Consider how the core skills and abilities common to most University jobs apply to the employee's job. Consider whether to add one to three skills/abilities which may be key to the job or your department.

For example, a department that develops visual communication materials may consider "Creativity" as an additional skill/ability. Include examples to illustrate the behavior, such as "Designs engaging cover artwork for Monthly Publication XYZ."

- Have a hard copy of the form ready for review in the performance planning meeting.

At the Performance Planning Meeting

- Explain to the employee the purpose of the meeting: to set performance expectations, to plan performance goals for the upcoming cycle and review the performance communication process with the employee.
- Identify the key responsibilities using the job description, specific assignments, tasks, projects, and goals.
- Using the form, discuss the skills and abilities to ensure a common understanding.
- Schedule a time for a performance progress meeting.

After the Performance Planning Meeting

- Download the performance evaluation form and input the key responsibilities and additional skills/abilities (if applicable) into the form.
- Give the employee a copy.

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2. Performance Feedback
Creating a Dialogue with the Employee

Effectively Delivering Feedback

Whether you are giving feedback in a performance progress meeting or on an informal, day-to-day basis, the principles are the same
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Give positive feedback when you want to *reinforce* and *encourage* a particular behavior or action:

- **Identify the specific behavior**
  "Following up with Mr. Brown to ensure that his problem was solved was the right thing to do."
- **Describe the behavior's positive impact**
  "He and his staff rely on our division to handle these issues effectively, and follow up phone calls help strengthen their view of our competence. Calling him also shows how important he is as an internal customer."
- **Look for ways to build on the behavior**
  "In what other areas could you use this 'follow-up' strategy?"
- **Emphasize the future.** Past performance issues should be viewed as lessons for the future

"I'm pleased that you addressed that issue in March. The problem solving skills you used will be invaluable as this project moves forward."

- **Encourage the employee to share his or her views**
  "Feel free to make suggestions. Let me know what I can do to help."

Discussing Performance Problems: Constructive Feedback

Discussing performance problems is a difficult aspect of supervision. However, delivering "constructive" feedback should not be avoided. It provides an opportunity for the employee to learn about issues that impede his or her success at work. It also helps the employee do a better job and therefore makes your school/division and the University stronger.

- **Identify the specific behavior**
  "Over the past month, you've missed two project deadlines."
- **Avoid attributing motive to behavior**, such as: "When you come in late it shows you don't care about your job." Just stick to its effect on the work.
- **Describe the behavior's negative impact**
  "When a project's completion is delayed, the rest of the team needs to adjust their schedules and sometimes postpone beginning a new project."
- **Search for solutions**
  "What do you think you can do to ensure future deadlines are met?"
- **Ask questions to gather additional information**
  "What are some of the things we can do to improve our relationship with our clients?"
- **Practice active listening**, or paraphrasing, to convey your understanding of what the employee is saying, thinking, or feeling
  "As I understand it, you feel undervalued when you are not asked to attend certain meetings."
- **Hypothetically reverse roles** to suggest the employee think and feel as if he or she was in someone else's shoes
  "Imagine if you were a customer and I didn't tell you that the deadline could not be met. How would you feel?"
- **Stop the discussion if it becomes too heated**; a break will allow both parties time to reflect on the discussion:
  "Let's take a break and clear our heads, then get back together after lunch."
- **Keep your feedback problem-oriented, not person-oriented**
  "How can we solve this problem?" Not: "Because of you, there is a problem."
- **Strive for understanding, not necessarily agreement**

3. Performance Evaluation
Determining Your Preliminary Rating

The purpose of this end-of-cycle step is to summarize for yourself your appraisal of the employee's performance and to determine a preliminary rating on what has been accomplished and how it has been done, before you give your summary feedback to the employee.

Before Determining Your Preliminary Rating

- Ask the employee to complete the performance self-evaluation and return it to you.
- Gather input from colleagues and others familiar with the employee's work. This information will be particularly helpful if you don't have first-hand knowledge of some area(s) of performance.
- Consider the employee's self-evaluation prior to completing your own evaluation, noting any discrepancies to be discussed during the performance review meeting.

Completing the Performance Evaluation Form

Prepare your comments on the employee's key responsibilities, found in *Part II: End-of-Cycle Summary* of the performance evaluation form.

You will be using the following scale when rating *Part III: Skills and Abilities* and *Part IV: Overall Rating* on the performance evaluation form.

- **Unacceptable: 1**
  Performance is consistently and significantly below expectations.
- **Improvement Needed: 2**
  Performance is occasionally below expectations; improvement is required.
- **Fully Proficient: 3**
  Performance consistently meets, and may occasionally be above expectations.
- **Highly Successful: 4**
  Performance is often above expectations.
- **Outstanding: 5**
  Performance is extraordinary; a role model for others. This rating is not readily achieved.

Making Fair and Accurate Performance Ratings
Consider the following:

- Assign ratings based on performance that has been observed, not based solely on general impressions or feedback from others. Try to validate feedback that might be received from others.
- Consider the individual's behavior and performance for the entire performance cycle--avoid the influence of one event.

- Start at the midpoint of the rating scale and push the rating up or down, based upon specific examples of behavior exhibited.
- Remember that the midpoint of the rating scale (3 = Fully Proficient) means "Performance consistently meets, and may occasionally be above expectations." This rating indicates that an employee is competently performing his or her job.
- Avoid:
  - *Rating all employees at the midpoint of the rating scale.* This does not allow for distinction between high-performing and low-performing employees.
  - *The Halo effect.* Basing a rating on one outstanding aspect of performance. The one characteristic creates a positive "halo" over other, unrelated areas.
  - *The Similar-to-me effect.* Rating higher those who may have personalities or working styles similar to yours.
  - *The Contrast effect.* Comparing one employee against other employees instead of against the expected accomplishments and behaviors.

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4. Performance Review Meeting
Communicating and Discussing Results

The final step in the cycle is the performance review meeting between the supervisor and the employee. The performance review meeting should take place as soon as possible following the completion of performance ratings.

Structuring the Meeting for Maximum Success

Get ready
- Arrange for a private location
- Review the guidelines for Effectively Delivering Feedback
- Ask the employee to bring his or her self-evaluation and recommendations for areas of development
- Gather your documentation

Tell the employee what you are going to discuss
- Calm any concerns the employee may have about the meeting

Focus on behavior
- Talk fairly and objectively about past and future performance; use specific examples to illustrate your points (See Effectively Delivering Feedback)

"Sandwich" your evaluation
- Begin and end with positive comments
- In between, address those areas needing development

Avoid "dumping"

- Don't save up all your negative feedback for this meeting
- Summarize performance for the year; don't belabor issues that have previously been addressed

Keep your cool

- This is a performance feedback discussion, not a negotiation, debate or argument

Listen

- Give your full attention, avoid distractions, allow the employee time to talk and stay silent to encourage the employee to continue speaking

Summarize often

- Summarizing ensures a mutual understanding and conveys interest and focus

Don't talk around shortcomings

- Employees expect and want to know what they need to improve

Ask for ideas

- Encourage the employee to offer ideas and suggestions on how he or she can improve performance

Don't make promises you can't keep

- Keep your credibility intact; promise only what you have control over

Ask for feedback

- Encourage the employee to share his or her views
- After your discussion, you may decide to change your rating; however, even if an employee disagrees with a rating, you are not obligated to change it

End on a positive note

- Thank the employee for his or her preparation and participation
- Be sure both you and the employee sign and date the form

After the Meeting

- Be sure to follow through on your commitments; for example, schedule any milestone meetings that have been agreed upon.
- Keep a copy of the completed, signed performance communication form along with the employee's self-evaluation for your records.
- Give a copy to the employee.
- Submit the original form to your HR Representative.