

Step by step guide to conducting an appraisal meeting

1. Prepare thoroughly for the meeting. Review the employee's last appraisal form and make a note of which objectives have been met. If any objectives have been missed, consider the reasons. Failure to meet objectives will not always be the fault of the employee. Priorities may change over time, so that the objectives which were originally set become less relevant and are justifiably sidelined. Go through the new appraisal form and complete it in pencil – you may wish to change your assessment after the appraisal meeting, when you have taken your employee's views into account. Wherever you are asked for a rating or an opinion, consider what evidence there is to support your view, for example sales figures, labour turnover statistics, accident records. An assertion about an employee's performance may be met by counter assertion, resulting in a "stand off". Evidence gives the discussion a solid base and is difficult to refute. Think back over the whole period of time since the last appraisal. Recent events may be the freshest in your mind but they may not be representative of the employee's longer term performance.
2. Give the employee time to prepare. If you are using a self assessment form, issue it to the employee well in advance of the appraisal meeting, so that he/she has time to consider all of the assessment criteria and think about future objectives and training needs. If you are not using a self assessment form, give the employee a copy of the blank appraisal form.
3. Arrange a suitable time and place for the meeting. Allow sufficient time – at least an hour – and make sure that you are not interrupted.
4. At the start of the meeting, explain the purpose and structure of the appraisal review. However well the appraisal scheme has been trained in, some employees will approach the meeting as if it was "judgement day" and will be nervous. Try to put your employee at ease by making some initial positive comments about his/her work and/or achievements.
5. Discuss your employee's performance, focusing on the objectives which were set last time. Ask your employee to talk you through his/her own assessment of performance. What has gone well and why? Where has he/she been less successful and why? Your employee may well identify problems of which you are unaware.
6. As the discussion progresses, add your own views about your employee's performance. Praise where praise is due. We are all motivated by the acknowledgement of our achievements. This is easy where an employee has met or exceeded expectations. It is, however, equally important to recognise situations where, even though an employee failed to meet an objective, he/she has nevertheless worked hard and the failure was due to other factors.
7. Encourage your employee to be open about his/her strengths and weaknesses. This can only be done if the employee trusts his/her manager to be supportive. An employee who believes that by admitting to a weak point he/she will be blamed or punished will never make that admission. Where an employee has an obvious weakness, encourage him/her to suggest ways to improve. This might involve additional support, mentoring or training. Try not to impose the remedy. Let it emerge as a result of your discussion. This way your employee takes joint responsibility for making it happen.
8. Be specific about any areas of your employee's performance which need to be improved and agree the actions you and your employee will take to address the problem. Record this information on the appraisal form. If, despite your efforts, your employee's performance does not improve in the future, the appraisal form will provide useful evidence of what was discussed and when.

9. Where the employee has encountered difficulties in achieving his/her objectives, try to identify the root cause. It could be something which is outside the employee's control but which you, as a manager, are able to rectify. Ask your employee to suggest possible solutions and offer your own view. Your employee is more likely to "buy in" to a solution if he/she has been involved in deciding the best approach.
10. Discuss and set the employee's objectives for the next period. Again, ask the employee for his/her input before making your own views known. Your aim is to reach an agreement and obtain your employee's commitment to a new set of objectives. This will not happen unless your employee is involved in the process. Objectives which are imposed without consultation with the employee will be resented and may be ignored. In any event, your employee has more detailed knowledge of his/her job than you. He/she may well be aware of factors which need to be taken into account in relation to the objectives which are unknown to you. Make sure that the objectives you agree are "SMART": specific, measurable, agreed, realistic and time-limited. "To increase non-food sales by 3% in the next quarter" is a SMART objective. "To reduce labour turnover" is not.
11. Discuss any training or development needs in relation to your employee's current role and the objectives which you have agreed. Training does not always mean going on a training course. It can be achieved through a variety of means including on the job training, distance learning, job shadowing, mentoring and structured reading. We all have our own particular learning style and your employee may have constraints on his/her availability outside of working hours. Take these factors into account and agree an appropriate method or combination of methods to meet the training or development need. Make sure that you also agree a timetable for the training to take place and stick to it.
12. End the meeting by explaining the next steps in the process. Typically these steps will include the following:
 - The manager completes a final version of the appraisal form. This should be done immediately after the appraisal meeting when the discussion is still fresh in the mind.
 - A copy of the completed form is given to the employee for his/her signature and any comments.
 - Where an employee is dissatisfied with the appraisal, he/she is advised of the appeal/grievance procedure. If the employee lodges an appeal/grievance, a meeting is held with a senior manager at which the employee is allowed to be accompanied by a work colleague or a trade union representative.
 - The completed appraisal form is sent to a senior manager for review, comment and signature.
 - The completed appraisal form, signed by the manager, employee and senior manager is placed in the employee's personal file.
13. Placing the completed appraisal form in the employee's personal file may end the appraisal review but it does not end the process. Performance management is an ongoing responsibility. Every effort must now be made to honour the commitments made during the appraisal meeting and support the employee's day by day progress towards meeting the objectives which have been mutually agreed.