

# Turning Points<sup>SM</sup>

Fast and flexible tips for managing today's workforce

## Painless Performance Appraisals

Tip Sheet No. 1

Conducting annual performance reviews can be a bit like going to the dentist. You know you have to do it, but you're not sure the pain is worth the result. However, this doesn't have to be a painful process at all. In fact you can make it a productive and helpful one if you follow these principles:

1. **Start 12 months early.** The most successful managers view the year-end appraisal as only one part of a 12-month-long project. One-time events without the proper foundation or intermediate steps are what give these sessions their "painful" reputation.
2. **Establish a performance contract.** You need to create a platform document that outlines expectations for the new year, preferably one that is built jointly. This does not have to be elaborate, but it does have to be clear about three things: (a) the top three to five priorities for the period, (b) goals that can be measured or observed, and (c) specific descriptions of each potential performance rating.
3. **Rise above the form.** Virtually every organization has a standard form for their annual performance reviews. Not only do they vary substantially, but they are often much maligned by organization members. Whatever complaints you might have about your form, you can still *use* it effectively by (a) focusing on the process and (b) adding useful information to the document to make the process a more helpful one (e.g., descriptions, definitions, and goals).
4. **Create both *what* and *how* goals.** "What" goals are quantitative in nature, including concrete results or outputs of the job. "How" goals are behavioral in nature, expectations about *the way* the work should be accomplished.
5. **Make it personal.** People have a reservoir of discretionary effort that they can choose to apply at work or not. When their work is aligned with their personal aspirations, they are happier and more productive. So include some of their goals and how you will support them during the period.
6. **Do whatever it takes to avoid surprises.** Simply put, if a subordinate is surprised by their performance review, then the manager has not done his/her job. Avoid this at all costs by setting clear expectations, having interim reviews, and making course corrections before it's too late.
7. **Document the entire year.** Managers often focus too much on the last few months of the review period. Make a file for year-long use, containing notes on milestones achieved, interim reviews conducted, relevant letters and memos, and notes on significant events. Information should be balanced, including positive and critical data, and everyone on your staff should be scrutinized equally.
8. **Ask for a self-assessment.** While the manager makes the final decisions, a self-assessment just before the end-of-year review has several benefits. It helps give the subordinate one last chance to give input, ensures a better-quality decision, and improves the likelihood of acceptance or buy-in to the result.
9. **Be prepared.** In addition to balanced and year-long documentation, the manager should be able to explain what behaviors or results would have led to higher ratings.
10. **Make the call.** If you have done your homework, your final decision should be relatively easy to make. Assign the appropriate rating and reward according to your organization's policies and guidelines. Be compassionate, fair-minded and forthright in your final meeting, then transition to planning for the new year and begin the process again.



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### Trend Lines

*Raised by coddling "soccer Moms" and "helicopter parents," newly arriving Generation-Y employees expect constant feedback, mostly positive.*

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