

# How Am I Doing?

## THE DREADED PERFORMANCE REVIEW

by Erika Osmundson, AgCareers.com Director of Marketing

**DEEP DOWN** don't we all want validation of how we are doing at our job, good or bad? Answering the question of how am I doing, seems like a simple request but unfortunately often gets overlooked due to distractions and the daily grind. Fortunately, there are organizations that have identified the importance of a structured performance management process and have implemented these either formally or informally.

While the talk about the benefits of performance management often revolve around those gained by the organization, this process is just as important and beneficial to the employee, if not more valuable.

### WHY PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT IS IMPORTANT

Stereotypically, performance management and performance reviews from the employee's perspective are thought of as scary, a formality, or pointless. However, there are several things that can be reaped from an effective performance management process for an employee that often go unnoticed, such as the ability to outline and articulate accomplishments to your superior; demonstrate your ability to receive and give constructive feedback; discuss career progression; and explore growth and learning activities.

### PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT IN THE WORKPLACE

Until you have gone through a performance management process, it is hard to know what to expect and that the variation in the quality of process can really influence the experience.

Typically performance management is associated with the performance review. However, performance management is much more than that one point in time.

An effective performance management process begins with planning and setting goals. Goals should be timely and measurable, relate to your job responsibilities and be in line with the company's overall objectives.

The process continues throughout the year as activities are completed to help achieve those goals. As you work toward accomplishing goals, both you and your supervisor should monitor and measure the results as you go. Keep a log, a file online or in hard copy to keep track of your achievements and disappointments.

A piece of advice: don't wait to discuss both your successes and challenges. Talking about things as they happen accomplishes two things:

- In the moment you are more likely to remember the situation and more effectively learn from it.

- It helps make the actual performance review more productive. You won't be worrying about all of the negative feedback you'll receive from things gone wrong throughout the year.

The performance review should be the pinnacle of the process and used to reiterate areas of continued needed improvement, acknowledgment of improvements, celebration of successes, and discussion about growth. The performance review can also be a time to share constructive feedback with your supervisor and plan for the future.

In many instances, performance management is tied to bonuses, pay increases, and/or other perks. According to the **AgCareers.com 2014/2015 AGRIBUSINESS HR REVIEW**, nearly 81% of responding agribusiness companies indicated that staff performance was linked to a reward. Keep in mind that company performance is often also a part of the equation. There is not one standard way that organizations manage this, so if you are unclear seek to understand the process by asking your supervisor or someone within human resources.

### GETTING THE MOST FROM A PERFORMANCE REVIEW

Getting the most from your review doesn't have to be completely the

supervisor's responsibility. Hopefully your manager has been provided with some training to enhance the experience, but here are a few things that you can do to help guide the discussion for the most effective experience possible.

- Plan a designated time to connect. Schedule a time for the discussion allowing both you and your supervisor time to plan and reflect on the time frame being evaluated. Suggest a quiet meeting place or somewhere off site that will allow for conversation with little interruption.
- Be prepared to listen. Truly listen to what your supervisor has to say and don't be defensive to constructive feedback. Focus on what they are saying rather than thinking through your rebuttal. Be aware of your body language. Is it giving the impression that you are open to feedback?
- Ask for examples. If you aren't sure what is meant by feedback or don't agree, ask for specific examples that will help you identify with the information being shared.
- Talk about accomplishments. Don't be afraid to share your accomplishments and the things you feel good about. Particularly if you hope to climb the career ladder, this is the time to shine and gloat a little about what you've done.
- Ask about next career steps. If you aspire to move up the career ladder or grow within your current role, ask your supervisor what is next? Ask for opportunities for training and additional education and then brainstorm with your supervisor what those might be.
- Use the time to write or re-evaluate goals. Working on goals together with your supervisor eliminates a lot of back and forth. Ask about how you'll be measured (if it is your first time) or if

anything has changed with the evaluation process.

- Set the stage to provide feedback. Conclude the conversation by asking if there is any additional feedback for you. Obviously, this is a sincere question and you'll want to listen to the feedback, but hopefully it opens the door for your manager to ask for feedback as well. Again, hopefully none of what you share will come as a surprise and will be delivered in a constructive manner. An example: 'Awhile back we talked about some of your directions being vague. Last month when you instructed me on vaccinating it was very clear, but recently when you asked me to power wash I had to ask a lot of follow-up questions to fully understand your expectations. Can we talk about that?'

---

*“Reiterate areas of continued improvement, acknowledgment of improvements, celebration of successes, and discussion about growth.”*

---

## WHAT TO DO IF THERE IS NO PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Perhaps you aren't one of the lucky ones and your organization doesn't have a performance management process or the process isn't being taken seriously by your supervisor. Take the reins and create an opportunity for yourself with this list of seven ideas!

- #1 Ask your supervisor upfront how they will measure success. Note this and keep in sight on your desk. Throughout the year write down both positives and negatives as it relates to your goals and this measurement.

#2 Meet more frequently. If a process exists but is sporadic or not frequent enough, make the suggestion for more scheduled connects. Many organizations meet at the six month mark and also annually. More conscious and frequent interactions make examples shared more easily recalled and relevant.

#3 Create goals. If this is not part of the process, take it upon yourself to write measurable and timely goals that you feel align with the business and then share those with your supervisor for discussion and approval.

#4 Rate yourself. If an evaluation matrix exists, ask for a copy in advance and rate yourself. Then compare and contrast your areas of similarity and differences with your supervisor to help spark discussion.

#5 Address problems as they arise. Don't let things fester and lead to a big blow-up. Talk about how things can be done differently next time right away.

#6 Ask a question. The best way to resolve a sticky situation is to ask a question. Example: Is there something we can put into place to be more cohesive about my objectives and outcomes?

#7 Simply ask for a performance review. Most managers when asked will make the time and effort, you might just have to ask!

Performance management and performance reviews get a bad rap. In all reality, there is so much to be gained for employees that utilize and look for opportunities to make performance management the positive experience that it should be. Rather than the dreaded performance review, maybe the mindset should be, “Yes, an opportunity to continue to grow my career!”