

[How to learn to love performance reviews](#)

By [Martha Finney](#) on May 26, 2010

I've never figured out why so many people dread the prospect of performance reviews. Before you thump your forehead with the heel of your hand, let me explain. I know that performance reviews are hideous — they can end in tears (I know that for a personal fact). But really, they don't *have* to be torture. If you are the manager whose job it is to lead those reviews, the tone they take is entirely within your control.

I like to think of performance reviews (done well, that is) as an opportunity for a reset and a fresh start on a new year or quarter. Instead of an excruciating experience of judgment and copping to failure, they can be a way to affirm and acknowledge all the growth and progress made the period before and an exciting opportunity to start with a clean slate for the period just ahead. They are an opportunity to solidify your relationship with your team, one person at a time, and build trust. They are also the chance for you to demonstrate through your own actions what kind of culture of accountability you want to continue to develop.

Here's how:

- **Keep your date.** I'm appalled at how many times I hear from people that their bosses have let performance review seasons come and go without a peep. Either the managers don't set up the appointments, don't respond to their direct reports' request for appointments, or blow off the appointments they made. These are all ways to tell your people not to care so much, and that in this culture someone's word doesn't mean a thing.
- **No surprises.** There shouldn't be a thing that you'd have to tell your people in their reviews about their performance that they don't know already. Your ongoing communications throughout the year should have established a collaborative culture on your team. As a result, everyone should know how they stand with each other and with you. And you, for that matter, should know how you stand with your people (why wait for the engagement survey scores?).
- **Use the meeting as a model for excellent customer service.** Everyone has customers, even if it's just internal customers. Your team members are your customers. And the performance review appointment is a perfect way to show how you want them to treat theirs. Be on time. Make sure the setting is private and uninterrupted. Listen calmly and non-defensively to everything they have to say. Make sure they know that you heard and understood them. Work with them to arrive at solutions and approaches to challenges for the upcoming period. Give them what they need, starting with the confidence that you are invested in their success.

- **Take it on the chin.** These performance reviews should be two-way, which means that you might hear some hard things about yourself. While I would never recommend that an individual risk getting fired by being too critical of his or her boss, self-empowered talent who are confident that they can find jobs elsewhere may use this meeting as an opportunity to tell *you* a thing or two. Respect the feedback and tuck it away in your mind for consideration in a moment that's not so emotionally charged. Don't punish your employee for candor.
- **Set your mutual goals high.** Be positive and inspiring. Even if part of the conversation must include a review of some failed objectives, make sure the overall feeling of the meeting is upbeat and aspirational. If you want your people to stay engaged in the work they're doing for you, give them something to build, not just fix.

By ending the meetings on a high note, not only are you helping your team stay ambitious and ready to reach for some major stretch goals, but you are also assigning yourself a more exciting and productive year ahead as well.

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