

Conducting appraisal meetings – essential skills for managers

From the start

- Get the individual talking – aim for an airtime split of at least two-thirds in favour of the individual.
 - Keep your messages clear and unambiguous – remember: if messages are thought to be inconsistent, recipients put only 7% trust in the words, with 38% of meaning going to tone of voice and 55% to body language displayed.
 - Take opportunities to ground the discussion in the context of ongoing performance management (eg: 'We've talked about this in our one-to-ones') and wider performance management ('As you know, the strategy of the organisation this year is about expansion, so I want to look at some stretching objectives for you').
 - Be emotionally intelligent – pick up clues in what people are trying to say and in their body language.
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Feedback

- Be constructive and build on strengths.
 - Be fair and balanced.
 - Be prepared to give and receive.
 - Keep it factual – use evidence, but use it sensitively.
 - Encourage feedback about your own performance as a manager.
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Self-appraisal

- Get the individual to talk about their performance (by encouraging the use of self - assessment or asking good opening questions like: 'What are three things you've done really well this year, and that you're really proud of – and what are three things you'd do differently if you had another chance or more time?')
 - Self-assessment helps to clarify the individual's insights and sustains good working relationships. It's much easier if an individual can acknowledge under-performance themselves rather than having it pointed out to them by the manager.
 - Individuals are often quite critical of their own performance and this gives managers scope for valid praise, building confidence and raising self-esteem.
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Empowerment and ownership

- Talk through problems and encourage people to come up with their own solutions. This is the basis of good coaching and empowers the individual.
 - The same applies to setting targets – these should always be agreed by both parties, but ask the individual what their ideas are around a realistic means and an achievable deadline.
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Questioning

Questions allow us to get information, open up dialogue, steer conversations, and convey messages. There are various types:

- **Open** – good to start an appraisal meeting, eg, 'What do feel has gone well?' These questions gain information and feelings and do not assume or influence the answer. They usually begin with what, why, when, where, how, who or which. **Tip** – ask 'what' before 'why' – the latter requires people to justify themselves, the former elicits more factors to explore (as long as you are listening properly).
 - **Closed** – these are questions which have a 'yes' or 'no' answer. They can be used to check facts, gain commitment, summarise, close conversations and secure complete understanding, eg, 'Have you completed all aspects of the project?' Beware of closing down conversations and influencing the answer with this type of question, eg, 'You're not having any problems, are you?'
 - **Probing** – begin to narrow things down or gain more information to get to the root of a problem, eg, 'Which aspects in particular worry you about the project?' and 'What exactly do you want to use the computer for?'
 - **Reflective** – by reflecting the speaker's comments back to them in the form of a neutral statement you can check understanding and feelings and encourage the speaker to expand and give more information. For example: 'So, you're saying that you enjoyed the challenge but you might do it differently in future?', 'You feel your contribution isn't being recognised?'
 - **Behavioural** – these questions seek specific examples of past actual behaviour and are often used to help predict how someone will behave in the future. For example, 'Can you give me an example of how you've contributed to the work of the team in the last six months?' or 'Tell me about a time when you disagreed with your boss's decision and needed to tell him.'
 - **Hypothetical** – provide opportunities to steer conversations and see how people might react in future, eg, 'If you were to take on this task how would you plan it?' or 'If you were faced with this problem again, how would you handle it differently?'
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Listening

- This is hard work and it needs to be practised!
 - Both sides in appraisal should try to clear their minds of other issues, be receptive, acknowledge different points of view and try to see things from the other person's perspective. Listening is active and involves focusing on the other person, reflecting back comments, taking notes, being patient as explanations are being made, checking back and clarifying understanding.
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Summarising

- This should be done at key stages and certainly at the end of the meeting.
 - Make sure all agreements to objectives, targets, developmental activities, plans for monitoring are clearly understood and agreed – covering what, why, who, when and how. **Tip** – getting people to monitor themselves and to take the initiative in demonstrating achievement of objectives or completion of plans can empower and motivate them, and take pressure off busy managers.
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Closing

- Do it cleanly.
 - End on a positive note – so morale and motivation are lifted, and commitment to actions more likely to result in their completion.
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