

# Guide to Performance Management

## UCSD Human Resources Department

### Observation and Feedback

Observing work performance and providing feedback about it should be a routine part of the performance management process. Feedback should be based on observed and/or verifiable work-related behaviors, actions, statements, and results. This type of feedback is called *behavioral feedback*. Effective feedback helps the employee sustain good performance, to develop new skills and to improve performance when necessary.

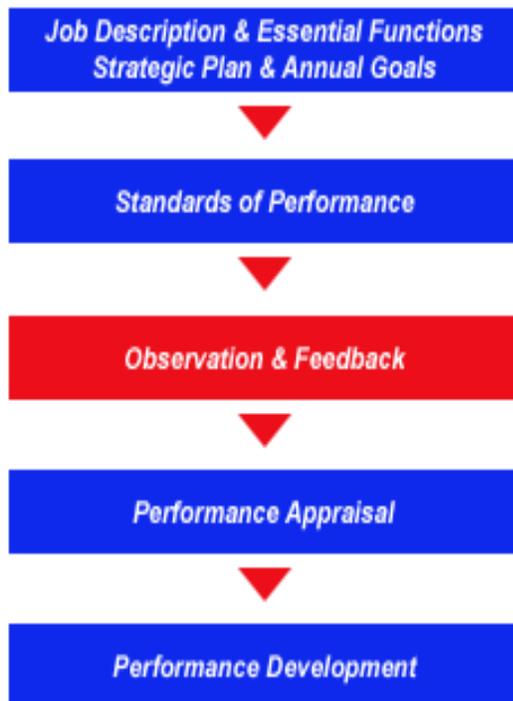
For additional information about observation and feedback, see [BLINK](#).

Observing employee performance and offering feedback about what you see should be a routine part of the way you manage employee performance. Feedback is most effective in reinforcing or improving work performance when the employee has confidence in the basis of that feedback. And you, as the performance manager, will be more confident when giving feedback based on information that you can support.

### Observing Employee Performance

From the standpoint of performance management, observation involves noticing specific facts, events, or behaviors related to work performance and the results of work performance. Observations are the raw data upon which effective performance feedback may be based. The purpose of observing employee behavior and the results of work performance is to identify and describe it in order to help the employee be successful and continue to develop his or her skills, knowledge, and experience.

When you make observations about the results of employee performance, the output employees generate and the impact of their work, you gather additional information to make both praise and



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constructive feedback more effective. Observations should be the basis for feedback, and may also suggest actions which might be taken to support, develop or improve performance.

Feedback based on observed or verifiable data is more likely to influence employee behavior than feedback which cannot be supported by firsthand information. It is not always possible to observe employees at work, but you should build occasions to observe their performance into your work day. In that way, you provide opportunities to understand what they do, to talk with and get feedback from them, to see employees as they perform at their best and to recognize areas in which their performance could be improved.

### When You Can't Be Present to Observe Performance

When you can't be present to observe employee performance, be sure that you have processes in place through which you can learn about how they're doing. **These processes should be open, fair, and understood by everyone.** Options for obtaining input about performance in your absence may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Evaluate the output and products of the employee's work.
- Have routine one-on-one meetings with your employee and include discussions of performance.
- Periodically review and discuss with your employee the standards of performance for his or her job and your expectations.
- Ask your employee to do periodic reports and share them with you for discussion.
- Obtain feedback from customers - in writing when possible.
- Do brief stand-up check-ins or phone calls.
- Ask an appropriate person who is present day-to-day to serve as a work leader or give the person authority to act in your stead, and ensure that everyone understands the person's role.
- Perform routine spot checks of the employee at work.
- Ask for confidential evaluations of employee performance by peers (or direct reports of supervisors). This process should be clearly understood by everyone and applied fairly to all.

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Generally, you should not wait until the formal performance appraisal session to give feedback about performance problems.

Ordinarily, performance issues brought up during the performance appraisal session have already been discussed with your employee.

### Behavioral Feedback

Feedback may be defined as "information about past behavior, delivered in the present, which may influence future behavior." (*What Did You Say?: The Art of Giving and Receiving Feedback* by Charles and Edith Seashore, Douglas Charles Press, North Attleborough, MA 1992.)

Feedback is influential. During the performance appraisal period, provide feedback about performance regularly. When employees receive feedback that is timely, frequent and specific they are more likely to understand what is expected of them, to repeat successful performance and to improve their work when necessary.

Feedback which describes observed or verifiable behavior and facts is different from feedback which evaluates the person based on assumptions, interpretations, generalizations and judgments about what the behavior or facts mean. Compare the following statements:

1. *That was a very poor report. I wish you were more committed to doing a good job.*
2. *Your report was not formatted according to standard practice and the content was based on data which is a year out of date.*

Note that in statement #1, the speaker has judged the employee as lacking commitment, and the statement about the report being "poor" is evaluative without being helpful. Statement #2 tells the employee exactly what needs to be improved without judging his or her character or motives. Employees' performance is more likely to improve when you ask them to *do* something differently rather than

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### **Guidelines for Giving Feedback**

- Tell employees that you are going to let them know how they are doing.
- Give feedback as close to the original event as possible.
- Describe specific work-related behavior or results observed.
- Ask for employee input and feedback.
- Let employees know about the effects or impact of their performance.

asking them to *be* different. People become defensive when they feel judged, and are more likely to accept feedback which is behavioral.

Behavioral feedback consists of statements about observed or verified behavior related to performance standards. If the employee does not understand what you expect or what the standards are, give clear messages about those expectations and standards, confirm understanding, and then give the employee a chance to improve performance to meet them.

### Guidelines for Giving Behavioral Feedback:

1. Behavioral feedback should be based on specific, observable or verifiable, data and information, and should be delivered as close to the event or behavior as possible.

*I noticed that you arrived at 8:30 on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday rather than at 8:00.*

2. After describing your observations to the employee, ask for his or her input before you decide what the behavior means. For example, you may observe that an employee has been arriving late over a period of days. Before you decide that the employee is being irresponsible, get more information. You may find that there is a valid reason for the behavior or there are other factors which would contribute to your understanding.

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*I'd like to talk with you about the reasons for your late arrival.*

3. Discuss the impact of the performance or its consequences, but never make threats or promises of promotion. When an employee understands the impact of performance, he or she will know why it is important.

*As a result, other staff had to leave their work to cover our service desk.*

Communicate by your words, body language and tone of voice that your intention is to be helpful when giving feedback. The goal of feedback is to reinforce or redirect performance so that the employee can be successful.

### Examples

The behavioral approach to feedback is valuable when describing performance which needs to be improved, because the employee learns which specific behaviors to change rather than receiving general comments which don't give much information. Compare the following statements.

It's more effective to ask employees to **do** something differently than it is to ask them to **be** different.

1. This was not your best work.
2. This project was completed three weeks later than you originally estimated and the result

is that our client is thinking about bringing in an outside consultant next time. What will it take to deliver on time in the future?

Statement #1 is vague and does not tell the employee what the specific performance problem was. Statement #2 gives the employee a more complete picture of what needs to be improved and the importance of improving performance. It also enlists his or her support in improving future performance.

Behavioral feedback is also valuable when giving feedback about successful performance. Compare the following statements:

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1. Terrific job!
2. Everyone on the team appreciates the way you facilitated this meeting. You identified the areas in which we were confused, you summarized to help us stay on track, and you maintained your neutrality. As a result, we were able to come to a decision today rather than haggling over details for another week.

*When feedback about successful performance is given in specific behavioral terms, the employee knows which behaviors to continue or repeat.*

Feedback about performance in need of improvement is best delivered in private to avoid embarrassment to the employee. Some people are also embarrassed when feedback about successful performance is given in front of others. Feedback is more effective if you know and respect the preferences of your employees.

Notes that you make or records that you keep about employee performance should also be phrased in behavioral terms. Avoid statements which would imply subjective judgment or prejudice about the employee's personality, character, or motives. Encourage your employees to keep records of their own accomplishments.

The performance manager and the employee should exchange performance-related information throughout the review cycle. At these discussions, take the time to discuss accomplishments, needs for further training, and any problems or concerns. If there are performance problems, schedule meetings at regular intervals for the purpose of providing feedback on performance. This practice will ensure that you address issues promptly and foster a problem-solving approach between the performance manager and employee.

Occasionally, though not often, performance problems may arise that will warrant documentation and performance counseling. Others may be persistent enough to warrant taking more serious steps. Before initiating any formal corrective or disciplinary action, contact your supervisor and your Employee Relations consultant in the Human Resources Department, or Human Resources Generalist at the Medical Center, for guidance and assistance.