

Writing Effective Employee Evaluations

For many managers, writing employee evaluations is one of the hardest parts of the job. I recently worked with a manager who was an entire year behind on writing employee evaluations. “It was beyond writer’s block,” he said. “I couldn’t seem to put my thoughts on paper.”

Fortunately, a few simple tips helped him get started—and got him better prepared to write future evaluations. Follow these steps to create more effective evaluations for your employees.

Step One: Evaluate the work, not the worker.

Because you work with your staff every day, it can be hard to distance yourself enough to write a truly effective evaluation, particularly when there are performance issues. This is where a lot of management-level writer’s block begins.

First, go back to that employee’s job description or previous year’s evaluation. Then ask yourself, “If I were a consultant coming into this workplace for the first time, would this staff person meet the criteria for the job?”

Utilize the job criteria to begin writing your evaluation. You might want to list them as bullet points, then write some factual information about how that employee did or did not meet each of the criteria.

Use analytical, not subjective, language to explain each of your points. Then add anecdotal information from that employee’s performance to illustrate your analysis. This creates the framework for your evaluation.

Step Two: Set measurable goals. Be specific.

An effective employee evaluation is more than just a report card. It provides a clear path for an employee to determine what is being done well, what needs to be corrected, and how to accomplish those goals. Being specific on all points is critical to achieving those changes.

Be clear about what was accomplished—and what still needs to be done. Set goals, and offer constructive advice on how to achieve them. Create deadlines and expectations. The more clear and concrete you are, the more helpful the evaluation will be.

Build the goals and guidelines into the framework of your evaluation. Remember to be as specific in praise as you are in correction. Employees want to know that this is not just a form, but a recognition of their efforts all year.

Step Three: Create simple progress tracking.

As you plan for future evaluations, don't rely on your memory or on a formal employee file for a year's worth of information on each employee. Instead, create a simple method of tracking each employee's progress all year long.

Develop a tracking system that works with the way you work. Make a quick note on your calendar when you speak to an employee about performance (good or bad). Or start a new email folder for each staff member, and drag copies of relevant emails to that folder throughout the year. Work smarter, not harder, and employee evaluations will be easier to write next year.

Effective employee evaluations can lead to better bottom line results, increasing your division's productivity and improving morale. By following these three steps, you'll be on your way to creating employee evaluations that generate real results for your employees and for you as a manager.

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