

Top Tips for Conducting Successful Performance Evaluations

Proven strategies and best practices for making the most of evaluations.

1 Arrange the discussion by getting organized and communicating.

Get organized.

- Find a time and place that works for both of you.
- Make sure the location is private.
- Schedule enough time so you don't have to rush and are able to both speak and listen.

Communicate in advance.

- Let your staff know when the process is starting.
- Convey your enthusiasm for the process – both the opportunity to recognize and acknowledge great work as well as the opportunity to identify mutually agreed upon solutions to challenges.
- Ask staff members to prepare (see tip #5).

2 Prepare for the meeting.

- Review the staff member's activities from the entire year by looking over their file, kudos received, one-on-one meeting notes, progress on goals, and workshops or other training attended.
- Make notes about accomplishments you want to recognize and coaching you want to provide.
- Connect employee performance to the mission and goals of the unit and Vanderbilt, and be prepared to describe how it furthers the mission.
- Create an agenda for the session that includes the items above and builds in time for you to listen to feedback.

3 Create a dialogue.

- Plan to be an active listener.
- Allow ample opportunities for your staff member to respond to your comments.
- Remember to ask your staff member what he or she needs from you.
- Work on problem-solving together rather than blaming.
- Try not to respond defensively. If the staff member has an angry or emotional response, remember to:
 - Listen. Pause. Breathe.
 - Think about the emotions you are both experiencing and where they may be coming from.
 - Respond by reflecting back what you think the staff member is feeling. Be curious, ask questions. Kindly restate your point.

4 Do's and don'ts.

Do:

- Problem-solve.
- Focus on the entire year.
- Be specific.
- Integrate with the mission and goals of the team and Vanderbilt.
- Ask for their opinions, suggestions, accomplishments, goals and needs.

Don't:

- Blame.
- Select only recent activities.
- Generalize.
- Focus on actions, goals and objectives that don't connect to team and organizational goals.
- Do all the talking.

5 Help your staff members prepare.

The most rewarding performance evaluations for both managers and staff are two-way conversations. Providing guidance to your staff member about how to prepare for the evaluation will increase the likelihood that you will have a meaningful and productive discussion. When you arrange the meetings, suggest employees come prepared to discuss:

- Accomplishments during the year - what are they proud of?
- The lessons they learned during the year – what could they have done better, what would they do in a future situation, and what support do they need to be successful?
- Coaching and support needed – what help do they need from you in order to be successful?
- Progress on goals – goals met and unmet. If they didn't meet their goals, what were the obstacles? Do they have any suggestions for overcoming the obstacles and can you problem-solve together for future success?
- Professional development – would they like training, mentoring or other learning opportunities?
- Career development – what are their career plans and is there something you can do to help them?

Take an interest in your employees' professional and career development – it shows that you are committed to their success and enhances their overall engagement and satisfaction. This does not mean that you need to have all the answers for them or promise them that a promotion is forthcoming. As their leader, your role is simply to guide, coach, and where possible, provide opportunities to grow and develop. Helping your employee create an [Individual Development Plan \(IDP\)](#) is a good first step.

Use optional self-evaluations thoughtfully, but keep in mind that while comparing your evaluation with the staff member's self-evaluation can generate healthy discussion and insights, using the self-evaluation as the final evaluation will not serve the evaluation goal at all. If you would like to have your employees complete a self-evaluation using the online tool (VPES), see directions for [university employees](#) and for [medical center employees](#).



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6 Use the ratings effectively.

- Review and make key notes about the employee's previous evaluation, both scores and comments. Did the employee take specific actions to improve performance over the last year?
- Assess whether the key functions for which you use to evaluate performance remain valid measurements of the employee's job responsibilities. If not, please make notes to change the key functions for the next evaluation season?
- Briefly overview the generic scoring template to re-familiarize yourself with the levels of performance measures.
- If you ask your employees to complete self-evaluations, take time to evaluate their performance separately from the employee's self-evaluation. Compare your ratings with the employee's self-ratings. Make notes of alignment and differences then determine final ratings. The comments in the evaluation should reflect the supervisor's assessment separately from any employee comments that are made and agreed upon by the supervisor.

7 Set goals -- together.

Look at last year's goals.

- How did it go? Let the employee tell you what he or she thinks.
- Give your feedback.
- Celebrate accomplished goals!
- For unmet goals, talk about why not:
 - Was it a personal obstacle or something within control? If so, how can you encourage and support success?
 - Was it an external obstacle or something outside of control? If so, is there something you do to take care of the obstacle? Can you refocus on what is attainable?

Set goals for next year.

- Encourage your staff member to identify goals that he or she wants to work on, especially those that align with the team goals.
- Ask the staff member to write a draft copy to go over with you.
- Make goals SMART (Specific, Measurable, Aspirational, Realistic, Timebound).

8 Coach to improve performance.

Providing constructive feedback to your employees shows that you care about them and want to help them succeed. Effective managers address major performance issues at the time they occur, so there shouldn't be surprises at the evaluation. On the other hand, you may have suggestions for improvements to enhance an employee's overall performance, help him or her move from good to great, or more effectively align activities to the team's mission and goals. Giving constructive feedback will provide direction for the coming year and clarify expectations.

How to provide constructive feedback:

- Before the evaluation meeting, identify the behavior or behaviors that need improvement. Describe how the improvements will have a positive impact on the team's or organization's mission or the employee's goals, professional growth or job functions.
- Provide positive feedback first.
- Describe the behavior that needs improvement.
- Ask the employee for recommendations to correct the behavior. If he or she suggests a workable solution, give your approval and your expectation for improved performance. If the employee is unable to offer a solution, problem-solve together.
- Clarify the agreement and determine next steps. Set a time to follow up.
- Reiterate positive key points from your earlier discussion.
- Thank the employee and make it clear that your goal is to see him or her succeed.

If you anticipate that this will be a very difficult conversation, please remember that there is training available for [medical center](#) and [university leaders](#).