ARE YOU READY?

While practice makes perfect, isn't it nice to have a head start? This checklist can give you that. While it does not necessarily include everything you will need, if you can check off these items you will be well on your way to an effective review.

In advance:

- ○ I have scheduled enough time for the meeting (at least one hour).
- ○ I have notified the team member of the meeting.
- ○ I have informed the team member about what will take place during the meeting.
- ○ I have given the team member the self-evaluation form to complete (optional).

The day of:

- ○ I have ensured the meeting will not be interrupted (no phone calls, emails, etc).
- ○ I have made the room comfortable, including:
    - ☐ setting the temperature at an appropriate level
    - ☐ making water or coffee available
    - ☐ clearing the table of any extraneous papers or files
    - ☐ removing anything I might fidget with (paper clips, rubber bands)
    - ☐ providing comfortable chairs
- ○ I have all the necessary paperwork and materials to conduct the meeting, including:
    - ☐ the team member's position description
    - ☐ the written performance review report
    - ☐ a list of goals and objectives created during the last review
    - ☐ performance documentation
    - ☐ a schedule of courses or training opportunities which may help the team member
    - ☐ a notepad and pen for taking notes
- ○ I have refreshed myself on the team member's history, including:
    - ☐ length of service with the department/University
    - ☐ educational background
    - ☐ experience background
    - ☐ level of technical skills
    - ☐ current projects
    - ☐ projects the team member has completed during the review period
    - ☐ attendance records

Afterwards:

- ○ I have followed up on any environmental problems, training opportunities, or other issues the team member brought to my attention.
- ○ I am checking progress on goals.

○ I am continuing to document performance - positive and negative - as it occurs.

○ I am discussing accomplishments and problem areas with the team member as they arise.

THE IDEAL PERFORMANCE REVIEW . . . AND HOW TO ACHIEVE IT

Whether formal or informal, performance reviews (PRs) are done at all levels. They may be dreaded or feared, however, that can be replaced with acceptance and even enthusiasm when done fairly and consistently. Following are some tips to guide you through the ideal PR.

PREPARING THE WRITTEN REPORT:

- **Be specific.** Provide specific examples to support your statements. For example, instead of noting "George is a good team player", state that he "often volunteers to help coworkers with large projects, such as the FLSA project". Document specific examples of behavior as they occur throughout the year and by the time of meeting the report will practically write itself!

- **Critique the performance, not the person.** Don't use the PR to rate personality traits - such reviews will be subjective and biased. Remember you are interested in <u>performance.</u>

- **Avoid bias.** Be aware of biases that might creep into your report so you can identify and deal with them. See handout entitled *I Wasn't Ready For This* for further information.

- **Save time - do it right the first time.** Take the time to create an objective and detailed report. Review the team member's job description and prior PRs to determine how well performance has been in relation to previously set objectives. Being accurate means being fair.

PREPARING FOR THE MEETING:

- **Prep your team members.** Notify them in advance about what will take place during the review. You might hold a brief meeting prior to the PR to discuss what will be covered.

- **Schedule the meeting appropriately.** Inform team members several days in advance, allow sufficient meeting time, and choose a neutral location with no interruptions. Avoid scheduling it for a day when one of you is likely to be under extreme pressure, such as the first day back to work after a three-week vacation.

- **Choose your words.** Plan what you will say, trying to balance positive and negative feedback. Anticipate possible reactions and decide how you can handle them.

DURING THE MEETING:

- **Relax.** Offer a cup of coffee, engage in small talk, allow yourselves to relax before getting started. Make yourself approachable - and less like a courtroom judge.

- **Start on a positive note.** Begin the meeting discussing a positive accomplishment. By discussing strengths first, your meeting will take on a positive tone which will help relax both of you.

- **Silence can be golden.** Do not feel the need to fill silent spaces in the conversation. Your team members may need these "awkward silences" to cue for further discussion.

- **Communication is the** *key.* You want to cover everything in your written report. However, forms should not be more important than your communication exchange. Show you are listening by summarizing statements, nodding, and maintaining eye contact. Demonstrate flexibility and a willingness to amend the written report if the team member furnishes reasonable evidence for such changes.

- ***Focus on the future.*** Take time to summarize previous discussions but focus your energy towards setting future goals and action plans.

- ***Be resourceful.*** When discussing areas needing improvement, discuss specific steps team members can take to make these improvements. Keep in mind you may need to provide resources for improvement (i.e., training).

- ***Honesty is still tlte best policy.*** Don't feel you must avoid disagreement at all costs - just be honest. Sometimes disagreements help clarify misunderstandings or facilitate more meaningful discussions. If either you or your team member feels too emotional to complete the meeting, however, don't force it; allow some cool-off time and reschedule for a later date.

AFTER THE MEETING AND CONTINUOUSLY THROUGHOUT THE YEAR:

- ***Support improved performance.*** Now that your team members have set goals, help them achieve them. Follow up on their progress and make opportunities for development available to all team members on a fair and equitable basis.

- ***Immediate acknowledgement helps.*** Address positive - and negative - performance as it occurs. If you save problems for the annual PR, your team member will likely be overwhelmed and defensive. Generally, no problems should be raised in the PR that have not already been discussed with the team member.

- ***Request feedback.*** Do not let the PR replace ongoing communication between you and your team members. Encourage their suggestions on ways to improve the work enviromnent. If their efforts are supported, their performance will improve.

- ***Be positive.*** As basic as it sounds, relaying a positive attitude will help you and your team members benefit from the PR process. Thinking of the PR as a communication tool as well as a review process will help improve attitudes about it.

Keeping these pointers in mind should allow your review process to flow smoothly and effectively. Remember, as a supervisor you play an important role in improving the performance of your team members as well as the University as a whole. The performance review is a significant step in a very positive direction.

SMART GOALS - TEMPLATE

SMART goals help improve achievement and success. A SMART goal clarifies exactly what is expected and the measures used to determine if the goal is achieved and successfully completed.

A SMART goal is:

Specific (and strategic): Linked to position summary, departmental goals/purpose, and/or overall University goals and strategic plans. Answers the question-Who? and What?

Measurable: The success toward meeting the goal can be measured. Answers the question-How?

Attainable: Goals are realistic and can be achieved in a specific amount of time and are reasonable.

Relevant (results oriented): The goals are aligned with current tasks and projects and focus in one defined area; include the expected result.

Time framed: Goals have a clearly defined time-frame including a target or deadline date.

Examples:

Not a SMART goal:
- Team member will improve their writing skills.

Does not identify a measurement or timeframe, nor identify why the improvement is needed or how it will be used.

SMART goal:
- The Department has identified a goal to improve communications with administrative staff by implementing an internal departmental newsletter. Elaine will complete a business writing course by January 31, 2026 and will publish the first monthly newsletter by March 1, 2026. Elaine will gather input and/or articles from others in the department and draft the newsletter for supervisor review, and when approved by supervisor, distribute the newsletter to staff by the 15th of each month.

SMART GOAL PLANNING FORM

Specific - WHO? WHAT?

Measurement/Assessment - HOW?

Attainable/Achievable - REASONABLE?

Relevant - EXPECTED RESULT?

Timed – WHEN?

AVOIDING PITFALLS IN PERFORMANCE REVIEWS

As with most things in life, the best way to work out the kinks with the performance review (PR) process is practice, practice, practice. We suggest that before conducting your first official PR you do a trial one with a colleague, preferably one with PR experience who can steer you in the right direction. In addition, be aware of the common pitfalls of the PR process and note the suggestions on how to avoid them.

What problems do you find with these statements?

"You are performing better than Joe but not quite as well as Mary."
Comparing team members to their peers can lead to a host of negative effects such as resentment (towards you as well as coworkers), gossip, and stunted creativity. Remember each person has strengths and weaknesses in differing areas. Keep the review focused on the team member's specific performance and goals.

"Just do what the person who held this job previously did and you'll be fine."
Even if someone is following in the footsteps of an ideal worker, there is usually no single correct way of accomplishing a task. Sometimes by breaking precedent or trying something new, a more efficient or creative process is found. Allow team members to be themselves and, whenever possible, give them leeway to experiment.

"I'm going to make sure you get promoted to senior manager this month!"
Don't make promises you may not be able to keep. Even if you state something casually, your team member may interpret it as if you had signed, sealed, and delivered the deal. You can promise to try to do something, but it's best to avoid promises altogether unless you have the power to implement them.

"Look at your physique - have you been working out?"
Commenting on personal appearance is not a good idea even if it is meant as a compliment. Remember, the issue here is *performance.* If you wish to begin your meeting with a compliment, focus on a work- related accomplishment. One exception: when appearance is directly interfering with performance (i.e., uniforms are required, and the team member is not caring for it properly). Chances are, if your comment is about appearance, it is better left unsaid.

"I'm going to the democratic caucus after meeting with my priest. How about you?"
Politics and religion are not appropriate topics during a PR. Even topics that seem neutral - such as real estate or vacation plans - can be sensitive: team members may translate them as your search for information about their finances. Again, the general rule is: if it is not related to performance, it doesn't belong in the PR meeting.

"The reason *I* promoted Mabel *is* because she has stronger communication skills than you."
If a team member asks why you chose someone else for a promotion or raise, don't discuss the other person. Instead, bring the subject back to the person you are reviewing by explaining, for example, what qualifications they were lacking for that particular promotion. The old standby works: "Let's talk about you, not her."

"So... let's talk money."
No, let's not. Performance is the topic of conversation, so focus on strengths, areas needing improvement, goals, and action plans. If team members mention money, let them know this meeting is specifically regarding performance and that money can be discussed at another time. If they are persistent, explain that you do not have the final say in that decision and your recommendation will be based in part on the PR meeting.

"Believe me, *I* dislike doing these PRs as much as you do."
You'll have difficulty maintaining a positive attitude in your staff if you don't maintain it personally. Consider the benefits of the PR process - it's a chance to develop stronger relationships, increase

communication, and ultimately improve productivity. Let your team members know you appreciate them and are willing to take a few hours each year to let them know.

"Here's what you're doing wrong. You know what you're doing right so we won't discuss it."
Stressing the negative and forgetting the positive does little more than make your team member defensive. While you need to address problem areas, you also need to reinforce positive behavior and encourage future contributions. Don't assume they know how valuable their work is to the department - tell them.

"I don't have time to prepare the report. I'll just wing it."
The PR is not an appropriate time to "wing it". Just think, chances are, you spend at least 2,000 hours per year at work; therefore, budgeting a few of those hours to prepare clear, objective reports is not much. Keep in mind that the PR is part of your job (a very important part!) and should be done as well as any other aspect of your work.

"Trust me. I'm the manager. I know what's best for you."
How can you know what's best for your team members without talking to them? Don't patronize your team members; you may have some ideas but allow team members to give input. Generating goals together is a critical portion of the PR, and people are much more likely to meet their goals when they help create them.

"I heard from a friend that our department is being eliminated."
Spreading unsubstantiated rumors is inappropriate any time, especially during the PR. Statements like this not only cause unnecessary anxiety, but if mentioned during the PR meeting, it basically tells the team member, "This meeting isn't going to mean much anyway." When that attitude is expressed, the quality of the meeting decreases considerably.

A key point: **Focus on performance.** Keep your meeting centered on how the team member is performing and what can be done to improve performance and maintain motivation. You will take great steps in avoiding problems or misunderstandings by encouraging communication, working with team members to develop goals, and keeping the meeting directed on performance issues. This will develop stronger relationships, increase productivity, and will help you develop accurate departmental and personal career goals.

I WASN'T READY FOR THIS

Thorough preparation will be your best bet when conducting performance reviews. As you undoubtedly are aware from other experiences, however, things don't always go as planned. How do you handle reactions you weren't expecting? How do you avoid biases? Be objective, use your best judgment, and keep the following points in mind.

Dealing with unexpected reactions:
Team members typically react favorably when discussing performance and goals, however occasionally you may encounter a reaction you weren't expecting. There really is no "best way" to deal with emotional outbursts; different strategies may work depending on your relationship with the person, past reactions, and your personality. These tips may help you determine the best way to handle your situation:

- **Crying.** Try to decrease embarrassment by remaining calm; offer tissues; allow a moment to recompose; offer to leave the room for a few minutes; ask if the team member can continue or would prefer meeting again at a later time.
- **Walking away.** Don't try to physically constrain; ask if the team member would like to talk but don't force the issue - some people prefer to leave the room rather than lose their temper. If the team member does walk away, be sure to reconvene after a period of "cool-down" time.
- **Avoidance.** (Team member clams up, avoids talking to you). Discuss necessary issues but don't aggravate by attempting "small talk". Usually, you won't need to make a big deal about this because the team member will get over it. If avoidance does continue, conduct a follow-up meeting to resolve.
- **Shouting.** Don't shout back; remain calm; speak slowly and firmly; don't appear frightened. If shouting continues, ask the team member to leave and reconvene later. If you feel physically threatened, call for assistance.

Recognizing and avoiding biases:
- **Recency** - Giving more weight to recent events and forgetting about those earlier in the review period. To avoid: Document performance throughout the year.
- **Leniency** - Rating everyone highly regardless of performance. To avoid: Complete report thoroughly, note specific examples, obtain information from team member's other supervisors when applicable.
- **Central Tendency** - Rating everyone as average. To avoid: Follow steps for avoiding leniency.
- **Similarity Effect** - Rating someone "like you" higher than deserved. To avoid: Be sure to review how well they perform a task, not how well you feel you could perform it.
- **Halo Effect** - Rating someone highly in all areas due to exceptional ability in one. To avoid: Review each aspect of job description separately; document positive and negative performance throughout year.
- **Horn Effect** - Rating someone poorly in all areas because of extreme deficiency in one. To avoid: Follow steps for avoiding the halo effect.
- **Personal Prejudice** - Letting factors not related to performance affect ratings (i.e., race, gender, religion). To avoid: Attend courses/seminars on diversity awareness, educate yourself.
- **Assuming Team member Incompetence** - Poor performance may not be the team member's fault; it could result from inadequate equipment, unclear expectations, ineffective training, or hostile work environment. To avoid: Communicate regularly with team member, ask about environment, observe workstations.

To further eliminate the chance of bias, use multiple methods to gather information, focus on performance with relation to job descriptions and previously set goals, and, whenever possible, utilize multiple reviewers. Following the suggestions outlined in these handouts and in the training, session will help as well.