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Dos and Don'ts for Performance Reviews

Just like professional athletes, employees need detailed, personalized feedback to grow beyond their professional challenges and grow into their professional strengths.

And like coaches, great managers spend time and energy giving specific, precise, feedback. Here are two lists of dos and don'ts for providing this feedback in performance reviews.

Here are three tips for all performance reviews:

1. **Develop SMART objectives at the beginning of the review cycle.** SMART stands for specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound.
2. **Have ongoing conversations with employees during the review period.** Use weekly check-ins to let employees know what they are doing well, and what you'd suggest they improve. Keep detailed notes about progress toward goals and conversations. That information can be included in a performance document.
3. **Give objective, descriptive feedback with detailed examples.** People need clear, detailed feedback about what they did well and what they can improve.

And here are three things to avoid in your performance reviews:

1. **Don't include any surprises in a written performance review.** A written performance review is often just the culmination of the process. It's when you pull all the information together, and isn't the right time to introduce new issues.
2. **Don't offer any guarantees or promises.** Be very careful about making any commitments in a review; consult your legal or HR department for more information.
3. **Don't use vague or subjective language.** Focus on the facts. It doesn't matter whether you're offering positive or constructive feedback; give an example of what you've noticed. Include details like when, how, how much, and how often.

It takes time to be a great manager, and time to write effective performance reviews. In fact, there's usually a direct correlation between the effort spent preparing the review and writing it, and its usefulness to an employee. But these techniques will help you save time, prepare well, and write effective reviews that improve job performance.

Write It Well is a Bay Area-based, woman-owned training, consulting, and publishing firm. For thirty years, we've helped busy professionals improve their skills in all aspects of business writing. We can customize our Writing Performance Reviews program for on-site, online, or e-learning delivery. For more information, please visit our site, write to natashaterk@writeitwell.com, or call us at (510) 655-6477.