



Writing a Rating-free Performance Dialogue

The goal for a ratings-free performance dialogue (PD) process is for supervisors to deliver more candid, specific, continuous feedback. This framework for writing the reviews is shared as a template for supervisors having conversations/giving feedback throughout the year and/or during the annual PD.

Resources to Help Evaluate Employee Performance

[The Skills for Success](#) and [Leadership Skills for Success](#) serve as a framework for what it means to be a member of the Cornell Community. These skills should work in concert with an individual's expertise of a specific profession. It is important for supervisors to talk with employees about these skills – both strengths, and areas for development.

[The Behavior/Results Matrix](#) is designed to help supervisors think through an employee's behaviors in conjunction with their ability to achieve results in their work. As the matrix suggests, it is possible to model the Skills for Success, but have inconsistency in meeting the job responsibilities, or vice-versa. The intent is not to put an employee into a "box", rather to guide a supervisor's thinking as it relates to the spectrum of success in both aspects of performance.

Framework

Writing about accomplishments

When an employee successfully demonstrates success in behaviors and/or results (see the [Behavior/Results Matrix](#)):

- demonstrates the [The Skills for Success](#) and/or [Leadership Skills for Success](#)
- accomplishes their job-specific responsibilities,
- delivers on agreed upon goals, and/or
- demonstrates performance above and beyond in any of the above areas, such as taking on and accomplishing additional goals or demonstrating exceptional behavior

Provide specific examples to highlight accomplishments and reinforce the value of the contribution.

Consider: What went well? Why, and how much, you appreciate their efforts, performance, and working with them? How their performance benefits the team? The organization?

Writing about opportunities for development

When the employee does not successfully demonstrate success in behaviors and/or results:

- Explain the specific areas for development, describing how the employee has fallen short in performance, what the employee must do to achieve success, and/or the expected change.
- Provide clear, observable, or measurable facts about behaviors, results, or events.
- Share what you expect to be different in the future. Be specific.
- Be supportive and talk about ways to address opportunities for improvement. Possible solutions include on-the-job, online, or in-person training; more attention/focus where needed; or additional 1-1 time.
- Offer assistance to help the employee adapt to the change. Where necessary help them identify an action plan with ways (i.e. on-the-job, online, in-person training, job shadowing, job rotation, conferences, etc.) and timelines in which you would like to develop them.

- Don't surprise your employee during the performance dialogue with constructive feedback that has not been previously discussed during a 1-1 conversation.

Writing about future development

- Talk with your direct report about their ideas for their future development and career.
 - Share competencies or strengths you encourage your direct report to develop in the future to help them advance.
 - Help them identify an action plan with ways and timelines to fulfill their development goals.
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Language in a Rating-free Performance Dialogue (PD)

The goal for a ratings-free performance dialogue (PD) process is for supervisors to deliver more candid, specific, **continuous** feedback. Appropriate language for writing the PD is shared as a template for supervisors. In addition to the following, reference the [Skills for Success](#) and/or [Leadership Skills for Success](#) and [Behavior Results Matrix](#) as a guide to explain performance about behaviors and results.

Language about Development

Offer positive reinforcement so your direct reports know what they are doing well. Personalize the PD by addressing your direct report in first person.

- (Direct Report name), you have been responsible for a major increase in (department name) because of...

This phrase is highly effective because it indicates progress and growth as well as the cause and effect relationship between behavior and/or work-related efforts. It also creates an opportunity for you to elaborate on which specific activities proved successful for the employee so he or she has a clear idea of where to focus energy moving forward.

- In the past year, you have mastered (skill) by successfully...

Take the time to compliment your employees if they have truly excelled in a specific aspect of their role since your last PD. Talk about what you've noticed helped them achieve the accomplishment and encourage them to continue down this path.

- I'm impressed by your ability to...

Focus on competencies and skills, not personality traits during the majority of the PD. Discuss the specific talents that help the individual excel, and leave time to go over the behavioral, competencies, or results that are opportunities for improvement. Think about what makes you value each individual and spotlight those benefits during your discussion.

- Where you have exceeded expectations are illustrated within...

If you notice a standout quality within your direct report that's a common theme throughout the year, make note of it. This will help show that you appreciate the consistent, reliable behavior so it likely continues.

Language About Development

- I'd like to see more time spent working on...

Employees want specific, actionable advice on what they can do to improve their daily work. Don't shy away from offering truthful insight into where you see them missing the mark, but remember to include realistic suggestions on how they can approach improvement, too.

- Follow-through could improve within...

If task completion is an issue with an employee, touch on the steps that need to be taken to correct the problem. Be up front about what's working and what's not, and make time for a conversation when you can ask what you can do as a leader to help him or her better tackle the matter.

- One thing we have discussed is that you often resist (task) and struggle to...

Using this language illustrates the problem as a struggle, not a failure. Putting the focus on the resistance to change shows there is the ability to resolve the issue with a change in behavior.

- (Direct report name), your performance at a low level for (task), and it would benefit you to...

Sometimes an employee's lackluster performance is a result of poor training. If you notice a team member needs on-going education in order to improve, create those opportunities and present them during your conversation. Rather than just highlighting a negative, you can communicate the value you see in them by making a clear path for improvement.

This tool has been developed by the Division of Human Resources. Questions about the tool can be sent to org_dev@cornell.edu. Questions about the Performance Dialogue process should be directed to your HR Representative.