

# A Guide for Goal Setting and Employee Feedback





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## Performance Appraisal Process

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The Performance Appraisal process is a systematic evaluation of an employee's performance to understand the abilities of a person for further growth and development. Individual performance objectives are made measurable and are based on prioritized goals that support the accomplishment of the overall goals of the total organization. The purpose of the Performance Appraisal is to enable employees to understand what is expected of them, set goals to meet these expectations and provide them with the tools to achieve these goals.

When thinking about employee Performance Appraisals, many managers quickly picture sitting in a formal setting with their employees providing annual feedback on the employee's past performance. You will find this is only one part of the overall process. The full scope of an employee appraisal is the act of:

- **Defining, Reviewing and Agreeing** on key goals with employees
- **Measuring and Evaluating** performance relative to agreed goals set forth
- **Providing Feedback and Coaching** against performance expectations



This guide is intended to provide some insight to:

- The SMART goal setting process
- Cascading of goals
- Techniques for coaching and providing feedback

Senior Leaders, Managers, and Supervisors are encouraged to use this information and guidance to successfully administer the Performance Appraisal process for the upcoming year.

## Goals: Define, Review and Agree

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**Goal Setting:** The systematic process of establishing and assigning a set of specific and attainable goals to be met by an individual, group or organization.

### Overview

In general, Mission Statements are a statement of purpose or reason for an organization to exist. The mission statement guides the actions of the organization and helps to spell out specific goals for business activities, initiatives, and strategies. The process of ***cascading goals*** should be considered when communicating goals at each organizational level at Milwaukee County. In short,



cascading goals communicate higher-level goals to the next level down in the organizational hierarchy. They also include the establishment of lower-level “sub-goals” that align with the higher level goals. The cascade can also flow upward if there are process improvements needed in order to achieve the initial goals, or if problems are noted in current standards.

### Cascading Goals

The process of cascading goals begins with the establishment of organizational or executive goals, then developing functional/departmental goals that must be achieved to fulfill the overall organizational goals. This is known as cascading. The cascading goal process integrates goal-setting activities at all organizational levels, pointing to the goals outlined at the executive level. As goals cascade from top to bottom, they become more narrowly focused and specific objectives can be defined.

Well-defined goals and objectives also make it easier to monitor individual and departmental progress, make adjustments, and proactively address issues before they become problems. Coaching and support of employees also become easier for supervisors, because clear performance expectations have been established. Additionally, annual formal performance evaluations also become much easier to write and conduct, because goals with clear measures of accomplishment (the objectives) provide the means for more accurate and meaningful evaluations.

Individual employee goal-setting improves employee performance by giving employees a clear direction and a path for continual improvement. Goals challenge employees and, if they are properly designed, will provide employees with new challenges. Goal-setting also keeps employees focused on the tasks that leaders feel are most important, providing employees with a clear direction and keeping them on the same page as their managers.

**Cascading Goals - Things to remember**

The cascading of goals is a process of deconstructing and translating goals from one level of the organization to the next. It is the manager’s role at each level to describe the contributions that members of his/her team can make to delivering results to the next level up. Managers should be mindful of the following when cascading goals:

- The employee needs to be able to do the work; people can’t achieve a goal that is not within their scope of influence or current capability.
- The employee must have the tools, resources, and access required to get the work done.
- Expectations must be well defined, and the employee must have sufficient time and bandwidth to meet milestones.
- Employee goals should be limited to three to five.
- Leadership at all levels must be prepared to offer guidance, coaching and support throughout the process.

**Cascaded Goal Example**

Executive	Milwaukee County will attract, develop and retain a quality, results-focused workforce.
Senior Leader	Identify and develop innovative strategies that promote excellence and foster employee engagement.
Manager	All new employees will complete a structured “New Employee” onboarding event and manager will develop an initial six month development plan.
Individual Contributor	Complete Milwaukee County “New Employee” onboarding and fulfill targeted activities as outlined in six month development plan.

**Review and Agree**

During the piloting of the new Performance Appraisal process and the use of the new form, not all employees will have the opportunity to be trained on the new process. Managers and supervisors participating in the 2013 pilot must take the time and meet with each individual contributor for whom you are setting goals. The best system is one where expectations are laid out (by Managers or Supervisors) and agreed to by the individual contributor. In the beginning

of the year, as well as throughout the year progress against expectations is discussed and a final assessment of completion of those expectations is delivered at the end of the year.

## Measure and Evaluate (SMART Goals)

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S.M.A.R.T. is an acronym for the 5 steps of specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-based goals. It is critical to make sure that what you are asking your employee to accomplish is:

- **Specific:** Areas for improvement must be exact and accurate without the use of generalities
- **Measurable:** You must be able to provide evidence that the employee did/did not do what was agreed upon.
- **Attainable:** Before you recommend a class, or a list of model behaviors, make sure it is available for the employee.
- **Relevant:** The goal should be in line with and supportive of the goals of the organization.
- **Time Bound:** There should be a time limit for improvement. A specific time frame encourages accountability and lets them know they must improve immediately.



### Specific

The first letter (**S**) stresses the need for a very specific goal, rather than a more general one. This means the goal is clear and unambiguous. To make a goal specific, it must tell an employee exactly what is expected, why is it important, who's involved, where is it going to happen and which attributes are important.

A specific goal will usually answer the five "W" questions:

- What do I want to accomplish?
- Why: Specific reasons, purpose or benefits of accomplishing the goal.
- Who is involved?
- Where: Identify a location.
- Which: Identify requirements and constraints.

### Measurable

The second letter (**M**) stresses the need for concrete criteria for measuring progress toward the attainment of the goal. The thought behind this is that if a goal is not measurable, it is not possible to know whether a team is making progress toward successful completion. Measuring progress is supposed to help an individual/ team stay on track, reach target dates, and experience the exhilaration of achievement that spurs them on to continued effort required to reach the ultimate goal.

A measurable goal will usually answer questions such as:

- How much?
- How many?
- How will I know when it is accomplished?

### **Attainable**

The third letter (**A**) stresses the importance of goals that are realistic and attainable. While an attainable goal may stretch an individual/team in order to achieve it, the goal is not extreme. That is, the goals are neither out of reach nor below standard performance -- if they were, they may be considered meaningless. When you identify goals that are most important to you, you begin to figure out ways you can make them come true. You develop the attitudes, abilities, skills, and financial capacity to reach them. The theory states that an attainable goal may cause goal-setters to identify previously overlooked opportunities to bring themselves closer to the achievement of their goals. An attainable goal will usually answer the question:

- How can the goal be accomplished?

### **Relevant**

The fourth letter (**R**) stresses the importance of choosing goals that *matter*. Relevant goals (when met) drive the team, department, and organization forward. A goal that supports or is in alignment with other goals would be considered a relevant goal. A relevant goal can answer yes to these questions:

- Does this seem worthwhile?
- Is this the right time?
- Does this match our other efforts/needs?
- Is this employee the right person for the job?

### **Time-Bound**

The fifth letter (**T**) stresses the importance of grounding goals within a time frame, giving them a target date. A commitment to a deadline helps an employee focus their efforts on completion of the goal on or before the due date. This part of the S.M.A.R.T. goal criteria is intended to prevent goals from being overtaken by the day-to-day crises that invariably arise in an organization. A time-bound goal is intended to establish a sense of urgency.

A time-bound goal will usually answer the questions:

When?

- What can I do 6 months from now?
- What can I do 6 weeks from now?

- What can I do today?

Goal setting is most effective when combined with feedback, so progress can be monitored. Direct feedback and coaching enhances communication and effective results

In summary, goals should be: **S**=Specific **M**=Measurable **A**=Achievable **R**=Realistic **T**=Time-bound.

## Provide Feedback

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Throughout the year and during the performance evaluation period, the manager should provide coaching and feedback on goals as well as development areas. The areas, identified during goal setting process, can serve as the manager's coaching agenda during the review period.

This approach ensures the manager's time is focused on the coaching activities that directly



relate to goal accomplishment. During the annual Performance Appraisal, the manager should summarize how well the employee did towards achieving goals and identify development areas for the next performance evaluation period. This approach ensures continued focus on the developmental priorities.

Effective coaches understand the value and importance of giving continual performance feedback to their people, both positive and corrective. Positive feedback will strengthen an employee's overall performance.

### Employee coaching is....

- Focused on future behavior
- Helping activity
- Developmental
- Inquiry oriented
- Used to help an already good performer perform even better by releasing potential in a way that works best for the individual AND the organization.

## Coaching Steps

- Share appreciation for employee's ability and willingness to address the issue, opportunity or problem
- Clearly describe the area of improvement or opportunity
- Determine whether issues or problems exist which limit the employee's ability to perform a task or accomplish a goal. (Note: Four common barriers are time, tools, training or temperament)
- LISTEN
- Discuss potential solutions to any issues or problems
- Develop an action plan that clearly establishes who will do what
- Set a date for follow-up

## Feedback

Feedback is often misunderstood as being a one-way communication between the manager and the employee, when in fact it is the overall interaction between them. Managers and employees can be both the givers and receivers of constructive feedback. Constructive feedback is essential for maximizing one's potential, raising awareness, improving one's strengths and building effective relationships.

In a practical situation, feedback is given to an employee so that he or she can work on the areas that need improving. Without feedback, the employee may assume that there is nothing to improve, and therefore no progress is being made. The lack of feedback usually leads to two main consequences:

1. The employee can make a false assessment of his/her abilities;
2. The employee can lose trust in their leader

### Effective feedback should be:

- Focused on past behavior
- Evaluative
- Often used to help poor performers change behavior in a prescribed direction, in a way that works best for the organization

### Additionally, feedback should be:

- **Timely.** It should occur as soon as practical after the interaction, completion of the deliverable, or observation is made.

- **Specific.** Statements like "You did a great job" or "You didn't take care of the clients' concerns very well" are too vague and don't give enough insight into the behavior you would like to see repeated or changed.
- **Focused on the behavior and not the person.** Avoid making the feedback seem as if it is a judgment. Describe what you heard and saw, and how those behaviors impact the team, client, etc.
- **Continuous.** Feedback should become a regular part of manager-employee communication.

### Guidelines for Receiving Feedback

- **Ask for it:** This gives the other person permission and lets them know they are free to provide you with information. Most importantly, it lets the other person know you are willing to listen.
- **Listen:** Give full attention.
- **Avoid Justifying Behavior or Becoming Defensive:** Remember, you ask for their opinion. You may not always agree, but you should always accept.
- **Confirm with others, When Possible:** This helps add to the credibility of the feedback.
- **Respond:** The best response is thank you. You have just been given a gift. Let the other person know their gift was appreciated.

### Guidelines for Giving Feedback

- **Speak Directly to Person:** Use their name, look them in the eyes. This shows sincerity.
- **Be Specific:** To be useful, the information has to be specific, and to the point.
- **Be Non-judgmental:** You are judging the behavior, not the person.
- **Focus on Changeable Behavior:** Use feedback as a method to gain awareness of changeable behavior.

## Conducting One on Ones

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*The following article appeared in the “Business Learning Coach Blog” on September 19, 2012 by Jim Grinnell, PH. D. Entitled: **“Coaching Effective Employee One-on-Ones”**, Jim offers some helpful insight as you begin to plan and conduct your one-on-ones for the upcoming year.*

If you’re not doing weekly employee one-on-ones, you’re squandering an immense opportunity. Think about the things employees want from their jobs. They want to feel like their efforts are contributing to something meaningful. They want a clear set of goals to shoot for and a sense of how they are progressing along the way. They want to be given responsibility, autonomy, and flexibility. They also want their boss to be open-minded and transparent. When employees experience such things, they are more motivated, committed, and make better corporate citizens. One-on-ones are one of the most effective vehicles for enacting such an environment. Specifically, regular one-on-ones enable a manager to:

- Stay apprised of the employee’s attitudes and stress level
- Identify what is blocking the employee from goal attainment
- Assess how well projects and tasks are being completed
- Explore issues that concern the employee
- Open up a bi-directional feedback channel
- Coach and develop employees

Running an effective one-on-one requires a fair amount of discipline and structure. Without such diligence, they can quickly devolve into pointless, rambling bull sessions that produce little or no benefit. Below are several suggestions for running effective one-on-ones:

- **One-on-ones are not a “task dump” opportunity.** This time is not about what you need your direct report to get done or for passing along mandates from upper management. It’s about giving the employee a venue for sharing their concerns and for you to give your feedback/responses.
- **One-on-ones start and end with your direct report.** Make sure that your direct report understands that they own their session. This is time for them to have your ear, express their concerns, and offer their ideas.
- **Set the right tone.** The tone should be constructive, honest, and collaborative. The focus is on employee development, not on criticizing performance gaps.

- **Give your 100% undivided attention.** Make it clear to other managers and employees that you are not to be interrupted during the session. Put your iPhone down. Don't multi-task in any form.
- **Your job is to ask, not sell or tell.** Ask open-ended questions. Such questions start with who, what, and where. Try to avoid why questions as they generally push an individual into a defensive stance. Don't interrupt the answers if at all possible. Make sure to validate what they say, both to acknowledge the importance of their inputs as well as to make sure that you are actually hearing and understanding what they are saying.
- **The end of a current session is the start of the next.** Take notes after every session. This will ensure that you are able to recollect commitments made by your direct report as well as yourself during the previous session. Highlight the things that you need to follow up on during your next session. This doesn't have to be a laborious or time consuming process. A few hand-written bullet points summarizing key discussion points, commitments, and follow-up items is all that is necessary. If you spend more than five minutes after your one-on-one documenting the meeting, you're putting too much thought into it.
- **Schedule them out.** Set a reoccurring schedule in which you meet the same day and time weekly. This allows both parties to plan their schedule commitments accordingly. It also creates an environment in which one-on-ones become a routine way of life. You should also set your schedule for an extended time horizon (e.g., three to six months out) as opposed to scheduling out a week at a time.
- **Finish what you started.** If you decide to start doing one-on-ones, you need to be committed to doing them for the long-run. If you stop abruptly, for whatever reason, your employees will likely feel like you engaged in the process only to extract information. You may end up in a worse place than if you never started doing one-on-ones in the first place.

While there are no set rules for how long each one-on-one should be, 30-60 minutes is generally sufficient. Whatever the duration, you should break the one-on-one into three equal segments. *The first third of the one-on-one is about them.* Start with a statement that makes it clear that the focus is on the employee. Use a question such as "what's happened since we last met?" to open the dialogue. This communicates to the individual that the focus is on them and it also allows them to choose what issues they would like to discuss. *The second third is your*

*time to check in on how your direct report is progressing in their tasks/projects.* This is when you follow up on the commitments they made during your last one-on-one. Have they achieved what they said they would? If they missed the mark, what went awry? What is challenging their ability to meet their commitments? What support do they need that they're not getting? *The final third focusses on employee development and coaching.* This is the time to have a transparent dialogue regarding the employee's performance. But, it's not about delivering evaluations of employee performance. The focus should be on how the employee can leverage their strengths to deal with challenges as well as what limitations they need to overcome. Your goal is to help set your employee up for future actions. As you close out the one-on-one, make sure to summarize the broad points of your conversation so you are both on the same page. One way to do this is to have your direct report take the lead on summarizing. This gives them a sense of ownership over what has been discussed in the one-on-one.

Conducting regular one-on-ones can be time consuming to be sure. But, managers who religiously practice them find that they ultimately save time. Quite frequently, the reason direct reports bring problems willy-nilly to their manager is because that is the only way they get their manager's ear. One-on-ones solve this problem by giving employees reoccurring, predictable touch points with their manager. Instead of peppering their manager with questions as they crop up, employees can now bunch their concerns and deal with them in one fell swoop. One-on-ones ultimately free up your time and result in a more productive and engaged workforce.