

Is there anything more dreaded on the HR calendar than the annual performance evaluation? The employee worries about how they will be judged and what unsavory surprises await. Supervisors fear the drudgery of saying “you’ve done well” a different way than how they said “You’ve done well” last year, or how they may deal with a contested sentence taken the wrong way (or understood quite correctly, thank you).

I recently told someone that there are as many performance evaluation methods and modalities as there are HR departments and managers. Some embrace 360-degree reviews, others love the anonymous surveys to staff; some like numerical ratings, and others like a more qualitative approach.

Jathan Janove, J.D, writes in a November 2021 article<sup>1</sup> that there is a school of thought that dispenses with the whole idea of annual performance reviews. Janove writes that upon receiving the annual performance review, 18% of women cry and 25% of men cry. Fifty-seven percent of individuals reported that the annual review made them feel that they were in competition with co-workers. Get rid of them, he argues!

What makes me cry, other than reading *my* annual performance review, which will *never* go away BTW, is to witness how often annual reviews are poorly done. If we are going to do annual performance evaluations, let’s do them as best we can.

- I believe that it is an “employee right” to receive an annual evaluation. And, in addition...
- The annual evaluation should not be a “stand-alone, one-and-done” event. The annual evaluation should be part of an on-going conversation about goals and job responsibilities. Consider setting up quarterly or monthly meetings with your supervisor/supervisees. These check-ins allow humanity to come through, personalizing the relationship. There is nothing wrong with “How is your family?” Be human. So...
- I meet with my supervisor monthly to discuss what I’ve been up to, and what’s coming at



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me. I brag unabashedly about things that have gone well. This is my supervisor’s opportunity to get me back on track if he sees something is amiss, or to introduce new needs and objectives. Which leads to...

- Absolutely NO SURPRISES (sorry for yelling) at annual evaluation time! Why do grown women and men cry at evaluation time? Because of surprises, and not like “Surprise!” with confetti and streamers. The other kind of surprise. Have the courage to talk to your employees immediately if there is an issue with how they may be conducting their work. This is a *conversation* to be held year-round so that they may be as successful as they can be!
- If you collect grievances to dump on employees at annual evaluation, shame on you! I am convinced that there’s a ring in Dante’s Inferno for lousy supervisors!
- Hey, we’re in a *national emergency*! (I know you know that) If there was ever a time to be flexible and to recognize amazing work under difficult circumstances with rapidly-shifting priorities, now’s the time. Library directors

<sup>1</sup> [Get Rid of Performance Reviews \(shrm.org\)](#) accessed January 20, 2022

and staff have done much to adapt, to serve their communities, and to keep services up-and-accessible. Be willing to view the progress towards position description responsibilities and SMART goals with empathy and flexibility. Be kind, be thoughtful, be respectful, and recognize sincerely good effort even if there were bumps along the way.

- Always base the evaluation on agreed-upon goals [SMART goals- **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**elevant, and **T**ime-bound] and the position description. But remember your humanness, and...
- I have no clear recommendation for the modality of performance evaluations. My UVM evaluation has a numerical score. Many schools of HR thought abolish the numerical scale. If you're going to use a numerical scale, keep it simple. A four-point numerical scale is better than a five-point scale. It gives the employee more information and managers are maddeningly prone to "3.5" as a rating. Other evaluation templates use "meets-does-not-meet expectations" language. Again, the simpler the better. Whatever you choose, make sure that everyone knows what "meets expectations" or "3.5" means (is 3.5 the new 3, I ask rhetorically?).

- According to Janove, be aware of favoritism, inconsistency, and "abrupt swings between severity and leniency" as you prepare.
- Additionally, keep a close eye on "recency bias (which happens when reviewers judge an employee's most recent performance and apply it to the whole year. For example, Employee A has a lousy year with a great finish, whereas Employee B has a great year with a lousy finish. Who gets the higher rating?)."
- The performance review should be a tool to enhance teamwork and support employee success. Trustees and directors have a responsibility to work for their library's well-being, and this is just one of those times.



**POSITION DESCRIPTIONS ARE THE FOUNDATION OF AN ANNUAL REVIEW AND ANNUAL GOALS. THEY DETAIL RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE POSITION, OFTEN IN RELATIVE RANK AND PERCENT OF THE JOB'S TIME. JOB DESCRIPTIONS ARE ESSENTIAL "HR" ITEMS; DON'T GO TO WORK WITHOUT ONE!**

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