



TOOLKIT

The Manager's Guide to Accurate Evaluations

Effectively Deliver Constructive Feedback and
Ensure Equity Across Employee Evaluations

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Executive Summary

Why Managers Should be Concerned About Every Staff Member Getting an “Above Average” Performance Review

Performance evaluations are time-consuming and difficult. Moreover, evaluating people can also feel awkward and subjective at times. These hurdles make it tempting to give all employees “high” performance ratings. However, those scores will not reflect true performance nor help employees advance their career. When annual performance ratings are inaccurate, managers cannot identify top talent, reward merit, or motivate staff to improve their performance.

As illustrated below, accurate evaluations have an outsized impact on employee productivity, retention, and professional development across industries. Higher education HR leaders and unit managers should therefore approach the performance review as an effective tool to realize employee potential, rather than a demoralizing obstacle to overcome.

Impact of Effective Evaluation on Staff Performance

↑ 12.5%

greater productivity in teams who receive strengths-based feedback compared to teams who receive no feedback (from an analysis of 530 work units)¹

↓ 14.9%

lower turnover rate among employees who receive strengths-based feedback compared to those who receive no feedback (65,672 employees surveyed)²

92%

of surveyed employees agree that “Negative feedback, if delivered appropriately, is effective at **improving performance**” (899 employees surveyed)³

Tools to Improve Staff Evaluations

This guide compiles ten tools to help managers evaluate their staff more accurately. Use these resources to effectively deliver potentially difficult performance feedback, mitigate bias in reviews, double-check initial performance ratings, and adjust ratings in a principled way—or make the case for keeping your evaluations the same. While these tools will prove particularly helpful for managers in units with large spans of control (e.g., facilities management, dining services), all supervisors should consider the guidance in the tools when preparing employee performance evaluations.

1) Gallup, “State of the American Manager Report,” 2015.

2) Gallup, “State of the American Manager Report,” 2015.

3) *Harvard Business Review*, “Your Employees Want the Negative Feedback You Hate to Give,” 2014.

Source: Gallup, [State of the American Manager Report](#); Harvard Business Review, [Your Employees Want the Negative Feedback You Hate to Give](#); EAB interviews and analysis.



In-the-Moment Support for Employee Evaluations

-
- Tool 1: Five Tips for Rating More Accurately
 - Tool 2: Quick Guide to Identifying Bias in Performance Reviews
 - Tool 3: Ten Strategies To Interrupt Bias
 - Tool 4: Exercise for Objective Review Writing
 - Tool 5: Manager's Constructive Feedback Conversation Roadmap
 - Tool 6: Guide to Navigating Common Employee Reactions to Constructive Feedback

1

Tool 1: Five Tips for Rating More Accurately

Overview

This tool outlines five considerations all managers should make when rating staff

Intended User

All managers completing downward reviews

Goal

To help managers quickly prepare for and thoughtfully conduct evaluations of their direct reports

Estimated Time Required

15 to 30 minutes to review this cheat sheet before conducting employee performance evaluations

Get Ready for Staff Reviews

Gather relevant information before beginning staff reviews, such as the following:

- Up-to-date information about employee performance
- Any notes on employees' completion of job duties, behaviors, organizational values, and leadership competencies
- Rating scale with examples of behaviors or competencies
- Feedback from other supervisors or trusted colleagues
- Employee self-reviews

1 Don't forget about the middle of the review period

It's easy to remember an employee's most recent performance and overlook the beginning or middle of the review period. To accurately capture the entire review period, consider the employee's performance at different points throughout the year. Choose standard milestones (e.g., 3 months, 6 months, 9 months) and think about what the employee was working on and how they were performing at that point in time.

2 Consider each performance criterion separately

Every individual has strengths and weaknesses. Avoid letting good or bad performance in one area influence the evaluation of an employee overall. When conducting a staff review, begin with the first performance criterion (e.g., job duty, behavior, competency) and consider specific examples of their performance in this area. Take a moment to mentally reset expectations after each criterion before proceeding to the next one.

3 Focus on performance, not personality

While managers will naturally prefer working with some employees over others, it's important not to allow these preferences to influence fair evaluation. Set personality differences aside and focus on the specific behaviors that impact performance. For example, rather than call an employee a "rude person," cite specific examples of negative interactions or issues with customer service.

This ensures that biases based on employee's personal characteristics (e.g., gender, race, marital status) do not hinder your ability to deliver an accurate evaluation.

For additional support to mitigate bias in performance conversations, see *Tool 2: Quick Guide to Identifying Bias in Performance Reviews* (p. 8) and *Tool 3: Ten Strategies to Interrupt Bias* (p. 10).

Tool 1: Five Tips for Rating More Accurately (cont.)

4 Pinpoint objective observations

Avoid letting gossip, assumptions, and external factors outside employees' control overrule the facts of employee behavior. When completing each staff review, call to mind specific observable instances of their performance. Concrete examples for each criterion help substantiate either a positive or negative rating.

For additional support when pinpointing objective observations, see *Tool 4: Exercise for Objective Review Writing* (p. 12).

5 Don't run away from difficult messages

Performance evaluations are stressful for managers and employees. It may seem easier to give high or middle ratings, rather than realistic low ratings, to avoid having uncomfortable conversations. But inaccurate reviews will not help underperforming staff improve. Managers are in the best position to provide helpful feedback—positive and negative—that make a real difference for staff and benefit the institution.

For additional support when delivering difficult messages, see *Tool 5: Manager's Constructive Feedback Conversation Roadmap* (p. 17) and *Tool 6: Guide to Navigating Common Employee Reactions to Constructive Feedback* (p. 21).

Tool 2: Quick Guide to Identifying Bias in Performance Reviews

Overview

This tool describes how to mitigate five potential biases that could impact performance reviews and feedback conversations

Intended User

All managers completing downward reviews

Goal

To help managers quickly recognize and interrupt potential biases that could impact the performance process

Estimated Time Required

15 minutes to review these this sheet before conducting employee performance evaluations

Instructions

Before writing performance reviews or holding feedback conversations, review the following types of biases that could manifest in your feedback, how to identify them, and what to do to mitigate them.

Then, as you conduct reviews, refer back to this sheet when writing and giving feedback to check your reactions and ensure only accurate, helpful feedback is communicated to your employees.

Tool 2: Quick Guide to Identifying Bias in Performance Reviews (cont.)

Type of Bias	What does it look like?	How to Mitigate
<p>Rater Bias:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tendency to rate higher those we view as “like us”, and to rate lower those we view as “not like us” Rating based on opinions and preferences, like “fit within the team” rather than objective performance standards 	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> She is not a team player He has an unflappable positive approach They go about the process in a completely different way than I do, therefore it’s not as good 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include specific examples and always relate comments back to performance goals/business impact Avoid describing the person and instead describe their performance and outcomes
<p>Halos/Horns:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rating higher/lower based on one specific instance of achievement or failure or one quality that does not reflect the full review cycle 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Letting an employee’s congenial sense of humor override their poor communication skills A single lapse in project management early on is focal point in an employee’s review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make sure at least 2-3 different aspects of performance are measured across the entire review cycle to get a holistic view, so that one good or bad trait or skill doesn’t overshadow everything else
<p>Group Think:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attempting to reach consensus by suppressing dissenting viewpoints or failing to critically evaluate alternative viewpoints 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individual rated higher because they are broadly liked across the team Explaining away lack of goal achievement (e.g., the product has not been doing well) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Always refer back to performance goals and specific examples of impact to get a full picture of the employee’s performance
<p>Primary/Recency Effect:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <u>Primary</u>: Rating based on things that happened early on in review cycle <u>Recency</u>: Rating based on recent work that is not reflective of the full review cycle 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focusing on strong first impressions throughout the review A “<i>What have you done for me lately?</i>” mindset Bringing up trends (positive or negative) that fall outside of the current review cycle 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep notes across the performance cycle regarding each direct report, so you don’t have to dig for examples later, or base feedback on first impressions or what has recently occurred
<p>Gender, Racial and other Identity-Based Bias:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using different feedback and language to describe the same performance, result, or behavior based on race or gender or other identities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describing an individual who interrupts others in meetings: Black Female: “She can be abrasive. She comes on too strong.” White Male: “He takes charge of meetings. He could be a little more patient, but who doesn’t?” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep evaluations objective by relating the comment back to performance goals/business impact Avoid describing the person and instead describe their performance and outcomes

Source: Seramount; EAB interviews and analysis.

Tool 3: Ten Strategies to Interrupt Bias

Overview

This tool outlines ten considerations all managers should keep in mind before, during, and after conducting performance review and feedback conversations

Intended User

All managers completing downward reviews

Goal

To help managers quickly recognize and interrupt potential biases that could impact the performance process

Estimated Time Required

30 minutes to review these tips before conducting employee performance evaluations



During succession planning or talent review discussions, we must **acknowledge our biases**, make decisions based on the performance **standards and initiatives that are communicated** across the organization, and be **open to the feedback** of others in the room.

► Planning

Automatic, unintentional, and driven by mental shortcuts and stereotypes, unconscious biases can derail your best efforts to be objective during succession planning or talent reviews. The goal is to identify “top talent”, select the “best” successors, and assess “executive potential” to develop those with the highest chance to successfully grow and/or lead within lead the organization. Systemic as well as individual-level biases result in organizations overlooking true “top” talent when they instead implicitly select for preferences that may be unrelated to job performance, or apply criteria inconsistently.

The strategies below will help you listen for, question, and redirect discussions that have a potential for bias before, during and after the succession planning or talent review process.

► Before

1 | Prepare for succession planning or talent reviews by taking stock of your known preferences and experiences.

- Are there any characteristics in a successor that might potentially bias your evaluation of them as a future leader?
- Think about visible characteristics (e.g., appearance, greeting style, accent, speaking style, gestures and body language, age and gender, etc.) and/or what you learn about the person as you review their profile or talk to them (e.g., where they went to school, where they grew up, whether or not they have children, the type of degree they have, past approaches that differ from the way you would have done something, etc.)

2 | Recall past talent reviews—or if this is your first, consider:

- What biases tend to emerge in your organization during the process? List as many examples of potentially biased behavior as you can, regarding performance evaluation.
- How will you share your insight on potential biases with your colleagues at the start of the succession planning or talent review discussion?

3 | Educate yourself with facts about unconscious bias research and invite discussion of their possible impact on the review process with your colleagues.

Source: Seramount; EAB interviews and analysis.

Tool 3: 10 Strategies to Interrupt Bias (cont.)

► During

4 | For every employee you are reviewing, consider the following:

- Does this person remind me of someone else (including myself)? If so, who and in what way (positive or negative)?
- How can I control for Similarity Bias—and the statistically borne-out tendency for people (possibly including me) to be most comfortable promoting people like themselves?
- Does this employee belong to any cultural groups that are known to be stereotyped (positively or negatively)?
- How long have I known this person? Will I let how long/short I've known this person cloud my objective evaluation of them?
- Is it possible I'm shifting criteria to fit a preferred employee and discount others? Am I ignoring or discrediting data that doesn't support my point of view about employees?
- Is there anything going on with me, either at work or in my personal life, that may get in the way of evaluating this person objectively? (If so, is there value to rescheduling the review or having someone else lead it?)

5 | For every employee you find yourself resistant to, in terms of their readiness for a certain role, ask yourself:

- Is it because their profile is not “what we're used to seeing”?
- Do you automatically associate this employee's background, gender, age, career history, appearance, or other characteristic with a different career path than what you're discussing? If so, is that valid—or just status quo?
- Are you automatically associating your own career path experiences or the career path experiences of others who have previously held the role to “what is needed” to succeed in the role now? If so, is that valid—or just status quo or what's “available” to you?

6 | Get comfortable interrupting bias with respect and confidence during succession planning or talent review discussions with your colleagues.

7 | Do not ever accuse colleagues of being biased or prejudiced. (Remember that people are almost never aware of their biases.) Instead:

- Position your questions to build more understanding.
- Address the statement being made vs. the person making the statement.
- Be supportive—or at least neutral—in tone (e.g., “Help me understand...”; “Tell me more...”; “That's helpful to know...”).
- Mitigate stereotyping by asking pointed questions, such as, “Would we be having this same discussion if they were white? Or male? Or Buddhist? Or straight?”
- Mitigate Availability Bias by pulling data and feedback from multiple sources, covering more than just the last few months—and asking questions like, “What else?” This helps to ensure that reviewers aren't relying entirely on data that is quickly and easily available to us.
- Ask if it's possible the person's culture may have taught them differently—and if so, if the cultural difference may actually be an asset to the organization.
- Be clear and concise.

8 | Remember to be open when others call out your own potential for bias. Try to see it as an opportunity for growth and dialogue.

9 | Review the outcomes of your process to identify gaps and patterns that may exist.

10 | Work with your leadership and VP of talent to introduce improvements to the process in its next iteration that will help manage bias.

Tool 4: Exercise for Objective Review Writing

Overview

This tool illustrates how to shift performance conversations from objective to subjective feedback.

Intended User

All managers completing downward reviews

Goal

To write reviews focused on objective evaluations of employee performance

Estimated Time Required

30 minutes to review these examples before conducting employee performance evaluations

Exercise

Below are groups of common personality traits (both strengths and development objectives) that appear in performance reviews, Career Committee conversations, and feedback conversations.

Alongside these personality traits are instructions for how to convert these **subjective descriptions** of the person into **more objective behaviors and outcomes**, such as those listed under "Describe their performance."

Read each of the following tables, and then consider reviews you've seen or written at your institution. Can you think of examples of these traits described objectively or subjectively? If you've seen subjective examples of this trait in reviews, how could they have been re-written to be more objective?

Note: When writing reviews, be sure to also **provide specific examples** of these behaviors and outcomes; doing so will ensure more objective and fair performance reviews.

Tool 4: Exercise for Objective Review Writing (cont.)



Do NOT Just Describe the Person	DO Describe Their Performance	
Personal Descriptions	Specific Business Outcomes/Behaviors	Specific Observable Behaviors
The employee has/does not have: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gravitas • Executive presence • Credibility The employee is/is not: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articulate • Poised • Well-spoken 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific meetings or interactions when a goal or objective was achieved or not achieved • Level of manager intervention or support required in meetings/ calls to be effective • Client/member feedback (including presentation scores) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrated level of preparation • Degree of content knowledge • Specific body language and social cues* • Verbal tics (e.g., “kinda,” “you know”)* • Pace of speech* • Formality of language matched to audience and message* • Facility in responding to questions*

** Note that these behaviors may be affected by an employee’s physical or neuro capabilities, and managers should take this into account*

Do NOT Just Describe the Person	DO Describe Their Performance	
Personal Descriptions	Specific Business Outcomes/Behaviors	Specific Observable Behaviors
The employee is: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A team player • Collaborative • Easy to work with • Generous • Positive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quantifiable positive business metrics • Specific meetings or interactions when an objective or goal was achieved • Examples of good business decisions made • Positive impact on specific project timelines, quality, or outcomes • Client/member feedback • If a leader: specific examples of impact on employee engagement or retention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asks for feedback and uses it to improve self and business outcomes • Takes action to solve problems • Seeks input from others • Shares information and insights with others proactively and constructively • Praises others for excellent work • Coaches or mentors peers • Creates opportunities for team learning

Source: Seramount; EAB interviews and analysis.

Tool 4: Exercise for Objective Review Writing (cont.)



Do NOT Just Describe the Person	DO Describe Their Performance	
Personal Descriptions	Specific Business Outcomes/Behaviors	Specific Observable Behaviors
<p>The employee is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aggressive • Abrasive • Defensive • Intimidating • Too confident • Unfriendly • Hard to work with • Loud • Not a team player • Cold • Too direct • Emotional 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quantifiable negative business outcomes • Specific meetings or interactions when a goal or objective was not achieved • Impact on specific project or process timelines, quality, or outcomes • Other staff uncomfortable sharing their information, insights, or opinions • Examples of poor decisions made • Client/member feedback • If a leader: specific examples of impact on employee engagement and retention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interrupts others • Uses demeaning language • Message is not tailored to situation • Does not offer constructive solutions • Does not seek input from others • Does not respond in timely manner • Reacts without full details or context • Multitasks in meetings • Withholds information • Does not incorporate feedback • Does not adhere to processes and procedures • Monopolizes time in meetings

Do NOT Just Describe the Person	DO Describe Their Performance	
Personal Descriptions	Specific Business Outcomes/Behaviors	Specific Observable Behaviors
<p>The employee is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timid • Too nice • Quiet • Not assertive • Shy • Not proactive • Doesn't take initiative • Not confident 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quantifiable negative business outcomes • Specific meetings or interactions when a goal or objective was not achieved • Examples of poor decisions made • Impact on specific project or process timelines, quality, or outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not hold others accountable • Does not ask for help or elevate issues • Does not identify opportunities for improvement • Fails to set deadlines and expectations • Uses unclear, indirect language • Does not participate in meetings • Fails to share important information • Waits too long to address a problem

Source: Seramount; EAB interviews and analysis.

Tool 4: Exercise for Objective Review Writing (cont.)



Do NOT Just Describe the Person	DO Describe Their Performance	
Personal Descriptions	Specific Business Outcomes/Behaviors	Specific Observable Behaviors
<p>The employee is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not innovative • Not insightful • Not strategic • Lacking intellectual horsepower 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Underperformance or stagnation on quantifiable business metrics • Implemented strategies do not yield desired results • Examples of poor decisions made • Work requires significant editing or oversight • Impact on specific project or process timelines, quality, or outcome 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fails to accurately assess risks and opportunities • Tackles symptoms, not root causes • Does not ask probing questions • Does not clearly communicate goals and strategies • Focuses on process but not end result • Spends time on work that does not advance key business objectives • Fails to take into account key data or information

Tool 4: Exercise for Objective Review Writing (cont.)



What it looks like in Practice



Below are three examples of review comments written first subjectively and then objectively to describe same situation. Notice that they are both about the same length, but the objective examples contain much more specific, concrete, and actionable feedback.

Subjective: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on personality assessments and assumptions • Provides few concrete details • Less likely to drive improvement 	Objective: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on observable behaviors and outcomes • Provides concrete details • More likely to drive improvement
<p>Catherine is rude and abrasive in meetings. Staff have reported feeling intimidated by her. She should not feel like she has to control every aspect of the discussion to demonstrate her authority. As a leader, she should be more inclusive and make sure others are comfortable sharing their ideas.</p>	<p>Catherine sometimes interrupts junior members of the team to make her points. For example, in the XYZ meeting she cut off several staff who disagreed with her or had questions. This discourages participation and healthy debate of ideas. She should take care to let others finish their thoughts and ask questions</p>
<p>Catherine is a collaborative team player. She is always willing to go above and beyond to help out her colleagues and is just a pleasure to work with. One colleague shared: "Catherine is my hero - she helped me a ton when I first joined the team."</p>	<p>Catherine routinely shares best practices and new information with colleagues. She also mentors two new team members. One said, "Catherine is my hero." Her approach keeps the team well-informed and connected, and more likely to surface and share new ideas.</p>
<p>Catherine should work on her executive presence. She often comes across as timid and more junior than she really is. She should have more confidence in herself and make sure her self-presentation matches the level of expertise that she has.</p>	<p>Catherine is an expert in X. However, she often defers to others in the room and prefaces many of her comments with "I'm not sure, but I think." Eliminating qualifying language and speaking for herself when she knows the answer will increase her effectiveness and credibility.</p>

Tool 5: Manager's Constructive Feedback Conversation Roadmap

Overview

This worksheet helps managers give constructive performance feedback by pinpointing how specific behaviors employees should change, and demonstrates how to prepare for a clear review conversation

Intended User

Managers who need to give difficult performance feedback

Goal

To help managers deliver feedback in an objective, thoughtful, and constructive manner

Estimated Time Required

15 to 30 minutes per employee

Step 1: Collect your thoughts about the situation

Giving constructive performance feedback can be hard, so managers should prepare a clear, simple message in advance. Reflect on the main points of feedback and determine how to share these points in a way the listener will easily understand.

The table below shows a simple message structure for sharing performance feedback. When communicating with an underperforming employee, refer to the table below and fill in the appropriate message in the following worksheet.

Performance-Expectation-Consequence (P-E-C) Message

	Think About	Example
<p>P</p> <p>Performance</p>	<p>What did the employee do that led them to fail to meet expected performance standards?</p> <p>Cite specific examples of actions or behaviors that were observed</p>	<p>Last week, James left work an hour early without explanation. He missed the weekly team meeting and failed to receive his new assignments.</p>
<p>E</p> <p>Expectation</p>	<p>What is the standard that the employee is expected to meet?</p> <p>Explain expectations using examples of behavior or actions the employee should demonstrate</p>	<p>James is expected to remain for the full workday and not leave without explanation. He should attend all team meetings and keep track of new tasks assigned to him.</p>
<p>C</p> <p>Consequence</p>	<p>What is the consequence of the employee not meeting standard expectations?</p> <p>Describe how their failure to meet established expectations impacts the team and the institution</p>	<p>Because James was unaware of new tasks assigned during the team meeting, he failed to complete the following week's work on time and caused a team-wide delay.</p>

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Tool 5: Manager’s Constructive Feedback Conversation Roadmap (cont.)

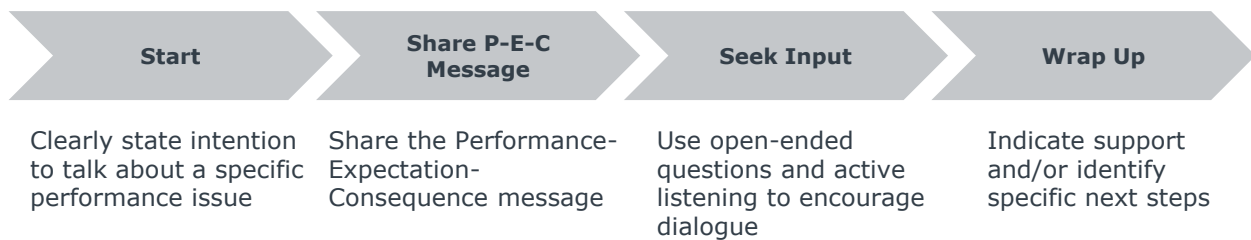
Template for Drafting Performance-Expectation-Consequence (P-E-C) Message

<p>P Performance</p>	
<p>E Expectation</p>	
<p>C Consequence</p>	

Step 2: Prepare your roadmap for the conversation

The P-E-C message contains the key points of feedback managers need to communicate. However, in any performance evaluation, employees may be caught off guard and react defensively (and ultimately miss the point) if managers jump straight to the P-E-C message without easing into the conversation—or if the exchange ends too abruptly. An effective, smooth feedback conversation includes the four parts shown in the graphic below.

Conversation Roadmap



Tool 5: Manager’s Constructive Feedback Conversation Roadmap (cont.)

The table below shows how the **Performance-Expectation Consequence Message** and the **Conversation Roadmap** fit together to help managers deliver feedback effectively to employees. It contains sample talking points and scripting that managers can integrate into their performance conversations.

Using this table as a guide, prepare for conversations with underperforming employees by filing in the “Scripting Notes” section of **Manager’s Constructive Feedback Conversation Roadmap** on page 20.

Sample Scripting and Examples for the Conversation Roadmap

<i>Roadmap</i>	<i>Think About</i>	<i>Example</i>
Start	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I’d like to talk to you about... • I have noticed... • I am concerned about... • I want to discuss... • I have some thoughts about... • I feel I need to let you know... 	James, I would like to talk to you about when you left work early last Tuesday.
Share the P-E-C Message	<p>P: Cite specific examples of actions or behaviors observed</p> <p>E: Explain expectations using examples of the behavior or actions that the employee should demonstrate</p> <p>C: Describe how their failure to meet established expectations impacts the team and/or the institution</p>	<p>P: I am concerned about this because you missed the weekly team meeting, and you didn’t let me know that you would be leaving before the end of the workday.</p> <p>E: I expect you and all other team members to stay the whole day. I also expect you to attend all team meetings so you can keep track of your ongoing and new assignments.</p> <p>C: Since you left early and missed the meeting, you didn’t hear about your new assignments for the next week. Because you didn’t complete this work on time, the whole team had to delay their work, putting us at risk of missing our deadline.</p>
Seek Input	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you see this situation? • What are your thoughts? • Why do think this happened? • What do you think you can do to improve? • How could you have handled this situation differently? 	<p>How do you think you could have handled this situation differently, James?</p> <p>Please tell me your thoughts.</p>
Wrap Up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I’d like to help you address this issue by... • How can I best support you? • I expect you to change... • Let’s meet again to follow up about... 	<p>I expect you not to miss any more team meetings or leave work early unless you first talk to me about your situation.</p> <p>Let’s meet again next week to discuss how we can both make sure this doesn’t happen again.</p>

Tool 5: Manager's Constructive Feedback Conversation Roadmap (cont.)

Manager's Constructive Feedback Conversation Roadmap

Roadmap	Scripting Notes
Start	
Share the P-E-C Message	
Seek Input	
Wrap Up	

Tool 6: Guide to Navigating Common Employee Reactions to Constructive Feedback

Overview

This worksheet helps managers anticipate employee reactions to difficult feedback and provides scripting to keep these conversations focused and productive

Intended User

Managers who need to give difficult performance feedback

Goal

To help managers prepare for employee reactions to difficult feedback and avoid pitfalls that can derail critical conversations

Estimated Time Required

10 to 15 minutes per employee

Step 1: Review the ways employees may try to sidetrack the conversation

Performance feedback conversations can be sensitive and emotionally charged. It is important that managers remain calm and levelheaded, even when met with defensiveness or irritation.

The table on page 22 lists most common ways that employees may react or push back during performance conversations. Review this table to anticipate how staff may respond and consider the recommended approaches to steering the conversation back on track.

Tool 6: Guide to Navigating Common Employee Reactions to Constructive Feedback (cont.)

Common Employee Reactions to Constructive Feedback and Response Scripting

<i>If the employee becomes a...</i>	<i>Employee says...</i>	<i>Then the manager must become a...</i>	<i>Manager can say...</i>
Apologizer Jumps to confession before hearing the message	"I didn't mean to create any problems—I know I can do better!"	Clarifier Verify the employee understands where he or she went wrong	"I appreciate you taking responsibility, but let's discuss further so we both understand what went wrong."
Denier Argues with validity of data	"I don't believe this portrayal is accurate. I am always on time."	Investigator Provide well-researched account of events	"I'm surprised to hear you say that. I checked the timesheets and you have been late five times this quarter."
Tear-Jerker Responds emotionally and struggles to articulate thoughts	"I try so hard—I don't know what happened—I'm just so upset."	Calmer Show empathy to the emotions and calmly keep to the message	"I know this is hard to hear. This is an important issue and I hope we can find a way to productively talk about it together."
Blame-Shifter Points finger to avoid accountability	"It's his fault."	Reflector Enforce individual accountability for their role	"I am speaking to him this afternoon. Right now, we are only talking about your performance."
Avoider Shuts down and avoids eye contact	"Oh...I see...sure..."	Engager Pause comments to ask neutral, engaging questions	"I'd like to stop for a moment and check in with you. I want to hear your perspective. Can you tell me your thoughts?"
Subject-Changer Distracts with a different topic of discussion	"So, how's your family doing?"	Driver Refuse to engage in a tangent	"Great, thanks. Today, however, I need to talk to you about your performance."
Rationalizer Offers excuses to justify behavior	"I don't have to be at every team meeting if I already know what's going on."	Juror Uphold correct behavior in spite of rationale	"I expect you and everyone on my team to attend all team meetings so we can coordinate our work together."
Score-Keeper Keeps a running list of peers' practices	"Everyone does it, so why can't I?"	Score-Settler Shift focus back to their behavior	"That doesn't make it right. Right now, we are only focusing on your behavior."

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Tool 6: Guide to Navigating Common Employee Reactions to Constructive Feedback (cont.)

Step 2: Anticipate how you think an employee will react to your performance feedback

Think of a specific employee and a piece of difficult performance feedback they need to hear. List the top two to three reactions this employee may have:

Reaction A: _____

Reaction B: _____

Reaction C: _____

Step 3: Plan your strategy for responding to the employee's reactions

Based on the employee's likely reaction, plan responses to keep the conversation on track. Refer back to the table on page 22 for assistance. In the space below, write a strategy for responding to each of the reactions listed in Step 2 above.

Planned response to reaction A	
Planned response to reaction B	
Planned response to reaction C	



Double-Check Your Ratings

-
- Tool 7: Staff Ratings Gut-Check Worksheet
 - Tool 8: Performance Rating Distribution Gut-Check Worksheet
 - Tool 9: Guidelines for Adjusting Staff Ratings to Reflect Performance Differences
 - Tool 10: Rating Distribution Approval Worksheet

2

Tool 7: Staff Ratings Gut-Check Worksheet

Overview

Managers can use this worksheet and sorting exercise to ensure downward reviews reflect the relative performance of their staff

Intended User

Managers with six or more direct reports

Goal

To help managers quickly double-check their downward performance ratings

Estimated Time Required

2 minutes per direct report

Step 1: Enter your direct reports' names into the worksheet on page 27

In the worksheet on page 27, write the names of all direct reports in the column labeled "Employee Name." Leave the other three columns blank for now.

Step 2: Color code your employees based on their performance during the last evaluation period

Start with the first employee listed in the worksheet. Think holistically about their performance during this evaluation period. Then review the guidelines below and decide which color best describes the employee's performance. Write that color in the "Color" column next to the employee's name.

Employee Color Code Groups

Color	Description of Performance
-------	----------------------------

Blue

The Superstar Employee

- Highly regarded by peers as an expert in the field; serves as a role model and stimulates teamwork
- Highly productive, generates top-quality work, and strives to improve
- Continuously seeks innovative ways to improve existing systems and processes
- Consistently exceeds both behavioral performance standards and quantitative goals
- Someone with high potential for promotion and leadership roles

Green

The Solid Performer

- Regarded as a valued and reliable team member with thorough job competency
- Consistently generates expected quantity and quality of work
- Meets expectations for behavioral performance standards and quantitative goals
- Someone to keep engaged and retain on the team

Red

The Employee Who Needs to Improve or Change Roles

- Regarded as a low performer with incomplete job competency
- Consistently falls short of behavioral expectations and/or quantitative goals
- Demonstrates inappropriate or disruptive behavior; has received formal discipline reports during the review period
- Someone to place on a focused improvement plan, transition to a new role, or manage out

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Tool 7: Staff Ratings Gut-Check Worksheet (cont.)

Step 3: Compare the color codes to your performance rating

Turn to the worksheet on page 27. In the column labeled "Performance Rating," write the numeric performance rating given to each employee for their initial evaluation during this review period.

Next, start with the first employee listed in the worksheet. Use the guide below to see if their numeric performance rating falls within the recommended range for their assigned color. If it does, write a check under the column titled "Agree?" in the worksheet. If it doesn't, write "NO" under the column titled "Agree?". Repeat this step for each of the listed employees.

Recommended Crosswalk for Performance Ratings and Colors

Color	3-Point Scale Score	4-Point Scale Score	5-Point Scale Score
Blue	3	4	5
Green	2	2, 3	2, 3, 4
Red	1	1	1

Step 4: Review your rating of any employee(s) with a NO in the "Agree?" column

If you wrote "NO" for any employee(s) when completing the previous step, your color and numeric evaluations for that employee do not align. Review the numeric rating to ensure it accurately describes the employee's performance during this evaluation period.

Start with the first employee marked "NO" in the "Agree?" column. Consider the following questions:

1. How does this employee compare with the other employees in the same color group? Is the employee a higher or lower performer than the others? Can the numeric rating be adjusted to better reflect how they performed compared to others in this group?
2. If you were on the fence between two ratings for this employee, why did you go with the rating you chose? Does this rating still make sense relative to the ratings of your team holistically?
3. Does this employee's rating reflect a personal bias based on the employee's personal characteristics? Did your personal bias cause you to rate this employee in this color group without adequate justification?

Update any ratings as necessary before submitting your final employee evaluations.


Tool 7: Staff Ratings Gut-Check Worksheet (cont.)

Staff Ratings Gut-Check Worksheet

Manager's Name: _____

Date: _____

Unit/Department: _____

Employee Name	Color	Performance Rating	Agree?
Example: James Smith	Green	4	

Tool 8: Performance Rating Distribution Gut-Check Worksheet

Overview

This worksheet provides step-by-step instructions to help managers calculate their staff's performance rating distribution, affording a macro view of group performance

Intended User

All managers completing downward reviews

Goal

To help managers calculate the percentage of direct reports rated "high, middle, and low"

Estimated Time Required

15 to 30 minutes; managers only need to complete this exercise once per review cycle

Performance Rating Distribution Gut-Check Worksheet

Manager's Name: _____ Date: _____

Unit/Department: _____

Step 1: Write the total number of employees you evaluated during this review period

Number of employees evaluated: _____

Step 2: Determine your employees' performance distribution

Use the crosswalk below to determine how your institution's numeric rating scale corresponds to high, middle, and low performance.

Recommended Crosswalk of Performance Levels and Scores

Level	3-Point Scale	4-Point Scale	5-Point Scale
High	3	4	5
Middle	2	2, 3	2, 3, 4
Low	1	1	1

Refer back to your completed evaluations and count how many employees you have assigned to each rating category (high, middle, and low) during this review period. Write the total number of employees assigned to each category in the spaces below.

	High	Middle	Low
Total Number of Employees			

Tool 8: Performance Rating Distribution Gut-Check Worksheet (cont.)

Step 3: Calculate the percentage of employees rated high, middle, and low

Use the following formula to calculate the percentage of employees in each category:

$$\text{Percentage of Employees in Each Category} = \frac{\text{Number of Employees in the Category} \times 100}{\text{Total Number of Employees Evaluated}}$$

Round to the nearest whole number. Write the numbers in the spaces below.

	High	Middle	Low
Example: (based on 45 employees; 8 high, 33 middle, and 4 low)	$\frac{8}{45} \times 100 = 18\%$	$\frac{33}{45} \times 100 = 73\%$	$\frac{4}{45} \times 100 = 9\%$
Percentage of Employees in Each Category	_____ %	_____ %	_____ %

Step 4: Compare your percentages to your institution's target percentages

If your institution provides target percentages for high, middle, and low performance categories, write the target percentages in the spaces below.

	High	Middle	Low
Institution's Target Percentage of Employees in Each Category	_____ %	_____ %	_____ %

Compare the rating distribution from Step 3 to your institution's target distribution (Step 4). Notice how similar or different the percentages are and consider possible reasons for the deviation.

Tool 9: Guidelines for Adjusting Staff Ratings to Reflect Performance Differences

Overview

These guidelines help managers revise downward reviews to reflect subtle differences in performance between direct reports

Intended User

All managers completing downward reviews

Goal

To help managers avoid giving the same ratings to employees who performed differently

Estimated Time Required

1 to 2 minutes per employee

Step 1: Enter your direct reports' names into the table

In the table on page 32, write the names of all direct reports in the column labeled "Employee Name" and the performance rating assigned to each direct report in the column labeled "Initial Rating." Leave the other columns blank for now.

Step 2: Create a list of employee ratings you want to double-check

In general, about 70 percent of employees are "middle" performers and should receive ratings that fall in the middle of any rating scale. To double-check the accuracy of your ratings, it's most efficient to focus on the employees who don't fall into this middle group. In addition, reconsider any employees who are "on the fence" between two ratings. Managers should ensure that personal bias based on employees' personal characteristics does not influence which employee ratings they choose to double-check.

In the table on page 32, circle the names of employees whose ratings need to be double-checked. Focus on employees with the highest one to two ratings and the lowest one to two ratings and/or employees who are between ratings.

Step 3: Use the guidelines on page 31 to adjust ratings as appropriate

For each employee circled, follow the flow of questions on page 31.

If you decide to change an employee's rating, write the new rating in the "Revised Rating" column of the table on page 32. In the "Explanation" column, write a brief description of why you decided to change the rating.

Tool 9: Guidelines for Adjusting Staff Ratings to Reflect Performance Differences (cont.)

Guidelines for Evaluating Initial Staff Ratings

Employees with the highest rating(s)

Does this person:

- Consistently surpass all behavioral expectations, and act as a role model for others?
- Regularly produce the highest quality of work and continuously strive for improvement?
- Require minimal supervision, demonstrate independent critical thinking, and look well-positioned for advancement?

Do all three apply?

No

Consider lowering the rating by one to two levels

Yes

Keep the highest rating

Employees with the lowest rating(s)

Does this person:

- Consistently fall short of behavioral expectations?
- Require regular, excessive supervision and follow-up to perform job duties?
- Seem unlikely to improve behavior or skills even with additional training and attention?

Do at least two of three apply?

No

Consider rating one level above the lowest rating

Yes

Keep the lowest rating

Employees between two ratings

Does this person:

- More regularly perform at the higher rating level?
- Primarily have weak areas that are not critical or significantly problematic to the whole team?
- Actively work on improving weaknesses and demonstrate not only progress, but early proficiency in these areas?

Do all three apply?

No

Choose the lower rating

Yes

Choose the higher rating

Tool 9: Guidelines for Adjusting Staff Ratings to Reflect Performance Differences (cont.)

Rating Revision Worksheet

Manager's Name: _____

Date: _____

Unit/Department: _____

Employee Name	Initial Rating	Revised Rating	Explanation
Example: Jessica Allen	5	4	Jessica is a strong performer, but she still needs to develop important critical thinking skills to become a top performer.

Tool 10: Rating Distribution Approval Worksheet

Overview

This worksheet provides guidance on building a principled case for why a rating distribution differs from institutional targets, if they exist

Intended User

Managers who seek approval to maintain their current performance distribution

Goal

To help managers build an evidence-based case for why the rating distribution should remain different from institutional targets

Estimated Time Required

30 to 60 minutes to complete the approval worksheet for one review cycle

Rating Distribution Approval Worksheet

Manager's Name: _____ Date: _____

Unit/Department: _____



Note: Managers seeking approval for higher-than-recommended rating distributions should complete all exercises below (Steps 1 to 4). Managers seeking approval for lower-than-recommended rating distributions should only complete Steps 3 and 4.

Step 1: Include evidence of strong overall performance

Review institutional goals for this evaluation period. Answer the following questions:

Did your department or unit meet all institutional goals?

____ Yes ____ No

Did your department or unit not only meet but exceed at least half of institutional goals?

____ Yes ____ No

List the goals your department or unit exceeded:

Tool 10: Rating Distribution Approval Worksheet (cont.)

Step 2: Include evidence of strong performance in important strategic areas

Gather information about your institution’s performance in each strategic area for this evaluation period. Answer the following questions:

Did your department or unit perform above the institutional average on goals in at least two of the strategic areas listed below?

_____ Yes _____ No

If yes, indicate in which areas your department or unit outperformed the institutional average:

_____ Budget Compliance

_____ Employee Engagement

_____ Student Success

_____ Other strategic area: _____

_____ Other strategic area: _____

Step 3: Provide additional qualitative information to support your request

In the space below, explain why you want to keep the percentage of employees rated “high, middle, and low” the same, even though this distribution differs from your institution’s target distribution. Use additional space if needed.

Step 4: Seek approval from your supervisor

Discuss this worksheet with your supervisor. If your supervisor agrees with the case presented in this worksheet, request their signature below.

Supervisor’s Name: _____ Signature: _____



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