

# APPRAISING PERFORMANCE



THE COMMON PERCEPTION OF PERFORMANCE APPRAISALS IS NOT ALL POSITIVE. DR TIM BAKER OUTLINES SOMETHING DIFFERENT FROM THE TRADITIONAL APPROACH.

**When I write 'performance appraisal'** what thoughts come to mind? I'm not sure exactly what you thought, but I am pretty sure that not all were necessarily positive.

Whether you are a manager or employee, most people dread the thought of formally appraising or being appraised on their performance.

The problem with the traditional approach is that it is often a waste of time and can cause more harm than good. I am not against performance feedback. In fact, I believe it is one of the most important things managers can do as leaders. However, the ways it is done don't always work particularly well.

#### Traditional appraising

The traditional performance appraisal is based on the military model; that is, the boss gives the subordinate a one-way monologue on what they are doing wrong and, occasionally, what the subordinate is doing right. In most cases, the recipient is passive and unenthusiastic. Done in this form, it is often a pointless and mostly painful exercise.

There are several things wrong with this approach: it is usually one-way; it is based on the power dynamic of manager and employee; it is done once or twice a year; it is a formal process that stifles discussion; it is rarely, if ever, followed up; the focus of the 'discussion' is rarely about what constructive ways an employee's strengths can be utilised and weaknesses overcome; it takes time and is, therefore, an enormously costly exercise; few enjoy the process.

#### A fresh approach

My approach is called The Five Conversations. It is based on five conversations between the manager and each of his or her staff over a six-month period. Each conversation need only last 10 minutes.

They are spread out over six months. In other words, over the course of a year, the manager is expected to have 10 conversations with each of his or her colleagues. Arguably this should be happening anyway as a means of building a professional rapport and understanding between a manager and the members of his or her team.

IMAGE: GETTY IMAGES

#### The Five Conversations framework

Date	Topic	Content	Key questions
January	Climate review	Job satisfaction, morale and communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How would you rate your current job satisfaction?</li> <li>How would you rate morale?</li> <li>How would you rate communication?</li> </ul>
February	Training and development	Development over the next six months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What are some skills you would like to learn?</li> <li>What courses would you like to undertake?</li> </ul>
March	Innovation and continuous improvement	Ways to improve the efficiencies and effectiveness of the business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What's one way that you could improve your own working efficiencies?</li> <li>What's one way we can improve our department?</li> </ul>
April	Improved performance	Improving performance and standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What are some opportunities for improved performance?</li> <li>How can I assist you to do this?</li> </ul>
June	Career	Career direction and guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What part of your job do you enjoy?</li> <li>What would we need to do to help you develop?</li> </ul>

#### What do managers and their team members talk about in these five conversations?

It's the manager's responsibility to schedule conversations with each of their direct reports. Each should address the questions in the 'Key questions' column of the table above, related to the topics in the second column. A record of the conversation should go to HR to track issues across the organisation.

#### Climate review conversation

In January, for example, data collected can be used to determine the climate across the organisation. This information can then be used as benchmarks to compare the climate twice a year.

#### Training and development conversation

Collectively, information recorded in conversations on training and development can create a comprehensive training needs analysis across the organisation. HR is then in a position to prioritise learning and development opportunities.

#### Innovation and continuous improvement conversation

Outcomes arising from the conversation around innovation and continuous improvement can be used to evaluate and implement ideas both within the department and across the organisation.

#### Improved performance conversation

This conversation focuses on strategies for improved performance, and can provide some clarity and

understanding around feedback on performance aligned with their role description.

#### Career conversation

The career conversation provides an opportunity for employees to discuss their careers and ways in which their manager can assist them in their current role.

#### Preparation

Both the employee and their manager should prepare for each discussion. Unlike the traditional performance appraisal, the manager's comments are guided by their employee's contribution.

#### Advantages

The key advantages of this model over a traditional approach to appraising performance include:

- > it facilitates an ongoing dialogue over the course of a year in a regular, ongoing discussion
- > it is a more relaxed approach that may encourage employees to be more open and direct about their developmental needs
- > it takes no more time than the traditional approach as each conversation should take approximately 10 minutes to complete
- > it provides HR with a wealth of information for planning and development on a continual basis
- > it is a much more natural and enjoyable process and experience. **WJ**

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Dr Tim Baker, Winners at Work

"THE PROBLEM WITH THE TRADITIONAL APPROACH IS THAT IT IS OFTEN A WASTE OF TIME AND CAN CAUSE MORE HARM THAN GOOD."