

Title:

Employee Performance Reviews – Dealing With Disagreements

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675

Summary:

What do you do when an employee disagrees with something you've written on their performance review? How can you prepare for this and deal with it effectively?

Start by listening to figure out the source of the disagreement. Is it an issue of fact (you wrote that the employee received a customer satisfaction score of 79 but the employee says that his score was actually 83), or is a matter of judgment (you wrote that the employee's customer service skills were unsatisfactor...

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Article Body:

What do you do when an employee disagrees with something you've written on their performance review? How can you prepare for this and deal with it effectively?

Start by listening to figure out the source of the disagreement. Is it an issue of fact (you wrote that the employee received a customer satisfaction score of 79 but the employee says that his score was actually 83), or is a matter of judgment (you wrote that the employee's customer service skills were unsatisfactory; she feels that her skills are terrific)? If the disagreement involves an issue of fact, get the facts and make any corrections necessary. If it's a matter of judgment, ask the employee for additional evidence. Then determine whether that evidence is weighty enough to cause you to change your mind, revise your judgment, and amend the rating that you assigned on the employee's performance review.

Most of the time, you have a reasonably good understanding of the areas where disagreements are likely to pop up in the course of the performance review discussion. Before beginning the discussion, re-read the review you wrote and try to spot the areas where you and the individual may not seem eye-to-eye. Then ask yourself, "What am I going to say when George disagrees with my assessment that his performance on the Thompson project just barely met expectations?" If

you've taken to time to review the appraisal you've written for potential hot spots, and given some thought to how you'll respond, you're much less likely to be caught off guard.

During the employee performance review discussion, start with your higher ratings and move toward the lower ones. Be prepared to give additional examples besides the ones you've included on the formal written appraisal. Refer back to the informal conversations you have had with the individual over the course of the year.

Of course, if you haven't had on-going, informal performance review discussions with the individual over the course of the appraisal period, then it's much more likely that disagreements will surface during the review. That's one more reason for scheduling periodic, "How's it going?" discussions with each person on your team.

As soon as a disagreement pops up, switch into active listening mode. "Active listening" involves allowing the other person to clarify both the facts and feelings about an issue so there's nothing left under the surface. For example, using phrases as simple as, "Tell me more . . ." or, "What else can you share with me about that . . . ?" or, "Really . . . ?" can encourage people to talk more about their perceptions. Simply nodding without saying anything encourages people to expand on what they have said. It's not at all unlikely that the employee, allowed a sufficient chance to think aloud about what you have written, will end up saying, "Yeah, I guess I see what you mean."

In dealing effectively with employee performance review disagreements, remember what your objective in the discussion is – and what it isn't. Your objective in a performance review discussion is not to gain agreement. It is to gain understanding. If the employee agrees with you, that's great. But particularly if your appraisal is a tough-minded assessment of the fact the Charlie's contribution toward achieving your department's objectives was only mediocre, you'll probably never get him to agree. That's OK. What you want is for him to understand why you evaluated his performance the way you did, even if his personal opinion is different.

Finally, if you have several employee performance reviews to deliver, don't start with the individual whose performance was the worst and where disagreements are the most likely to arise. Start with the easiest – your best performer – and move toward the more difficult. In this way, you'll build your skills and become more comfortable with the performance review process. Remember the advice that John Dillinger, the 1930's public-enemy #1, once provided: "Before you rob your first bank, knock off a couple of gas stations."

