

things you can control, rather than on the past which is dead and done?

## Performance Evaluations Don't Have To Be Painful

Why does performance evaluation season come with a sense of dread and anxiety? Why do we shrink from this annual routine with such pessimism? Managers and employees alike prefer to shun the performance management process and for good reason. Our long-held and strongly modeled beliefs about performance evaluations have given them a bad rap. They don't have to be painful but they always will be if we continue to perpetuate unproductive perspectives on the task. Here are some of the reasons performance evaluations continue to be painful:

### 1. Performance evaluations are DONE TO employees.

Why do we continue to approach this opportunity as a one-sided deal? You as a manager must embrace the belief that employees have something to contribute to the conversation. They have insights that might instruct the process. Quit doing performance evaluations TO employees and start doing them WITH employees.

### 2. Performance evaluations are a rehash of the past.

While the written document should be a complete summary of the employee's contributions for the past year, the conversation shouldn't regurgitate what the document says. Why do we feel that we have to read the completed evaluation to the employee? Allow the employee to read the document prior to the evaluation meeting, ask them if they have any questions or comments about the document, and then spend the majority of the evaluation meeting focusing on the future. What is more motivating than focusing forward, towards

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### 3. Managers do all the talking.

When you do most of the talking in a performance evaluation meeting, the employee is naturally going to tune out. The more you continue to drone on and on, the less the employee will care. A good rule of thumb is for the manager to do one-third of the talking and for the employee to do two-thirds of the talking in a performance evaluation meeting. Of course, this requires you to be open to the employee's input and the employee to be engaged in their own performance.

### 4. The completed evaluation document does not clearly reflect the job.

A stranger should be able to read a completed performance evaluation document for any employee and clearly understand what the employee's job is all about. Regardless of the form, the comments and examples you write should provide specific illustrations as to how the employee either met or did not meet the expectations for performance. When you check boxes without examples to support the ratings or when you write vague and general comments like, "She's a valued employee" the employee is left wondering what they did or didn't do that was effective. Taking the time to be specific and clear about the employee's performance will make the evaluation more meaningful to the employee.

### 5. The evaluation is done once a year.

Most organizations conduct performance evaluations on an annual cycle. And, that's okay. Employees should receive a formal report at least once a year to give them a sense of how they are measuring up. However, when the evaluation is the only time the employee receives feedback about their performance, it's often too little too late.



You should be giving frequent and informal feedback to employees throughout the year. Minimally this should happen in a quarterly meeting that is documented. Ideally, it will happen daily. Conversations about specific projects or jobs don't count. Real feedback means that you are engaging the employee in a conversation about what they are doing well and what they can do to improve. It's a helpful conversation, not an excruciating conversation.

#### **6. The evaluation is seen as an HR requirement.**

When the performance evaluation process is seen as a "have to do" that is required by Human Resources, you will dread it. No one wants to "have to do" anything--especially a performance evaluation. However, when you view the performance evaluation as an ongoing process of performance management it will have more value.

To be seen as an ongoing process, performance management activities (setting expectations, documenting specific examples of performance, giving frequent feedback) need to be integrated into how you accomplish your goals. These should be tools that lead to the accomplishment of the organization's objectives, aligned with the strategic vision.

**7. Performance evaluations are not clearly linked to pay.** Over the years we have come to believe that the reason we do performance evaluations is to assign pay increases. If this were true, there would be very few performance evaluations taking place in this economy! While performance evaluations can be linked to pay adjustments, they contribute to the organization's effectiveness in many other ways. In fact, if they are not linked to pay then the focus is more likely to be on clear expectations, frequent feedback, and professional growth. Take away the money and we begin to focus on things that are just as important like developing strong working relationships and challenging ourselves to higher levels of performance.

#### **8. Complicated calculations do not accurately represent human effort.**

The old-style performance evaluations (many are still in use today) use a numeric calculation to rate employee performance. By rating individual categories, assigning a numeric value to each, and adding and dividing the numbers, we are led to believe that the final score somehow represents the sum total of the employee's contribution. And, if the employee earns an 8.1 and his peer earns an 8.4, the peer certainly must be a more valued contributor.

This is flawed logic. Calculated performance evaluation systems are not really calculated at all. They are still based on an initial judgment by the rater, which means that the overall rating is still based on a considered

opinion. Adding numbers to the form does not make it more objective. Employees know this.

Performance evaluations can be painless. Organizations across the United States are currently pursuing new approaches that are transforming the old, dreaded approach into something that is more engaging, more positive, and more motivating for everyone involved. By challenging the assumptions about how we have always done it, we can transform the way we feel about this annual ritual.

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## **10 Questions that Get Employees Talking During a Performance Evaluation**

The typical performance evaluation discussion is one-sided. You talk and the employee listens. As a result, everyone walks away from the encounter feeling disengaged and unempowered.

The annual performance evaluation conversation CAN be a very productive and positive experience if both parties fully engage in the conversation. In fact, *Painless Performance Evaluations* are based on that principle. The employee talks more than the manager does.

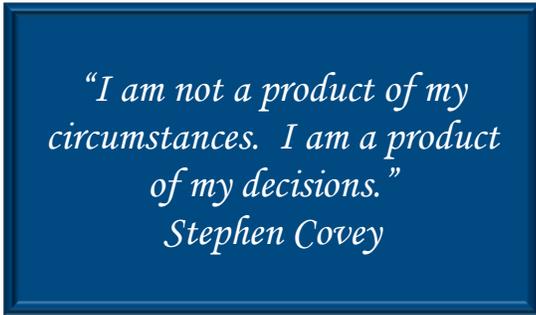
To turn the tables and encourage employees to participate in the conversation, you must be armed with open-ended questions. Here are a few that will get you started:

1. What did you think about the performance evaluation?
2. What surprised you about the evaluation?
3. What pleased you most about the evaluation?
4. What accomplishments did you have this year that were not included in the evaluation?
5. What do you like most about your job?
6. What challenges you or frustrates you most about your job?
7. What could we do next year to make your job more challenging?
8. What could we do next year to make your job less frustrating?

9. If you could do one thing to change your job, what would it be?
10. How can I help you do your job better?

Before you have the next performance evaluation with an employee, think about how you can involve them in the conversation. Asking a few thought-provoking, open-ended questions might be the answer to getting them involved in the process. It might be the first step to a more engaged and motivated employee.

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## *Schedule of Public Courses*

The following courses are being offered to the public by Harmony Coaching & Consulting. Click on the associated link for more information on the program or to register.

Course Title	Date(s)	Time	For More Information/Registration
<b>SHRM Learning System®</b> is the preparation course for the HR Certification Exam <i>(Every other Saturday)</i>	<b>2/27 – 5/7/2016</b> (every other Saturday)	8:30AM – 4:30PM	<a href="http://www.cbu.edu/shrm">http://www.cbu.edu/shrm</a>
<b>The Coaching Clinic®</b> is a two-day workshop for executives, managers and leaders to experience and learn coaching skills and competencies.	<b>Spring 2016</b>	8:30AM – 5:00PM	<a href="http://www.harmonycc.net/coaching-clinic.php">www.harmonycc.net/coaching-clinic.php</a>

