Make your employee reviews motivating

It can feel like it takes forever to write performance reviews for each of your team members. It might even feel like you just finished writing them the last time around. And now you have to think of accomplishments, strengths and areas for improvement for every member of your team. Again!

Hopefully, your employees are getting plenty of feedback between formal review cycles. If something's working well, it should be praised in real time and expanded if possible. And if something isn't working, it should be corrected right away.

So your team members should know how they're doing going into the review process. That's not to say that the review shouldn't address performance issues. It should. But if possible, it's best for your team member to know about any issues ahead of the review. Here are a few types of surprises it can pay to avoid:

• **The blind side.** As a manager, it's your job to broach the subject of something that needs improvement in real time, verbally. Talking about an issue for the first time in writing on the record can hurt morale.

• **Asking the impossible.** Even your top talent has limits. Keep it realistic, even when looking for ways your best people can continue to improve.

• **Mediocre ratings for a stellar performance.** When it comes to appreciation, short-changing your team can hinder your future business results. Be sure your team members know what the numbers mean and how each item and section affects their overall rating.

• **Alternative facts.** Tell the story of your team member's performance objectively. Be sure not to "spin" facts to fit the form better or make a point.

If you have positive surprises to share, they can surely give your team member a morale boost. For instance:

• **Quotable quotes.** Did someone write an e-mail or letter praising your team member? Feel free to share.

• **Good outcomes.** Has the team member's work brought about a positive result? Let the world know.

• **Development options.** Encourage your team to keep growing and learning. What trainings might they be able to take in the near future?

• **Extra compensation.** Is a raise or bonus on the horizon?

Remember: Your employees don't see all the reviews you write. So they won't have a frame of reference and may not realize you were writing 100 words a minute to beat an aggressive deadline. If you want to keep your team working at their best, be generous in recognizing each employee's contributions. Offer opportunities to improve where needed. And document your team member's positive efforts.

Employee reviews don't have to feel like a trip to the dentist. With a bit of care, your team members can emerge from the process with renewed energy and commitment to their work.

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