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Why Supervisors Hate Performance Reviews (And How to Fix It)

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Like *Titanic's* iceberg, it looms in the ocean of tomorrow's calendar: "Performance Review Meeting." *I feel like I just did this*, the calendar's owner thinks. *Who has this kind of time?* It's true; most employees wish they could send annual performance reviews to the bottom of the Atlantic. But what if these grumbles aren't coming from just any employee—they're coming from a supervisor?

Nobody likes performance reviews, but supervisors get the least sympathy. Preparing reviews is no cakewalk. It takes time supervisors rarely have. This leads to cutting corners, which creates the very reasons employees hate receiving reviews. It's a vicious cycle. The good news is everyone can hate performance reviews a little less if we combat supervisors' common complaints about them.

Supervisors never seem to have time to write reviews, and often end up slapping them together in the hour before an appraisal meeting. Employees who spot a rushed review are likely to dismiss feedback, negating the purpose. To maximize time, supervisors should organize information throughout the year. This will resolve two additional complaints: seeming overly critical and forgetting information.

Supervisors may seem overly critical or neglectful if they cram an entire year's performance into one discussion, especially if they blindside an employee with a negative review. To avoid this, regularly provide performance feedback and address deficiencies as they happen. It is important for supervisors to be trained in how to give improvement feedback in a constructive manner with specific examples of what the improved performance "looks" like. That way, employees know what they need to do and what to expect at the annual review if there hasn't been any improvement.

Regular performance feedback will also curtail the problem of forgotten information. Recent or negative performance is easy to recall, but what about that brilliant project from last January? To help remember exceptional performance, send thank-you e-mail to employees, commending them for their hard work. These electronic kudos can be stored online and easily retrieved come review time. Organized information will help create a balanced review of the year's performance.

While balance within one review is critical, supervisors may have trouble balancing across reviews. If possible, prepare all performance documents in one day. This minimizes variables that can affect scores, such as the supervisor's attitude toward a current project and maximizes the ability to see the big picture of their team. Resist the urge to tone down the areas of needed improvement or beef up the positives. Keep the reviews honest.

Salary discussion is a touchy topic for many supervisors and often part of the review process. For most employees, the salary increase information is the reward for enduring a performance review—the Big Gulp® after a box of saltines. When sitting across from someone who is expecting a Big Gulp but will be offered a kid's size, things can get tricky. Listen to the employee's argument for a higher raise, and then be prepared to defend the decision or to consider any new information. Make sure to explain the

reasoning behind the proposed increase. Training on giving and receiving feedback will give supervisors the skills to turn a potential contentious situation into a positive conversation!

Start to finish, performance reviews don't have to sink ships. Supervisors can ensure smooth sailing if they take the time to tackle their most common complaints about the process. With structured training and practice, supervisors won't dread "Performance Review Meeting" on the calendar. Instead, they'll welcome this powerful vessel to develop their employees and their own supervisory skills.