



Performance Evaluation Guide

Performance evaluations are an important communication tool that can benefit both the employee and the employer by aligning expectations and future goals. The process does not have to be complicated. It is an opportunity for an employer to provide feedback in a fair, consistent and objective way regarding past performance and set expectations for future job performance.

What is a performance evaluation?

A performance evaluation assesses and reviews an employee's performance and reminds him or her of the practice's work expectations. It can also remind the practice of the value of the employee's contributions. An evaluation should represent a year-round dialogue with the employee regarding his or her performance.

As a dentist and small-business owner, you wear many hats in your practice. Because employees are necessary for the success of a practice, it is important to communicate how his or her performance supports the practice goals and success.

Performance Evaluation Management Best Practices

The steps below will guide you through the process.

- **Prepare.** Gather relevant documents that will support the evaluation (i.e. job descriptions, previous performance evaluations, performance improvement plans, attendance records, etc.). Some practices view themselves as a "family," which may cause discomfort during an evaluation, especially one with areas of opportunity. Approach the evaluation from the leader perspective; it will be difficult for the employee to accept the feedback if the practice owner is viewed as a "buddy." Be sure to schedule the evaluation in advance so the employee can come prepared to offer comments and feedback.
- **Review job descriptions and office policies.** Verify that the job description accurately reflects the employee's responsibilities and expected competencies and determine where he or she meets expectations or needs improvement. Review with the employee office policies that may require additional review. Review concerns related to punctuality, absenteeism or requests for time off, if needed.
- **Complete an evaluation form.** Comments should be specific and objective. Select numerical ratings that support your documentation.
- **Create the agenda and schedule the meeting.** Develop a concise agenda that outlines desired talking points. Schedule a meeting that allows about 1-1 1/2 hours, avoiding squeezing an evaluation into a patient cancellation or at the end of the work day. Set an end time for the meeting to prevent excessive discussion, especially regarding areas of concern. If it is decided that more time is needed, schedule a follow-up meeting within a short period of time.
- **No surprises.** Review notes regarding employee performance during the review period, noting achievements or performance improvements needed. The evaluation should not be the first time an employee hears about concerns related to his/her performance or conduct. The evaluation is the time to develop plans for improvement and set goals for the upcoming year.

- **Start on a positive note.** Begin the meeting with a friendly greeting and advise the employee of the topics that will be discussed, as well as the order in which they will be covered. Inform the employee that the evaluation is intended to be a two-way conversation and that questions are welcome.
- **Just the facts.** Use objective information previously documented in the employee file. Focus on performance and conduct, not on the employee's character. Provide a number of specific behavioral examples of times when the employee did not meet objectives. For example, if the employee is confrontational discuss how the employee's behavior affects his/her performance. Never compare one employee's performance to that of another.
- **Set positive goals, objectives and expectations.** At the end of the day, employees want to do a good job and feel that he or she is making a valuable contribution to the success of the practice. To achieve this, an employee needs a clear understanding of how his or her individual goals and performance affect the success of the practice. An example of a goal may include continuing education to improve or acquire new skills that will benefit the employee and practice. A plan of action may be required to help the employee in areas of deficiency.
- **Encourage employee feedback.** Encourage and allow the employee equal time to talk. Listen actively by rephrasing and summarizing what your employee says to make sure you truly understand him or her. Keep an open mind; no employer is perfect. Sometimes the employee has a valid point—or may provide clues as to why he or she is underperforming. This dialog may provide resolutions for improvement. Document all comments on the evaluation form.
- **Wrap it up.** End the meeting by summarizing the conversation, ask for final questions or concerns and end with positive expectations. Both the employee and doctor should sign the completed evaluation form. If the employee refuses to sign, notify him or her that the signature does not indicate agreement with the evaluation, it merely acknowledges the evaluation occurred. If the employee continues to refuse, write "Refused to sign" in front of a witness. The doctor will maintain the original form with signatures and provide the employee with a copy.
- **Conduct evaluations regularly.** Evaluations should occur for all employees on a regular schedule – at least annually. Schedule the evaluation on the employee's anniversary or plan all employee evaluations during the same month each year (focal evaluation). Include specifics about salary review and performance evaluation policies in the employee handbook. If the practice cannot afford a merit increase, an employee should still receive an objective accurate evaluation for his or her performance. If he or she has areas of improvement, do not provide a glowing evaluation simply because a merit increase is not possible. At some point, conditions will improve and you may be able to provide the employee with the merit increase he or she deserves.
- **Follow up.** Upon completion of the evaluation, the practice should begin focusing on an employee's current performance. The practice should regularly review goals or objectives for the upcoming year. If needed, modify or add goals. Regularly communicate with the staff about his or her performance and provide coaching and guidance as necessary. Document all conversations surrounding performance for use during the next evaluation.

Regular performance evaluations are a necessary element of employee management. The evaluation is a tool to motivate employees, as well as address any areas of opportunity. Share both positive and negative performance examples throughout the year. Because evaluations and other employee documents can be used in court in the event of a dispute, ensure that the performance evaluation is not biased, unfair, subjective or discriminatory and that documentation is available to support any rating.

The evaluation process offers an opportunity to speak with employees about how the employee and the practice can be successful. Effective performance evaluations are not a task done at employees but something done in collaboration with employees.

Performance Evaluation Meeting Checklist

Preparing for the evaluation

- Schedule the evaluation review meeting with the employee at least two weeks in advance. Avoid scheduling the meeting at the end of the day or during a patient cancellation and be sure the location provides privacy.
- Review previous performance evaluations, if applicable.
- Review current job description. Ensure it accurately reflects position duties and responsibilities. Note any necessary changes to the job duties and discuss during the evaluation meeting.
- Review documented discussions and other documentation in the employee's personnel file.
- Complete the evaluation form considering accomplishments and areas of needed improvement.
- Be prepared to share and discuss employee's future goals and educational opportunities.
- Bring a copy of the employee handbook to the meeting as a reference should there be issues surrounding office policies, i.e. work hours, time off, etc.

Conducting the evaluation

- Review the agenda and objectives of the meeting and encourage open and honest communication.
- Address each area of performance by providing positive and constructive feedback to the employee. Provide the positive feedback first. Be prepared to offer specific examples when giving positive or negative feedback.
- Review the job requirements and discuss possible changes or modifications to the job description.
- Develop specific goals/objectives for the coming year along with employee's input.
- Ask questions of the employee and encourage feedback and input.

Summarize the evaluation

- Review important points of the evaluation discussion and any action required. If the evaluation was unfavorable to the employee, review the expectations and timeline for improvement.
- Document agreed upon future goals and opportunities on the evaluation form. Also document any comments the employee provided on the form and any future follow-up related to any employee concerns.
- Manager and employee should sign the evaluation form and give a copy to the employee. (Signature does not indicate agreement or disagreement; however, it is an acknowledgement that the evaluation was discussed with the manager.)
- Place original signed evaluation form in the employee's file.

Evaluation Quick Reference Tools

SMART Goals

Following are components of an effective goal – one that describes performance standards that will “tell us what good behavior looks like.” The SMART acronym can help us remember these components.

Specific - The goal should identify a specific action or event that will take place.

Measurable - The goal and its benefits should be quantifiable.

Achievable - The goal should be attainable given available resources.

Realistic - The goal should require you to stretch some but allow the likelihood of success.

Timely - The goal should state the time period in which it will be accomplished.

Examples:

- Acquire three new hygiene patients each quarter.
- Reach and maintain 90 percent capacity for each workday by calling inactive patients, rescheduling missed appointments and verifying my appointments.

Positive Attribute Examples

- Adapts well to change
- Works well under pressure
- Maintains a positive attitude when under stress
- Is an active listener
- Demonstrates effective communication skills
- Is highly professional
- Is someone who can be depended on
- Manages time well
- Seeks out responsibility and follows through
- Pays attention to details
- Seeks professional development opportunities
- Follows directions well
- Accepts responsibility willingly
- Exceeds expectations
- Is highly conscientious about the quality of work
- Gets along well with coworkers

- Strives to cooperate with all staff
- Takes criticism well and learns from mistakes
- Works well independently
- Accepts responsibility eagerly
- Shows great flexibility
- Isn't afraid to ask questions
- Shares information clearly and concisely

Examples of Performance Improvement Feedback

- Is developing a better attitude toward (insert previous problem)
- Is showing more interest and enthusiasm
- Is demonstrating a higher degree of independence
- Has strengthened his/her skills in (insert area of improvement)
- I am encouraged at (insert name)'s level of commitment toward professional growth
- Needs to improve the speed to complete (insert type of task)
- Needs to demonstrate more of a team-player attitude
- Needs to improve on follow-through
- Capable of stronger performance in (insert area of weakness)
- Needs more training in (insert area)
- Sacrifices accuracy for speed
- Shows an inconsistency effort in (insert task)
- Is a poor time manager, consistently missing deadlines
- Doesn't listen to directions
- Has difficulty prioritizing workload
- Shows a lack of energy and/or interest in the work