



# ASSESSING STAFF PERFORMANCE

John Hackett ponders whether traditional performance appraisals have had their day.

I have been reading reports suggesting that conventional performance appraisals are not working. I have covered this topic before and outlined the elements of the traditional appraisal process, but some employers suggest that the “old way” is just too cumbersome, formal and time consuming and the impact it has on altering and improving employee performance appears minimal.

While we assume employees like to receive feedback there are studies that show many don’t enjoy it at all. Stanford University psychologist Carol Dweck, in her book *Mindset*, explains that people approach feedback with either a fixed mindset or a growth mindset. People with a fixed mindset believe “I am who I am”, while people with a growth mindset believe their qualities can be developed through hard work and application.

Therefore, a fixed mindset employee will be more sensitive to feedback and resistant to change in response to performance appraisals. But Dweck has also found that you can influence a person’s mindset, and by framing feedback in terms of its growth potential, you can help nudge your employees across to the growth mindset.

So are there different ways to appraise your employees’ performance?

Mona Patel, the CEO of Motivate Design, a New York-based creative design agency has

outlined an alternative approach. She said that she approached the performance review issue as a design problem and asked the question “how do we get maximum impact in minimal time”, and came up with what she terms the “Tough Love Review”.

Patel describes this as a 10-minute, one-on-one conversation with each employee, to talk through one thing they are doing exceptionally well and one thing that they need to improve to reach that next level.

Patel says that firstly, she creates a spreadsheet with three columns:

1. Employee Name
2. “Tough”, outlining one work performance issue, goal missed or interpersonal problem, etc.
3. “Love”, outlining one highlight, goal achieved or accomplishment, etc.

At the beginning of the review she explains to each employee that the goal of the discussion is to bring awareness to both achievements and areas to work on. She then asks how each employee would like to receive advice on a scale of one to 10, with one being kind and nurturing, and 10 being pointed and direct. This scale gives control to the employee and by tailoring your messaging, reassures the employee that this process is all about helping them.

You then discuss the “Tough” and “Love” sections of the review. Patel says for responses of seven or higher, start with the “Tough” discussion, and for responses of four or lower begin with “Love”. For responses that fall in-between ask the employee “What do you think needs work?” which brings the “Tough” discussion to the forefront, so you can then end the discussion with “Love”.

Let the employee know that they will work with their manager to craft an action and accountability plan after the review is completed and finally, allow the employee to provide whatever response they want to close out the review session.

Patel says the end result is a meaningful conversation that gives employees a choice in how the conversation unfolds, and results in two key takeaways that are memorable and actionable.

Since implementing this approach Patel says she has seen a significant and constructive change in her employees. Approaching reviews this way has given her a meaningful touch point with each employee; to thank them for the great work they do, but equally has assisted employees to determine what is holding them back from realising their potential and also empowering them to help their career and, therefore, the company flourish. **m**

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