Supervisor's Guide to Performance Management

Beta Test
October, 2016 - March, 2017

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the Beta testing of the revised Performance Management system! Your willingness to test the system and provide constructive feedback is important to ensuring a well-designed system and a successful implementation when it is rolled out to the entire City.

The goal of the orientation session is to train and prepare you for success. As you get into the process and have questions or concerns, you can count on getting whatever support you need.

Contact:

- Lenear Watson, ext. 6123, for questions about sensitive or confidential employee performance issues, for coaching on any aspect of the system, or to confirm documentation requirements.

- Pam Kisslinger, ext. 6134, or your department's Leadership Council representative, with questions about the performance management process, expectations and Beta requirements - or for coaching on any aspect of the system.

BETA TIMELINE

2016	Before Sept. 30	● Complete orientation training
	Oct. 1	● Beta begins - Staff orientation
	Oct. 31	● Complete first Check-In
	Nov. 9	● Hosted lunch and feedback
2017	End Jan.	● Direct Report feedback survey
	Feb. 15	● Hosted lunch/feedback and appraisal prep
	March	● Complete two additional Check-Ins
	March	● Complete Year-End Appraisal and Year-End Discussion
	April	● Complete Beta feedback
	June-Aug.	● Organization-wide communication & training
2018	March	● Full system implementation

Introduction

Having completed the rollout of the mission, vision, and core values, the City of Overland Park, consistent with emerging trends and employee feedback, is initiating an updated performance management system that encourages all supervisors and staff to join in the following vision:

A system designed to support a ***culture*** that brings out the best in all employees by engaging in performance-building conversations throughout the year that strengthen ***accountability to our mission***, ***stretch us toward our vision,*** and ***embody our core values***.

Accountability to Our Mission

> *We plan, build, protect, and preserve a lasting quality of life in Overland Park.*

Stretching to Our Vision

> *We are a trustworthy, agile, and innovative organization with an engaged workforce committed to strengthening the vitality of our community.*

Embodying Core Values...

- o Reinforces **Integrity** through performance accountability & professionalism
- o Demonstrates **Stewardship** by supporting the growth and success of our employees
- o Fosters **Relationship Building** - supervisors - staff and teamwork
- o Demonstrates mutual **Respect** through our interactions
- o Strengthens our **Service Commitment** and service abilities
- o Focuses on the **Pursuit of Excellence** through accountability for results, goal setting, innovation and continuous improvement

Three Foundations

The new system is built on three foundations, summarized as follows:

Foundation #1: Growth Mindset

Growth Mindset

- You are never done learning!

- Success is achieved more from effort to grow than fixed, innate ability

- Best performance comes from less focus on proving, and more focus on *improving*

- Emphasizes *process* - growth and learning from daily experience

Growth Mindset Messages

- *I believe in your ability to keep learning and improving*
- *It's safe to take risks*
- *I encourage your development*
- *I've got your back*

Foundation #2: Maximize Strengths

"People who have the opportunity to focus on their strengths every day are six times as likely to be engaged in their jobs." (StrengthsFinder 2.0)

This system shifts from a traditional performance management focus on identifying and fixing deficiencies or weaknesses to encouraging employees to grow and develop in areas of their greatest potential. Strengths involve more than just being good at something. Strengths are the activities that also fill you with energy and create a sense of satisfaction and confidence.

Maximizing strengths does not mean that you ignore problem areas or poor performance or that employees can skip learning essential job skills less suited to their interests. There is no question that managing performance requires addressing weaknesses and holding employees accountable for performance gaps.

Working from a foundation of Maximizing Strengths challenges us to:

- Explore if a performance gap can be filled using an approach more consistent with a strength, and
- Look for opportunities for employees to use strengths on the job as much as possible.

This Handbook includes a set of questions to prompt discussions for identifying and maximizing strengths. For more information about Maximizing Strengths, refer to StrengthsFinder 2.0 and search for Marcus Buckingham online.

Foundation #3: Supervisor as Coach

A key supervisory role is that of a coach. Yet, time pressures, competing priorities and lack of skill can challenge many supervisors to fulfill this important responsibility. One goal of the new performance management system is to create a coaching *culture*, that is*,* an energized work environment where "pursuit of excellence" through feedback and learning is the norm. Regular, active and effective coaching focuses not only on achieving results and meeting organizational goals, but addresses *employee's* needs, opportunities and challenges, builds strengths and nurtures a growth mindset, resulting in:

- Performance improvement

- Professional and career development

- Increased creativity, engagement, motivation

- Strengthened relationship and trust between supervisor and staff

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Supervisor as Coach

- Provides regular feedback as a means to strengthen performance
- Focuses on "feed forward" - Coaching in advance to maximize probability of success
- Provides feedback, as well as "feed forward*"
- Ensures employees have what they need to potentially succeed
- Relates to employees as people first
- Results in stronger, more trusting relationships

   Coaching Messages

- *Results are important AND your success and wellbeing are important*
- *How can we tap into what engages you?*
- *I'll help you reach your best possible performance*
- *Your input is valued / What you do matters*
- *I have time for you*

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* Feedforward is a term coined by Marshall Goldsmith to describe the process of a future-oriented, idea-generating approach to performance improvement. For more on this, refer to the article in Supplemental Resources and search online for Marshall Goldsmith and Feedforward.

Highlights of the New System:

Building on the three foundations, and in response to feedback from City employees, this system is designed with two goals in mind: 1) Appraise Performance, and 2) Grow Performance, with:

| Less Emphasis on...	More ...
Written Documentation	Time on conversation between supervisors and staff
Year-end ratings & appraisal	Ongoing feedback & coaching throughout the year
Past performance	Future performance
Proving	Improving
Managing	Leading

System Components

- New **Performance Dimensions** reflect mission, vision, and core values; replace the "wheel" as the framework for all system components and performance factors for the appraisal.

- A simplified **Year-End Appraisal** describes and documents past performance; Factors into compensation; Updated **performance descriptors** offer greater performance distinctions.

- New **Employee Wrap-Up** shifts the focus of the **Year-End Discussion** to encourage more reflection, learning and goal setting.

- Introduces **Check-Ins** - periodic *conversations (not appraisals)* between supervisors and employees designed to strengthen performance and engagement.

- Integrates **Rewards, Redirection/Discipline, and routine observations and interactions** as part of the ongoing Performance Management process.
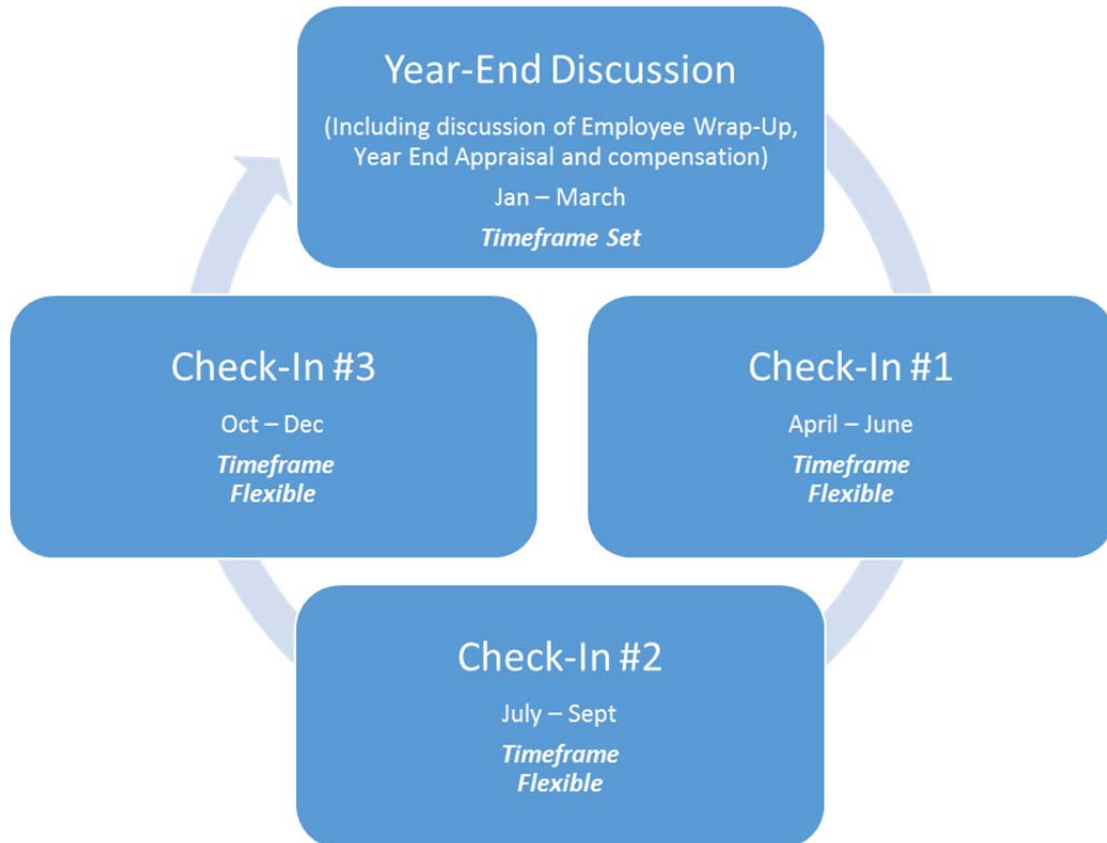
Ongoing Growth

Ongoing Appraisal

Check-Ins

Year-End Appraisal & Employee Wrap-up

Year-End Discussion

Recognition

Redirection Discipline

Routine observations, interactions documentation
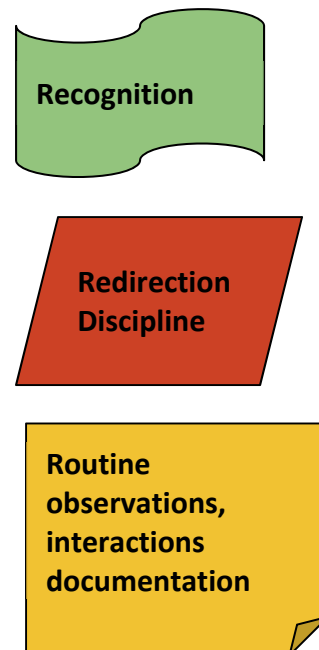
Sample Check-In Timeframe

Here is a typical timeframe, with Check-Ins conducted quarterly. Your timing may vary, depending on your Department work and review schedule. Make sure that Check-Ins are spread out over the year. Once you get into the Check-In habit, you may find a need or interest for more than three in a year.

Year-End Discussion

(Including discussion of Employee Wrap-Up, Year End Appraisal and compensation)

Jan – March

Timeframe Set

Check-In #3

Oct – Dec

Timeframe Flexible

Check-In #1

April – June

Timeframe Flexible

Check-In #2

July – Sept

Timeframe Flexible

- What Check-In schedules would work best for your department and work flow?

Performance Dimensions

The new system introduces a set of four Performance Dimensions that reflect the Mission, Vision, and Core Values. Each dimension is defined by a variety of skills and behaviors that represent what "Living OP" means. While the four Performance Dimensions apply to all City employees, they may be expressed in many different and unique ways. Part of the agility of the new system is the option for departments to identify behaviors most descriptive and important to their positions, levels and functions.

PROFESSIONALISM Demonstrates personal qualities and behaviors that reinforce core values Personal Leadership Commitment Growth Mindset Trustworthiness Communication Emotional Intelligence Leads by Example	**ACHIEVING RESULTS** Demonstrates required competencies and can be counted on to achieve desired outcomes Competency Accountability Initiative Service Orientation Organizational Skills Problem Solving Time Management Performance Management
TEAMWORK Builds respectful relationships and works with others in ways that maximize strengths and engagement Interpersonal Skills Collaboration Engagement Inclusiveness Support Team Leadership	**FORWARD THINKING** Thinks strategically and regularly looks for innovative solutions for meeting current and future needs Continuous Improvement Open to Change Strategic Innovative Adaptive Staying Current

Performance Dimensions Detail

Professionalism

- Is personally trustworthy
- Can be counted on to keep commitments
- Demonstrates high ethical standards
- Maximizes personal and professional strengths
- Embraces challenge, even at risk of failure
- Asks for help when needed
- Stays calm, even under stress
- Can be counted on to maintain confidentiality
- Creates opportunities to learn and grow
- Leads by example
- Works for the greater good, not just individual reward
- Communicates with others in a professional and respectful way
- Is articulate when expressing ideas or information
- Is willing to do the right thing, even if not popular
- Has a positive influence on others

Achieving Results

- Takes action to get things done
- Effectively sets priorities
- Effectively organizes work and resources
- Demonstrates technical/professional expertise
- Is articulate when expressing ideas and information
- Puts customer needs first
- Holds self and others accountable
- Uses time/City resources wisely
- Effectively anticipates and solves problems
- *Communicates clear goals and expectations**
- *Provides constructive feedback without creating defensiveness**
- *Takes time to coach employees to help them improve job performance*
- *Addresses performance issues in a timely way**
- *Reinforces safe work practice**

Teamwork

- Connects with others at a personal level
- Openly shares information & expertise that others need
- Asks others for input on decisions that affect them
- Helps others feel valued and appreciated
- Encourages different ideas and perspectives
- Collaborates effectively across boundaries
- Challenges others to stretch beyond current abilities
- Makes others feel listened to and respected
- Is willing to confront disrespectful behaviors in others
- Encourages respect for individual differences
- Resolves conflict effectively
- *Clarifies team roles and responsibilities**
- *Provides feedback for development, not criticism**
- *Communicates trust in staff**
- *Makes a point of praising positive performance**
- *Takes time to celebrate successes*

Forward Thinking

- Identifies opportunities for improvement
- Takes time for after-action reviews to identify lessons learned
- Is willing to let go of what no longer works
- Is open to innovative solutions
- Actively supports change initiatives
- Takes calculated risks
- Engages others in discussions on how to meet changing needs in the City and community
- Builds strategic partnerships and alliances
- Anticipates long term needs and priorities (department and city)
- Takes into account how actions may impact others now and in the future
- Stays current with developments impacting the work
- Encourages others to move out of their comfort zones try new and more effective ways to work

*Supervisory or Team Leadership behaviors

Check-Ins

Check-ins are defined as *Periodic* conversations to *"check in"* on progress, challenges, needs and interests from both the supervisor's and the employee's perspectives, with the goal of positively impacting **future** performance and *engagement.* The goal is to generate more frequent, meaningful, and productive conversations between supervisors and their staff.

What's most important about check-ins is that they create open, two-way conversations that employees register not as a performance evaluation, but as a time reserved for that employee to receive feedback, guidance, and support for what will help them reach their best performance and meet their professional goals. It is a time to strengthen the supervisor - employee relationship.

Check-Ins do not replace ongoing feedback or actions taken to recognize or redirect performance. Here are a few ways they differ from a traditional performance review or a routine status check:

- Being a "partnership conversation," the agenda is set by both supervisory and employee.
- While this can be a time to talk about performance issues, the tone of the check-in is intended to be positive, engaging, and forward thinking. The supervisor serves as coach, adapting to the needs and style of the employee.
- Check-ins can address all four Performance Dimensions. This keeps it from being solely focused on the goals and behaviors represented in Achieving Results. It's a time to talk about not only *what's* being accomplished, but *how* the work is being done, what's being learned and how to continue growing and developing individually and as a contributor to the City.
- The check-in coach approaches the interaction as a skillful listener (Read what *Great Listeners Actually Do*, HBR, included in prep materials.)
- Check-Ins build engagement in the work and strengthen relationships and trust with the supervisor.

The effective Check-In coach continuously listens for the needs, opportunities, and challenges that surface in the conversation. You want to communicate your shared goal of achieving the employee's best possible performance and supporting their development and career goals.

Where? How Long? What to Discuss?

There is no one set way to conduct a check in. No set amount of time. Or frequency. The requirement is to hold a minimum of three documented check-ins each year, though many organizations have adopted a more frequent schedule.

A 10 or 15-minute meeting that covers the supervisor's and employee's Check-In topics may be all that is needed for some employees. This can take place in any environment - office or field, inside or outside.

Each supervisor, with their employees, can determine the need and focus for Check-Ins, which can vary for each employee. You may find that more frequent check-ins are beneficial to some employees, but not needed by others. For example:

- The experienced, self-motivated, high-performing employee may need fewer check-ins and focus more on building opportunities to expand professional responsibilities and skills.

- The new employee still figuring out the job and the organization may need more frequent check-ins with more direct guidance and instruction.

- The underachiever with ability, but low motivation could perhaps benefit from more supportive check-ins to explore opportunities to develop or better use their strengths or expand job responsibilities.

- The experienced employee starting a new work assignment or responsibility may need more frequent direct coaching and support as he/she builds new skill and confidence.

Respect Your Own Learning Process

Conducting great Check-Ins may take time and involve your own development process. For many, it will take new skills and a focus that may feel uncomfortable at first. Adopt your own growth mindset! Be patient, keep a sense of humor and stay confident that you can do it. Ask for help when you need it and make use of the many resources available to you. Ask for feedback from your employees so that you can all learn as you go.

Preparing for a Check-In

By design, check-ins are less formal and scripted than performance reviews. While you will want to be prepared, remember that you are not the only driver of this conversation. Encourage employees to come with their own priorities and agenda and start the conversation there. Offer the option of the Preparation Worksheet. While you may have specific things that you wish to talk about, we want employees to feel that this is time reserved for them. As a coach, you will deliver needed feedback and offer a balance of guidance and support to help them reach their best performance and their goals.

Schedule the Check-In with employee at least one week out.

Supervisor Preparation Worksheet

- Opportunities for positive and/or developmental feedback and lessons learned during the past check-in period.

- Status check on current priorities, e.g. current work, improvement plans, development goals.

- Review the **Performance Dimensions Detail**. Identify specific behaviors in any of the four Performance Dimensions that you want to talk about with feedback, coaching or goal setting.

- Challenges and Learning Prompts/Strengths development.

- **Update goals, priorities and expectations**, including development goals.

- Identify opening questions or conversation starters (Remember Ask first, then tell!)
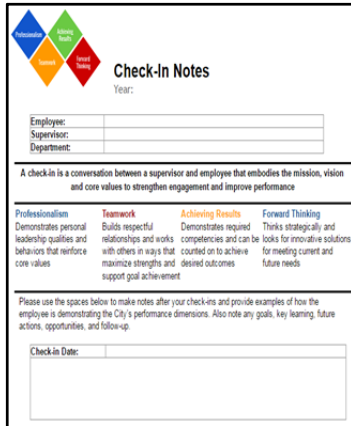
Employee Check-In Preparation

You can use this worksheet to identify the topics that you wish to discuss at your upcoming Check-In.

- ○ Priority topics for you - what do you most want to talk about?

- ○ Behaviors you want to discuss from Performance Dimensions Detail

- ○ Guidance or support needs for current or future work

- ○ Current challenges

- ○ New opportunities to use or develop under-used skills or strengths

- ○ Career growth and support

- ○ New goals, priorities or expectations that need to be established and planned for, including development goals

Check-In Documentation

Check-In Notes provide running documentation of your Check-In conversations.

Refer to the shared Beta Participant folder in Google Drive for the Check-In Notes template. Go to "File", "Make a Copy" to create a copy for each employee participating in the Beta Test. These copies will be saved directly to your own personal Google Drive.

Check-In Notes:
- Make as detailed as needed to record highlights, agreements and plans
- Update goals and priorities
- Include examples of performance dimensions to reference at year-end
- Kept to support Year-End Appraisal
- Retained by Supervisor

Documentation Guidelines

Established performance documentation guidelines apply to Check-In Notes:

Do Document
- Facts
- Performance Issues
- Performance Improvement plans
- Follow-up Plans
- Formal Discipline
- Referrals made
- Rewards/Recognition

Don't Document
- Your personal feelings
- Your interpretation of 'Why"
- Your conclusions about employee's medical or mental health status

The Wrap-Up Discussion

The purpose of the Wrap-Up Discussion is twofold:

1. To talk through the items on the Employee Wrap-Up, completed in advance by the employee.
2. Discuss the Year-End Appraisal and communicate compensation decisions (if available)

The **Employee Wrap Up** invites a somewhat different kind of end-of-year discussion, as you will see from the form. The goal is to combine a review of accomplishments and performance, pausing to reflect on the year's highlights, challenges and learning. It's an opportunity to celebrate past successes, clarify goals and priorities and talk about what is needed for the employee to do his or her best work going forward. Note that this includes employee self-appraisal of the performance dimensions and a prompt for feedback about what is needed from you and others to support their best work. This is intended to ensure employees get the support they need to achieve their best performance going forward.

The **Year-End Appraisal** form is a simple one-page document on which you select the performance descriptor most accurate for each of the four Performance Dimensions and for overall performance. A space is provided for brief comments (no more than 500 words.) It is used to summarize your evaluation past year performance, which can serve to justify merit pay decisions and officially document performance.

To complete the Year-End Appraisal:

- Review the Employee Wrap Up, including employee's appraisal of each Performance Dimension.
- Review Check-In notes and any other documentation you've generated throughout the review period for examples and comments that support your ratings in the four Performance Dimensions.
- Note examples of positive Recognition from you or others.
- Review any Performance Notes documenting Redirection or Discipline discussions. How often have these discussions occurred over the review period? Has there been improvement? Is there still need for corrective action?
- Determine which of the Performance Descriptors best fit the employee's performance in each Performance Dimension and Overall.
- Fill in summary comments in the space provided to explain ratings and provide examples.
- Follow your department's protocol for submitting the Year-End Appraisal to the HR Department.

Performance Descriptors

Underperformer	Performer	Contributor	Key Contributor
Marginally meets job expectations periodically falls below them	Consistently meets and occasionally exceeds expectations and performance criteria	Often exceeds job expectations and performance criteria; contributes beyond core responsibilities	Consistently performs beyond expectations; demonstrates leadership and positively impacts the organization

Performance Management Blank Forms

Check-In Notes

Year:

Employee:	
Supervisor:	
Department:	

Conversations between supervisors and employees to "check in" on progress, challenges, needs and interests with the goal of positively impacting future performance and engagement.

Professionalism	**Teamwork**	**Achieving Results**	**Forward Thinking**
Demonstrates personal leadership qualities and behaviors that reinforce core values	Builds respectful relationships and works with others in ways that maximize strengths and support goal achievement	Demonstrates required competencies and can be counted on to achieve desired outcomes	Thinks strategically and looks for innovative solutions for meeting current and future needs

Use the spaces below to make notes to after your check-ins, including examples of how the employee is demonstrating the four performance dimensions. Note goals, key learning, future actions, opportunities, and follow-up plans.

Check-in Date:	

Check-in Date:	

Check-in Date:	

Employee Year-End Wrap Up

This Wrap Up is designed to provide reflection on the past year and gear up for the next.

Looking back …

What were the highlights of the past year for you?

Biggest challenges? Biggest opportunities for growth and learning?

To what extent did you get the support, guidance and feedback you needed to do your best work?

1 (not at all)	2	3	4	5 (all I needed)

What support, guidance or feedback was most helpful? What else would have been helpful?

How would you describe your performance in the four Performance Dimensions? (Descriptions on second page)

	Under Performer	Performer	Contributor	Key Contributor
Professionalism				
Teamwork				
Achieving Results				
Forward Thinking				

Comments

What would you have done differently, if anything, in any of the four Performance Dimensions?

What changes do you anticipate in your work priorities for next year/check-in period?

Where do you have opportunities and/or need to improve your performance?

Where are your greatest opportunities and/or interests for growth and development?

What would support your best performance and professional growth next year?

Descriptions

Performance Dimensions:

Professionalism	Teamwork	Achieving Results	Forward Thinking
Demonstrates personal leadership qualities and behaviors that reinforce core values	Builds respectful relationships and works with others in ways that maximize strengths and support goal achievement	Demonstrates required competencies and can be counted on to achieve desired outcomes	Thinks strategically and looks for innovative solutions for meeting current and future needs

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Year End Appraisal

Year:

Employee:	
Supervisor:	
Cost Center:	
Department:	

Performance Dimension Appraisal

Select the option that best describes performance in each dimension. See back page for definitions

	Under Performer	Performer	Contributor	Key Contributor
Professionalism				
Teamwork				
Achieving Results				
Forward Thinking				

Overall Performance Appraisal

	Under Performer	Performer	Contributor	Key Contributor
Overall				

Please provide summary comments below (limit 500 words or less):

Signatures

Employee signature is requested to verify that material was reviewed with the employee. *(The employee's signature only confirms that the material was reviewed with the employee.)*

_____   _____

Employee   Date

_____   _____

Supervisor   Date

Year-End Appraisal: Descriptions

Performance Dimensions:

Professionalism	Teamwork	Achieving Results	Forward Thinking
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Supplemental Resources

Effective Check-Ins: Balancing Guidance and Support

Recognize that employee needs change over time. For any one Check-In, listen carefully to determine the right balance of:

Guidance to strengthen *Ability*   - and -   *Support* to strengthen *Confidence and Motivation*

- *Are goals specific and clear?*
  Confirm targets and expectations

- *Does employee know how?*
  Provide direction and/or training

- *Is employee progressing?*
  Provide observations, feedback, practice

- Use Four Key Check-In Skills

  - Active Listening

  - Ask Good Questions

  - Feedback & Feed Forward

  - Be encouraging

Four Key Check-In Skills

Here are four skills that support effective Check-Ins in more detail:

Active Listening	Provide Feedback and Feed Forward
• Being fully present - minimizing distractions • Listen to - employee feelings heard • Listen for - where you can help with needs, opportunities and challenges • Confirm Understanding (Two-way)	• Lessons learned from the past • Coaching for future success
Ask Good Questions	**Be Encouraging**
• Open-ended • Stimulate thinking and learning / invite ideas • Future focused • More "what" and "how" - less "why"	• Express confidence • Provide support & resources • Acknowledge improvements • Avoid being judgmental or critical

Read *What Great Listeners Actually Do*, HBR, included in the resource section of this handbook.

"I don't think we give enough regard to how personal feelings factor into the equation. If you can understand how people feel about the task or goal at hand, the rest of it becomes a whole lot easier. People will work harder for you if they believe you have their best interests at heart and that you are setting them up to win. While we tend to talk strategically about developing people and goal setting, it's important to realize that we are also looking to create a relationship where people want to work hard for you."

Managing in a Busy World, Ignite Newsletter, Ken Blanchard Company, July, 2016

Sample Coaching Questions

While Check-Ins are best a free-flowing conversation, it can be helpful to come prepared with a few questions to target the areas you want to discuss and encourage an open discussion. The following sets of questions are included as examples of the types of questions you might ask to initiate and conduct your Check-Ins:

Initiating the Check-In

- How are you doing?
- What's on your mind today?
- What would you like to talk about?
- And What Else? (AWE)

Targeted to Performance Dimensions

Achieving Results

- Are you on track and making progress? What's going well? Where are there blocks?
- What is most challenging for you with this work/these days?
- What's most satisfying about your work these days?
- Do you have the resources & support you need?

Teamwork

- How are things going with _____?
- Where are your opportunities to strengthen teamwork?
- How can you take a stronger lead on that project …
- How can I help?

Professionalism

- Would you like to talk about how to handle (that recent difficult situation) next time?
- How might you build your credibility with the group?
- What have you learned from this that will help next time?
- What development goals would you like to discuss?
- How do you think you could be more effective?

Forward Thinking

- Looking ahead, where are your best opportunities for growth & improvement?
- Where do you see opportunities for change or improvement in our work processes?
- What resources and supports do you need to be successful?
- What would get in the way of your being successful?
- Let's set some new goals and priorities.

Setting Goals for Upcoming Check-In Period

One benefit of periodic check-ins is the ability to keep goals up-to-date and top of mind. These questions may help draw out future priorities and help employees think through their work goals. You can always build on the employee's responses and add your input and direction to make sure expectations and goals are clear going forward. However, asking the employee to initiate the goal conversation can create more ownership and engagement in the process.

1. What are your primary work goals and priorities for this check-in period?

2. What would you most want to accomplish during this upcoming check-in period?

3. How can you make your goals SMART?

4. What do you need to be most successful in meeting those goals? (Check on ability/skills; support/input from others; system/resource needs)

5. Is there anything that would get in the way of your being successful that we can address up front?

6. How often would you like meet with me to discuss your progress?

Develop SMART Goals

SMART Goals provide clarity and measurable targets and can serve to both motivate and track progress:

S - Specific - (Exactly what would success look like?)

M - Measurable - (how many/by when/what impact? How will you know you are successful?)

A - Attainable - (aligns with ability, schedule and resources)

R - Realistic - (Is success possible?)

T - Timebound (what specific deadline or milestones along the way?)

Identifying and Maximizing Strengths

You may not choose to discuss strengths at every check-in, but these questions can help prompt a good strengths discussion, build rapport, identify opportunities and strengthen engagement.

1. Which activities or job duties energize you and give you a sense of satisfaction?
2. What have you been able to learn quickly - what comes naturally to you?
3. What's easy for you to be good at? Teach others?
4. What activities do you do that make you feel strong and confident?
5. Are there talents you aren't using now that would benefit the team?
6. What ideas do you have for making even better use of your strengths?

Professional Development and "Stay" Conversations

These questions can help prompt professional and career development discussions and build on the strengths discussion:

1. Do you have any professional development goals related to your current work that you would like to talk about?

2. In what areas are you interested in growing or developing?

    a. Are there any particular skills you want to learn?
    b. Are there specific challenges or situations you want to experience?

3. Who could serve as an additional coach or mentor for you?

4. What career ideas or goals have you been considering?

5. What do you see as your next steps?

6. How can I help?

The opportunity to learn and grow on the job is a prime motivator for many employees, as well as a major factor in employee retention. You may want to take the opportunity during a Check-in for a "Stay" conversation, prompted by questions, such as:

- What's important to you in your decision to stay with the City?

- What could inspire you to leave?

- What about your job makes you want to take the day off?

Q12 - Engagement According to Gallup

One of the key Check-In goals is to "strengthen employee engagement." But, you may ask, what does that really mean? Research has identified "making progress" as one of the key factors in engagement. When employees feel like they are making progress towards organizational and professional goals, they tend to be more focused, motivated and engaged.

The Gallup Organization has identified 12 questions that have been shown to indicate employee engagement. Addressing these questions can support effective Check-Ins. The items in bold have been identified as most critical, though they are all important.

Read the 12 Questions and ask yourself...

- How would your employees answer these questions?
- Which of these items can you most influence as a supervisor?
- Where is there opportunity for you to address some of these items in your Check-Ins?

Gallup Q12

Why am I here?

1. **Do I know what is expected of me?**
2. **Do I have the materials & equipment I need to do my work right?**

How am I doing?

3. **At work, do I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day?**
4. In the last seven days, have I received recognition or praise for doing good work?
5. Does my supervisor, or someone at work, seem to care about me as a person?

Do I belong?

6. At work, do my opinions seem to count?
7. Does the mission / purpose make me feel my job is important?
8. Are my co-workers committed to doing quality work?
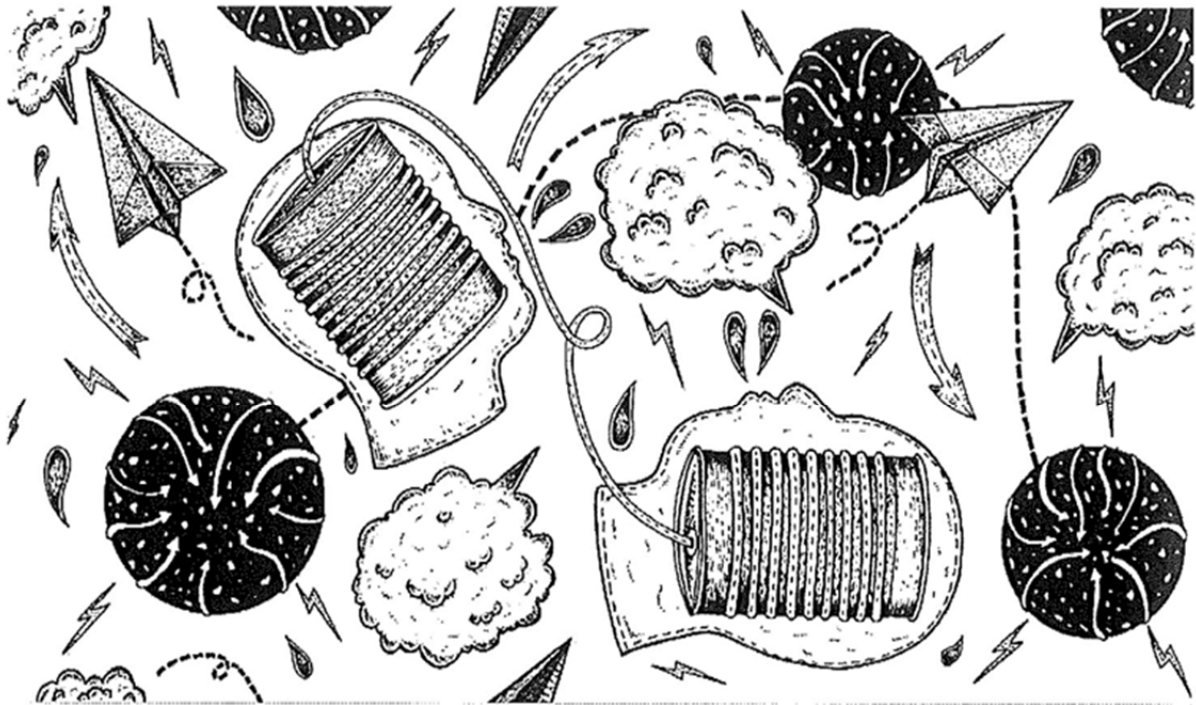9. Do I have a best friend at work?

Am I growing?

10. Is there someone at work who encourages my development?
11. In the last 6 months, has someone at work talked to me about my progress?
12. This last year, have I had opportunities at work to learn and grow?

COMMUNICATION

What Great Listeners Actually Do

by Jack Zenger and Joseph Folkman

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Chances are you think you're a good listener. People's appraisal of their listening ability is much like their assessment of their driving skills, in that the great bulk of adults think they're above average.

In our experience, most people think good listening comes down to doing three things:

- Not talking when others are speaking
- Letting others know you're listening through facial expressions and verbal sounds ("Mmm-hmm")

- **Good listening was seen as a cooperative conversation.** In these interactions, feedback flowed smoothly in both directions with neither party becoming defensive about comments the other made. By contrast, poor listeners were seen as competitive — as listening only to identify errors in reasoning or logic, using their silence as a chance to prepare their next response. That might make you an excellent debater, but it doesn't make you a good listener. Good listeners may challenge assumptions and disagree, but the person being listened to feels the listener is trying to help, not wanting to win an argument.
- **Good listeners tended to make suggestions**. Good listening invariably included some feedback provided in a way others would accept and that opened up alternative paths to consider. This finding somewhat surprised us, since it's not uncommon to hear complaints that "So-and-so didn't listen, he just jumped in and tried to solve the problem." Perhaps what the data is telling us is that making suggestions is not itself the problem; it may be the skill with which those suggestions are made. Another possibility is that we're more likely to accept suggestions from people we already think are good listeners. (Someone who is silent for the whole conversation and then jumps in with a suggestion may not be seen as credible. Someone who seems combative or critical and then tries to give advice may not be seen as trustworthy.)

While many of us have thought of being a good listener being like a sponge that accurately absorbs what the other person is saying, instead, what these findings show is that good listeners are like trampolines. They are someone you can bounce ideas off of — and rather than absorbing your ideas and energy, they amplify, energize, and clarify your thinking. They make you feel better not merely passively absorbing, but by actively supporting. This lets you gain energy and height, just like someone jumping on a trampoline.

Of course, there are different levels of listening. Not every conversation requires the highest levels of listening, but many conversations would benefit from greater focus and listening skill. Consider which level of listening you'd like to aim for:

Level 1: The listener creates a safe environment in which difficult, complex, or emotional issues can be discussed.

Level 2: The listener clears away distractions like phones and laptops, focusing attention on the other person and making appropriate eye-contact. (This behavior not only affects how you are perceived as the listener; it immediately influences the listener's *own* attitudes and inner feelings.

Acting the part changes how you feel inside. This in turn makes you a better listener.)

Level 3: The listener seeks to understand the substance of what the other person is saying. They capture ideas, ask questions, and restate issues to confirm that their understanding is correct.

Level 4: The listener observes nonbverbal cues, such as facial expressions, perspiration, respiration rates, gestures, posture, and numerous other subtle body language signals. It is estimated that 80% of what we communicate comes from these signals. It sounds strange to some, but you listen with your eyes as well as your ears.

Level 5: The listener increasingly understands the other person's emotions and feelings about the topic at hand, and identifies and acknowledges them. The listener empathizes with and validates those feelings in a supportive, nonjudgmental way.

Level 6: The listener asks questions that clarify assumptions the other person holds and helps the other person to see the issue in a new light. This could include the listener injecting some thoughts and ideas about the topic that could be useful to the other person. However, good listeners never highjack the conversation so that they or their issues become the subject of the discussion.

Each of the levels builds on the others; thus, if you've been criticized (for example) for offering solutions rather than listening, it may mean you need to attend to some of the other levels (such as clearing away distractions or empathizing) before your proffered suggestions can be appreciated.

We suspect that in being a good listener, most of us are more likely to stop short rather than go too far. Our hope is that this research will help by providing a new perspective on listening. We hope those who labor under an illusion of superiority about their listening skills will see where they really stand. We also hope the common perception that good listening is mainly about acting like an absorbent sponge will wane. Finally, we hope all will see that the highest and best form of listening comes in playing the same role for the other person that a trampoline plays for a child. It gives energy, acceleration, height and amplification. These are the hallmarks of great listening.

Try Feedforward Instead of Feedback

Giving and receiving feedback has long been considered an essential skill for leaders. As they strive to achieve the goals of the organization, employees need to know how they are doing. They need to know if their performance is what their leaders expect from them and, if not, they need suggestions on how to improve it. Traditionally, this information has been communicated in the form of feedback from leaders to their employees. And leaders, themselves, need feedback from their employees, in the form of suggestions for how to improve procedures and processes, innovative ideas for new products and services, and input on their own leadership styles. This has become increasingly common with the advent of 360° feedback.

But there is a fundamental problem with feedback: it focuses on the *past*, on what has already occurred-not on the infinite variety of things that can be, in the future. As such, feedback can be limited and static, as opposed to expansive and dynamic.

Ten Reasons to Try Feedforward

1.   We can change the future. We can't change the past. Feedforward helps people envision and focus on a positive future, not a failed past. Athletes are often trained using feedforward. Race Car drivers are taught to "look at the road, not the wall." Basketball players are taught to envision the ball going in the hoop and to imagine the perfect shot. By giving people ideas on how they can be even more successful, we can increase their chances of achieving this success in the future.

2.   It can be more productive to help people be "right," than prove they were "wrong." Negative feedback often becomes an exercise in "let me prove you were wrong." This tends to produce defensiveness on the part of the receiver and discomfort on the part of the sender. Even constructively delivered feedback is often seen as negative as it necessarily involves a discussion of mistakes, shortfalls, and problems. Feedforward, on the other hand, is almost always seen positively because it focuses on solutions.

3.   Feedforward is especially suited to successful people. Successful people like getting ideas that are aimed at helping them achieve their goals. They tend to resist negative judgment. We all tend to accept feedback that is consistent with the way we see ourselves. We also tend to reject or deny feedback that is inconsistent with the way we see ourselves. Successful people tend to have a very positive self-image. I have observed many successful executives respond to (and even enjoy) feedforward. I am not sure that these same people would have had such a positive reaction to feedback.

4.   Feedforward can come from anyone who knows about the task. It does not require personal experience with the individual. One very common positive reaction to the previously described exercise is that participants are amazed by how much they can learn from people that they don't even know! For example, if you want to be a better listener, almost any fellow leader can give you ideas on how you can improve. They don't have to know you. Feedback requires knowing about the person. Feedforward just requires having good ideas for achieving the task.

5.   People do not take feedforward as personally as feedback. In theory, constructive feedback is supposed to "focus on the performance, not the person." In practice, almost all feedback is taken personally (no matter how it is delivered). Successful people's sense of identity is highly connected with their work. The more successful people are, the more this tends to be true. It is hard to give a dedicated professional feedback that is not taken personally. Feedforward cannot involve a personal critique, since it is discussing something that has not yet happened!

6. Feedback can reinforce personal stereotyping and negative self-fulfilling prophecies. Feedforward can reinforce the possibility of change. Feedback can reinforce the feeling of failure. How many of us have been "helped" by a spouse, significant other, or friend, who seems to have a near-photographic memory of our previous "sins" that they share with us in order to point out the history of our shortcomings. Negative feedback can be used to reinforce the message, "this is just the way you are." Feedforward is based on the assumption that people can make positive changes in the future.

7. Face it! Most of us hate getting negative feedback, and we don't like to give it. I have reviewed summary 360° feedback reports for over 50 companies. The items, "provides developmental feedback in a timely manner" and "encourages and accepts constructive criticism" almost always score near the bottom on co-worker satisfaction with leaders. Traditional training does not seem to make a great deal of difference. If leaders got better at providing feedback every time the performance appraisal forms were "improved," most should be perfect by now! Leaders are not very good at giving or receiving negative feedback. It is unlikely that this will change.

8. Feedforward can cover almost all of the same "material" as feedback. Imagine that you have just made a terrible presentation in front of the executive committee. Your manager is in the room. Rather than make you "relive" this humiliating experience, your manager might help you prepare for future presentations by giving you suggestions for the future. These suggestions can be very specific and still delivered in a positive way. In this way your manager can "cover the same points" without feeling as embarrassed and without making you feel even more humiliated.

9. Feedforward tends to be much faster and more efficient than feedback. An excellent technique for giving ideas to successful people is to say, "Here are four ideas for the future. Please accept these in the positive spirit that they are given. If you can only use two of the ideas, you are still two ahead. Just ignore what doesn't make sense for you." With this approach almost no time gets wasted on judging the quality of the ideas or "proving that the ideas are wrong." This "debate" time is usually negative; it can take up a lot of time, and it is often not very productive. By eliminating judgment of the ideas, the process becomes much more positive for the sender, as well as the receiver. Successful people tend to have a high need for self-determination and will tend to accept ideas that they "buy" while rejecting ideas that feel "forced" upon them.

10. Feedforward can be a useful tool to apply with managers, peers, and team members. Rightly or wrongly, feedback is associated with judgment. This can lead to very negative unintended consequences when applied to managers or peers. Feedforward does not imply superiority of judgment. It is more focused on being a helpful "fellow traveler" than an "expert." As such it can be easier to hear from a person who is not in a position of power or authority. An excellent team building exercise is to have each team member ask, "How can I better help our team in the future?" and listen to feedforward from fellow team members (in one-on-one dialogues.)

In summary, the intent of this article is not to imply that leaders should never give feedback or that performance appraisals should be abandoned. The intent is to show how feedforward can often be preferable to feedback in day-to-day interactions. Aside from its effectiveness and efficiency, feedforward can make life a lot more enjoyable. When managers are asked, "How did you feel the last time you received feedback?," their most common responses are very negative. When managers are asked how they felt after receiving feedforward, they reply that feedforward was not only useful, it was also fun!

Quality communication-between and among people at all levels and every department and division-is the glue that holds organizations together. By using feedforward-and by encouraging others to use it-leaders can dramatically improve the quality of communication in their organizations, ensuring that the right message is conveyed, and that those who receive it are receptive to its content. The result is a much more dynamic, much more open organization-one whose employees focus on the promise of the future rather than the mistakes of the past.

The Hardest Question to Ask

by Michael Bungay Stanier, author of [The Coaching Habit](#)

What is the hardest question to ask? What comes to mind for you? There are plenty that set you up for a potentially awkward social moment, for sure.

- How much do you earn?
- Will you marry me?
- What's this rash?
- Is that it?

But I'm not really talking about those. I'm talking about the questions you use in your day-to-day working life, the questions you ask to become a more effective manager and leader. And there's one question that's the hardest of them all. It also happens to be the most powerful coaching question in the world.

Anticipation…

Now, there's a problem with making a claim like that. People lean forward, expecting the big reveal. And hoping for something David Copperfield-esque, something big and impressive. And the hardest/best coaching question in the world is actually a little anticlimactic on first reveal.

Just three words:

"And what else?"

Already I can sense you raising your eyebrows, a little skeptical. "Is that it?"

Why it's So Powerful

"And what else?" — we'll call it the AWE question, as it's a punchy acronym — earns its crown because of the twofold power it packs.

First, it supercharges any other question you've asked. You should know that the first answer someone gives you is never their only answer, and it's rarely their best answer. Ask "And what else?" and you'll get more bang for your buck. Here's an example, using the focus question from my new book, [The Coaching Habit](#).

- "What's the real challenge here for you?"
- "And what else [is a challenge]?"
- "And what else?"
- "So… what's the real challenge here for you?"

Even without knowing the context or the answers, you can see how this conversation goes at least one level deeper than it would if you relied on just the answer to your initial question.

Why It's So Difficult

The second reason the AWE question works so well is also the reason it's the hardest question to ask. It's a self-management tool for you. Because when you ask "And what else?" you're choosing to stay curious rather than move into advice-giving mode.

And you *love* giving advice. You're an advice-giving maniac. A monster. You don't even know what the issue is, but you're already just waiting for the other person to be quiet so you can tell them what to do.

I know this, because it's true of almost every manager and leader I've worked with. Years of positive reinforcement, starting at school, to "add value" by having an answer means that it's the default behavior for most of us.

Giving advice feels comfortable, and not just because it's an old habit. It's a position of power. When you're giving advice, you're in control. You're the smart one. You know how the conversation is going to end.

When you instead ask a question, the balance of power shifts. Now *they* get to shape the direction of the conversation. Now *they're* doing the thinking. Now *they're* in control. Meantime, you've stepped into a place of ambiguity and uncertainty. Was that a good question? Was it the right question? Am I adding value? What answer will they give? What if it's not the answer I'm expecting? What if it's a crazy answer?

This is Empowerment

The "empowerment" drum has been beaten to such extent that it can now feel like an empty word, a piece of corporate jargon. Still, there's something powerful in the idea "*how do I help people take responsibility for their own freedom?*"

What's often missed in the discussion is that empowerment can mean giving up your power to someone else. That's not easy for anyone. But staying curious and mastering a powerful coaching question or two ("And what else?" is a perfect place to start) are acts of servant leadership. Which means it can be a fast way to raising your game as a powerful, useful and engaging leader.