Performance Management Guidelines

Updated March, 2018
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1. Introduction

The Performance Management guidelines are designed for university leadership, managers, employees and human resources personnel to use in conjunction with the Working @ VCU: “Great Place” HR Policies in the implementation of the Performance Management process for VCU University and Academic Professionals and Classified Employees. The objective is to provide a common understanding of the purpose, methods, and procedures involved in the performance management process at VCU.

Performance Management begins with the establishment of clear expectations and well-defined behaviors that cascade from the university’s strategic priorities and values to the school or unit level to each employee, providing a direct line of sight from the individual’s goals to the university’s mission and vision. It includes a mechanism for discussing useful and meaningful feedback on accomplishments and competencies, including coaching discussions on career growth as well as rewarding and recognizing high performers.

2. Performance Management Accountability & Responsibility

All University and Academic professionals and classified staff participate in the university’s performance management process. The successful implementation of the performance management process requires engagement of employees, managers, university leadership and human resources staff.

The Employee is responsible for:

- Providing input to managers in the performance planning process.
- Working collaboratively with the manager in the development, documentation and implementation of performance and career development goals which contribute to achievement of departmental goals and the university’s mission.
- Having a clear understanding of role expectations and requesting clarification when necessary.
- Discussing concerns and/or questions regarding any part of their job or the performance management process and addressing aspects of performance identified as needing improvement.
- Fully participating in performance discussions and review processes.
- Preparing annual performance reviews within established deadlines.
The **Manager** is responsible for:

- Understanding and actively supporting the university’s performance management process.
- Participating in developing appropriate position descriptions and monitoring the employee’s success toward meeting identified goals.
- Seeking input and providing support for the employee regarding individual performance and career development goals.
- Communicating and documenting each employee’s performance development plan.
- Engaging in ongoing discussions, feedback and communication with the employee to discuss progress toward achieving performance and career development goals.
- Addressing instances of poor performance or other significant performance issues in a timely manner and assisting employees in making the necessary improvements.
- Preparing annual performance reviews within established deadlines.
- Participating in the salary increase and rewards process.
- Validating work time and certifying absences.

The **Vice Presidents, Deans and Department Heads** are responsible for:

- Establishing and communicating organizational goals that align with the university’s strategic priorities.
- Providing the training/resources needed to increase manager and employee effectiveness in the achievement of organizational goals and strategic priorities.
- Ensuring organizational compliance with this policy, and that all managers are knowledgeable about the processes and requirements for performance management and are abiding by them.

**VCU Human Resources** is responsible for:

- Providing HR leadership across the institution, designing policies and developing programs.
- Providing tools, resources and training the university’s senior management to be knowledgeable about roles, processes and requirements of all HR policies.
- Monitoring and reporting on school/unit compliance with HR policy.
- Collaborating with school/division HR Professionals
- Providing training resources on the performance management process.
- Maintaining records and providing reports as necessary.
**The HR Professional** is responsible for:

- Providing guidance and assistance to those within your school/division as they navigate the performance management process.
- Facilitating HR decision making, task implementation and execute transactions at the leadership level related to performance management.

### 3. Overview of the Performance Management Process

The process of managing performance provides opportunities for the manager and employee to assess how well the employee’s performance meets the requirements of the job. Such communication is part of a manager’s ongoing responsibilities rather than an annual event.

The performance management cycle begins with the establishment of job requirements, a job description outlining principal responsibilities and duties, and clear standards upon which performance is measured. This provides the foundation for creating goals.

Provided with performance goals and competencies, the employee performs the job as agreed to with their manager. It is the manager’s responsibility to informally review the employee’s performance, offering specific feedback on how well goals are being met and where improvement is needed. During these discussions, the employee and manager should develop an action plan to improve the employee’s performance as needed to meet the expectations for the position.

Performance goals and competencies are reviewed and redefined at three points:

- At least annually;
- When job responsibilities or strategic goals change;
- When a new employee assumes the job responsibilities

Annual performance reviews are required by the university and serve as the manager’s formal documentation of the employee’s performance during the performance period. As a resource for facilitating the organization’s performance review process, the Talent@VCU system is a tool used to document and summarize information collected during the evaluation discussions between manager and employee throughout the performance period. Talent@VCU also serves as a performance journal - an online log that employees and managers may use to document their performance milestones.
The Performance Management Process Flow

Goal Setting
1. Following a conversation with the manager, the employee enters goals into the system.
2. The manager approves and aligns the goals.

Mid-year Review
1. The mid-year review is recommended and strongly encouraged
2. The employee completes a mid-year self-review.
3. The manager conducts a mid-year review and the manager and employee meet to discuss progress.

Annual Review
1. The employee completes an annual self-review.
2. The manager completes an annual review.
3. The reviewer approves and signs the annual review.
4. School/ Division leadership team completes the Calibration discussion.
5. The manager and employee discuss the annual performance review.
6. The manager acknowledges in the system that the discussion has taken place.
7. The employee acknowledges that the discussion has taken place and signs the completed review in the system.

The Performance Management Process and the Talent@VCU Software

The university’s performance management process is supported by Talent@VCU, a software tool that integrates performance management, career development, and learning management. Talent@VCU uses a single-user sign-in feature.
4. Goal Alignment and Performance Planning

Senior leadership is responsible for developing the university’s strategic priorities that set the direction of the university. After university goals are established, school/division goals are defined to implement university goals. The process is carried further within the departments with the establishment of goals for the individual employee. When translated into operational terms, the purpose and strategy are expressed as specific, measurable goals and desired results.

Employee aligned goals are related, but not identical to the school/division’s and university’s strategic priorities. Having a clear alignment of goals allows everyone to work in support of a larger goal, and helps employees see how their day-to-day activities contribute to the success of the University.

Performance goals and competencies are equally important in the employee’s performance review. Goals can be drafted by the employee, written by the manager or written jointly. All employee goals are approved and aligned by the manager. It is the manager’s responsibility to provide general guidance on the nature and number (no more than 6 or 7) of employee goals. Before an employee enters goals, a conversation between the employee and the manager is required. During the conversation, the manager shares the relevant University, school/division goals for the year and works with the employee to develop and enter more specific goals using the Talent@VCU software.
Guide to Writing S.M.A.R.T. Goals

Developing sound goals is critical to managing employees’ performance. Each year managers work with employees to set goals for the upcoming year/evaluation period. Goals should be S.M.A.R.T. – specific, measurable, achievable, results-focused and time-bound.

Example: By mm/dd/yyyy, implement a new performance management system for Classified Staff and University Employees using clearly defined processes and guidelines so employees and supervisors can more competently evaluate performance and develop their careers.

Below is a definition of each of the S.M.A.R.T. goal criteria referencing the example above.

Specific: Goals should be simplistically written and clearly define what will be accomplished. Specific is the What, Why, and How of the S.M.A.R.T. model.

Explanation of Example:
“Implement a new performance management system for Classified Staff and University Employees = What

“Using clearly defined processes and guidelines” = How

“So employees and supervisors competently evaluate performance and develop their careers” = Why

Measurable: Goals should be measurable so employees have tangible evidence that they have accomplished the goal. Usually, the entire goal statement is a measure, but there are usually several short-term or smaller measurements built into the goal.

Explanation of Example: The essential metric is whether the system is operational as of mm/dd/yyyy. What measures will define “operational” response time, working as configured, % of time available to users?
**Achievable:** Goals should be achievable; they should stretch the employee slightly so they feel challenged, but defined well enough so they can achieve them. Employees must possess the appropriate knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to achieve the goal.

When the goal is clearly defined, sufficient resources exist and a timeframe is established that allows the employee to carry out those steps. Achievable goals motivate employees. Impossible goals demotivate them.

**Explanation of Example:** In order for an employee to reach the goal, they must have a skill set. In this case, proficiency in the area of performance management is the skill set that allows them to understand the nature of the goal. The goal must present a large enough challenge for the employee to remain interested in and committed to accomplishing it.

**Results-focused:** Effective goals measure outcomes, not activities.

**Explanation of Example:** The result of this goal is a process that allows employees and supervisors to more competently evaluate performance and develop their careers, not the individual activities and actions that occur in order to make the goal a reality.

**Time-bound:** Goals should be linked to a timeframe that creates a practical sense of forward movement to close the gap between the current state of the goal and the desired outcome of the goal.

**Explanation of Example:** A specific date/timeframe for completion provides the employee with a time-bound deadline.

The concept of writing S.M.A.R.T. goals is very important for accomplishing individual goals, which in turn are linked to department, division, and University goals. It is also critical for ensuring good communication between employees and supervisors so there are no surprises during annual performance reviews.
**S.M.A.R.T. Goal Questionnaire**

The S.M.A.R.T. Goal Questionnaire that follows assists managers and employees in creating S.M.A.R.T. goals. Begin by writing the goal as clearly and concisely as possible. Then, answer the related questions and conclude by revising the goal, in the space provided.

**Goal:**

**Specific.** What will the goal accomplish? **How** will it be accomplished? **Why** will it be accomplished?

**Measurable.** How will the goal be measured (list at least two indicators)? What evidence will indicate accomplishment of the goal?

**Achievable.** Does the employee possess the necessary knowledge, skills, abilities, and resources required to accomplish the goal? Will meeting the goal present a challenge without being overwhelming?

**Results-focused.** What is the reason, purpose, or benefit of accomplishing the goal? What is the outcome (not activities leading up to the result) of the goal?

**Time-bound.** What is the established completion date and does that completion date create a practical sense of urgency?

**Revised Goal:**
Cascading/SMART Goals Examples: Manager

University Theme:
Become a leader among national research universities in providing all students with high-quality learning/living experiences focused on inquiry, discovery and innovation in a global environment.

School/Division Goal
School of Education:
Prepare effective, highly-skilled teachers, counselors, school administrators, higher education faculty and other education professionals committed to making a difference in the lives of children and adults and their communities, particularly in high-need learning environments.

Individual Goals
Manager, Student Services Center:

Title: Service Center Goals Implementation
Provide direction, oversight and support to the service center team to ensure all students are assigned faculty advisors; all student applications are processed for teacher preparation programs and clinical placements and all records are created and maintained in accordance with School of Education policy, procedures and timelines to enable students to successfully progress through their School of Education experience.

Title: Process Improvement
Provide guidance to applicable service center staff in designing and implementing process improvement techniques to reduce application-processing time by 8% for the 2019-2020 academic year.

Title: Performance Management for Direct Reports
Coach and support all direct reports, provide clear goals and expectations for performance, meaningful feedback and fair mid-year and annual performance reviews aligned with the university Performance Management policy and guidelines.

Title: Development Goal
By June 30, 2018 complete coursework to increase my communication and team leadership skills to prepare for greater management responsibilities.
Completed S.M.A.R.T. Goal Questionnaire Example #1

Manager Goal:
Title: Service Center Goals Implementation
Provide direction and support to the service center team to ensure administrative (all records are accurately maintained), advising (all students are assigned advisors) and technical support (all student applications are processed for teacher preparation programs and clinical placements) is delivered to students in accordance with School of Education policy, procedures and timelines. This will enable students to successfully progress through their School of Education experience.

Specific.
What will the goal accomplish? Administrative, advising and technical support to students
How Providing direction and support to the service center team
Why To enable students to successfully progress through their School of Education Experience.

Measurable. How will the goal be measured (list at least two indicators)? What evidence will indicate accomplishment of the goal?
All:
- Records are accurately maintained
- Students are assigned advisors
- Student applications are processed for teacher preparation programs and clinical placements

Achievable. Does the employee possess the necessary knowledge, skills, abilities, and resources required to accomplish the goal? Determined when providing direction and support to the team and inventorying resources available for execution of the services. Will meeting the goal present a challenge without being overwhelming? Determined by the knowledge, skills and abilities of the team and available resources human and material.

Results-focused. What is the reason, purpose, or benefit of accomplishing the goal? What is the outcome (not activities leading up to the result) of the goal? To enable students to successfully progress through their School of Education Experience.

Time-bound. What is the established completion date and does that completion date create a practical sense of urgency? In accordance with School of Education policy, procedures and timelines
Cascading/SMART Goals Examples: Employee

University Theme:
Become a leader among national research universities in providing all students with high-quality learning/living experiences focused on inquiry, discovery and innovation in a global environment.

School/Division Goal
School of Education:
Prepare effective, highly-skilled teachers, counselors, school administrators, higher education faculty and other education professionals committed to making a difference in the lives of children and adults and their communities, particularly in high-need learning environments.

Individual Goals
Coordinator, Clinical Placements and Licensure:

Title: Application Processing Teacher Preparation Programs
Process all applications received for admission to teacher preparation programs accurately and within the timeline established by the dean’s office to facilitate timely decision making and notification of admission to all applicants.

Title: Student Recruitment
Enhance prospective student interest in applications through proactive development and sharing of general and program course information during scheduled recruitment events and upon request from internal and external audiences throughout the performance period.

Title: Application Processing for Student Experience Programs
Process all applications received for clinical placements for practica, student teaching, internships, externships and state licensure accurately while adhering to all internal and external program deadlines to maximize opportunities for student selection and participation.
Completed S.M.A.R.T. Goal Questionnaire Example #2

Employee Goal:
Title: Application Processing Teacher Preparation Programs
Process all applications received for admission to teacher preparation programs accurately and within the timeline established by the dean’s office to facilitate timely decision making and notification of admission to all applicants to enable students to successfully progress through their School of Education experience.

Specific.
What will the goal accomplish? Timely decision making and notification of admission to teacher preparation programs to all applicants.
How Processing all applications
Why To enable students to successfully progress through their School of Education Experience.

Measurable. How will the goal be measured (list at least two indicators)? What evidence will indicate accomplishment of the goal?
All applications are processed:
- accurately
- within the timeline established by the deans office
- to facilitate timely decision making and notification

Achievable. Does the employee possess the necessary knowledge, skills, abilities, and resources required to accomplish the goal? Identified through conversation between the employee and manager regarding necessary employee skills, competencies and resources. (Example KSAs: Technical ability, knowledge of process software, knowledge of procedures and timelines, ability for attention to detail) Will meeting the goal present a challenge without being overwhelming? Determined by the knowledge, skills and abilities of the employee and available resources human and material.

Results-focused. What is the reason, purpose, or benefit of accomplishing the goal? What is the outcome (not activities leading up to the result) of the goal? Maximize SOE students admission to teacher preparation programs.

Time-bound. What is the established completion date and does that completion date create a practical sense of urgency? In accordance with School of Education policy, procedures and timelines
S.M.A.R.T. Goal Checklist

- (S) Does the goal focus on a specific area?
- (S) Is the goal written using concrete language?
- (S) Does the goal begin with an action verb? (to + verb)
- (M) Can progress be measured for the goal? Is the progress:
  - Numeric or descriptive?
  - Quantitative?
  - Qualitative?
  - Financial?
  - Constrained by time?
- (A) Is the goal a “stretch”, yet still within the employee’s control?
- (A) Is the goal sufficiently and reasonably limited in scope?
- (R) Does the goal measure actual outcomes or results, not activities?
- (R) Do the results include products, deliverables, or accomplishments?
- (R) Is the goal supportive of and directly relevant to the University and the school/division’s mission and goals?
- (T) Has a reasonable timeframe been identified?
- (T) Is it necessary to identify interim steps or have a plan to monitor progress?
Cascading Goals Conversation Model

Planning

- Schedule time on the calendar to have the discussion
- Prepare to share overall goals and develop SMART individual employee goals

Discussion

_Establish the Agenda_

- State the purpose and format for the meeting

_Explained the Cascading/SMART Goals Concept_

- Briefly identify the VCU Strategic Priorities
- Make the connection between the university goals and the school/division mission/vision/goals

_Share Your Ideas_

- Share specific employee goals critical to success in the position
- Communicate to create professional development goals
- Ask for the employee’s reaction
- Surface obstacles and issues
- Offer information and assistance
- Summarize key goals and action steps mutually agreed to
- Make the connection between the university goals and the school/division mission/vision/goals

_Agree on Action Plans_

- Check for employee’s commitment to the action plan
- Express confidence and offer support
- Ask employee to summarize understanding (if necessary)

Follow-up

- Observe
- Measure
- Coach (discuss strengths and opportunities for growth/improvement)
Suggested Conversation Guide

Explaining the Cascading SMART Goal Concept

- Developing sound university, school/division and individual goals, is critical to employee and university success.
- Each year we will work together to set and clarify goals for the upcoming year/performance review period.
- Having clear alignment of goals allows everyone to work in support of a larger goal, and helps everyone see how their day-to-day activities contribute to the success of the university and establishes a framework for individual career growth and success.
- Goals should be SMART – specific, measurable, achievable, results focused and time-bound.

Ways of Asking for Input

- As you consider the goals for your work over the next year, what is missing from your perspective?
- What questions do you have regarding the specific goals I’ve shared and how what you do contributes to the overall success of the university?

Ways of Building an Action Plan

- What is one thing that you think it would be beneficial for you to work on to help you achieve your goals?
- How can I be helpful?
- What is one thing that you can begin to do as an action step tomorrow to be more effective?
- Would you be open to listing to some ideas I have for moving forward?
- Of the suggestions I shared, which ideas sound best to you.

Ways of Summarizing

- What I heard you say was...was my interpretation on track?
- How do the ideas we just discussed sound to you? Does this sound like something you may be able to use? Why, why not?
- How may I be of assistance to you?
- What questions can I answer for you?

Ways of Checking for Commitment

- How would you characterize your level of commitment to the plans we developed?
- It is important that we conclude our conversation by making certain that we have a mutual understanding of the next steps, please recap the highlights of our discussion today in your own words.
Career Development Goals

Career Development goals are connected to the personal development responsibilities. The primary focus for these goals should be on the development of specific knowledge and/or skills required to perform the current job and/or future career interests as applicable.

Changing goals during the performance period

Effective ongoing communication must be established and adhered to by the manager and employee to keep each other informed on the status of the goals being implemented. Sharing and documenting the status of goals must occur in time for management to make decisions and corrections, as necessary. Listed below are trouble spots that may occur and suggested remedies for handling them.

1. When unexpected events occur that indicate the attainment of the goal is unfeasible, irrelevant or impossible,
   - Stop implementing the goal.
   - Select alternatives (new or modified goals) and set up a time schedule to discontinue the existing goal and/or implement the new or modified one.
   - Communicate change to all employees involved/impacted.

2. Established goal is pursued even though an unexpected opportunity arises
   - Re-analyze the payoff of the existing goal in light of the new opportunity.
   - If usefulness and value will be substantially greater, set new goals in lieu of prior goal.

3. Goals are expected in an unfairly short, or unattainable, amount of time.
   - Hold frequent progress conversations to clarify difficulties.
   - Managers may need to be prepared, at times, to reduce expectations if they are unfair or unattainable.

4. Goals are not attained due to circumstances beyond everyone’s control.
   - Such a failure can provide useful guidelines for the next round of goals.
   - Place greater emphasis on the level of attainability and the probability of occurrence.
   - Document the employee’s efforts and briefly describe the external circumstances.
5. Ongoing Discussions and Feedback

Providing ongoing feedback to employees about their performance is very important for maintaining productive working relationships, for accomplishing goals, and for general performance coaching and redirection. Coaching occurs when a manager wants to acknowledge an employee’s progress and encourage the employee to continue on that path to success. Coaching also provides an opportunity for balanced feedback when an employee needs to change what or how they have been performing (redirection) and to share opportunities for growth.

Objectives of Performance Coaching

- To establish performance expectations with regard to goals, core competencies, and goals.
- To communicate clearly and in behavioral terms what good work performance looks like.
- To monitor the employee’s progress in achieving goals.
- To identify problems hindering progress, discuss strategies to remove barriers, and constructively criticize work that falls short of standards.
- To ensure that the employee receives the training needed to perform successfully.
- To create an environment that will spark the employee’s motivation to perform his or her work successfully.
- To praise on an ongoing basis work that meets or exceeds the standards.
- To consult with an employee who does not meet standards for reasons other than lack of skills (e.g., attitude, motivation, personal problems, etc.) or who still does not perform to standards after receiving appropriate coaching/training.
- To encourage the employee to set goals for further improvement.
- To provide a non-threatening atmosphere in which the employee can freely express tensions, conflicts, concerns, and problems.
- To help the employee realize their potential.

Types of Coaching

- To reinforce good performance
- To correct performance
- To teach new skills and procedures
- To mentor employees

Benefits of Coaching

- Increases productivity, quality, and effectiveness of the employee and the work group
- Increases employees’ motivation, initiative, and success
- Increases creativity, innovation, and engagement
- Makes the manager’s role easier when employees build their skills and independence
The Interaction Process – A Balancing Act

Interaction Skills (Key Principles)
- Maintain and enhance self-esteem
- Listen actively and respond with empathy to problems or concerns
- Ask for help and encourage involvement in solving problems
- Share thoughts, feelings and rationale for decisions
- Provide support without removing responsibility

Good Feedback is:
- Timely
- Specific
- Balanced and non-threatening
- Focused on action planning
Giving Feedback: The STAR Model

Positive Feedback Example:
ST – A parent came into your office today looking upset.
A – You gave her the information she needed and explained the next steps.
R – She thanked you for your help and left with the information she needed and looked relieved.

Growth/Improvement Feedback Example:
ST – A parent complained to me about the service he received from your office.
A – Before he could finish, you interrupted him and said there was nothing you could do.
R – He left looking very upset
A – It will be helpful in a similar situation going forward if you listen more patiently, wait until you know all the circumstances before responding, explain what you can do, if you can’t help them make contact with someone who can or direct them to where they can find what they need.
R – That way, they will have a better understanding and feel better about the interaction and the university.
Tips for Giving Feedback

1. **Make the feedback specific and related to behavior.**

   No: “James, you’re late again and you have a poor attitude.”
   Yes: “James you have been 15 minutes late for the past three mornings. Will you help me understand why?”

2. **Consider the timing. Give feedback either before the event in the form of advice or immediately after as positive or corrective feedback.**

   No: (criticism) “Jane, because you’ve done such a poor job in the past, I need to preview the speech you’re planning to give next week.”
   Yes: (advice) “Jane I’d like to review the content of your presentation with you before your meeting next week so we can be sure you are successful.”

   No: (positive, but not specific) “Jane, good speech last week. Keep up the good work!”
   Yes: (positive) “Jane, you did an outstanding job in your presentation. The speech was well researched and interesting. I saw many members of the audience taking copious notes while you presented!”

3. **Give the feedback in calm and unemotional language.**

   No: “James, isn’t it about time you improved your production with this machine?”
   Yes: “James, I’m sure your progress will be much faster now that you better understand how to use the new machine.”

4. **Check to make sure clear communication has occurred.**

   No: “So, John, you’ve got it now, right?”
   Yes: “John, do you understand the new protocol now? Will you explain it to me so I’m sure that I explained it correctly?”

5. **Focus on behavior the employee can change.**

   No: “John, why don’t you like to talk to other people?”
   Yes: “John, part of your role is to keep the team informed about the status of the project.”
Tips for Giving Feedback (cont.)

6. **Use “I” statements rather than “you” statements.**

   No: “John, you are so inconsiderate of others when you leave your radio on!”
   Yes: “John, I lose my concentration when I am able to hear your radio in the work area. Please turn the volume down during working hours.”

7. **Define the impact on you, the team, the unit, the university.**

   No: “Janet, can’t you ever get your reports to me on time?”
   Yes: “Janet, when I don’t get your reports on time, I can’t get my reports to my manager on time. This slows up decisions about resources our department needs for the upcoming month.”

8. **Solicit feedback rather than impose it.**

   No: “John, I saw how you handled Mrs. Smith during this crisis, and it was not good at all.”
   Yes: “John, it is important that you learn to handle your difficult customers more effectively. I’m happy to share some things that have worked for me and talk with you about what you can do more effectively. Would that help?”
Receiving Feedback: 6-steps to success

The following information is intended to assist employees with developing an open and non-defensive posture to coaching and feedback. This information should help employees receive and respond to feedback in an appropriate and professional manner.

1. Set goals for yourself.
   Before you even receive feedback you should think about what goals you would like to set for yourself. Being motivated to achieve may make it easier to receive constructive criticism. Creating goals will give you a target to orient your efforts towards. These could be long or short-term goals just make sure they are challenging yet achievable.

2. Be approachable.
   People avoid giving feedback to people who are not approachable. Ask for feedback. Let others know you are interested in hearing what they think. Your openness to feedback is obvious through your body language, facial expressions, and welcoming manner.

3. Ask questions.
   This helps clarify the difference between perception and behavior. Focus on questions that help you understand what behaviors you may need to change. Ask for examples and stories that illustrate the feedback, so you know you share meaning with the person providing the feedback. Check with others to determine the reliability of the feedback. If only one person believes it about you, it may be just him or her, not you.

4. Manage your emotions.
   If you start to feel yourself becoming emotional it’s perfectly acceptable to ask the person providing the feedback if you can have some time to process the information and schedule another meeting. When your fight or flight mode kicks in and emotions start to run high it’s difficult to concentrate on what the other person is saying. Taking time out to calm your nerves will allow you to process your feedback as calmly and objectively as possible.

5. Analyze the feedback received and develop a strategy to overcome obstacles and achieve your goals.
   Remember to look for facts as opposed to opinions in the feedback. Try to recall some of the constructive feedback you have received in the past. If you see any patterns or feel you might recognize some of the behaviors they are describing write them down. Think about how these behaviors/issues could become barriers to the goals you came up with in step one. Plan what steps you could take to address these points.

6. Share your plan and ask for advice and support.
   This shows that you’re taking steps to remedy the issues pointed out. They may also have suggestions that you may not have considered. Finally, ask your manager or colleague for support in making these changes. If they see that you genuinely want to put their advice into action, they’ll be sure to offer you encouragement along the way and be more receptive when you give them feedback in return.
6. Reviewing Performance and Competencies

Mid-year and annual reviews begin with an employee’s self-evaluation of performance goals and competencies. The annual self-review is required and employees are encouraged to use the opportunity to ensure that their voice is heard in the process. Following the employee’s self-review; the manager rates the employee separately on both goals and competencies (refer to Performance Goals and Competencies Rating Scales below) and provides an overall rating. All ratings should be supported with comments providing specific examples of observed performance during the current performance cycle. See the appendix of this document for the detailed list of VCU competencies and sample behavior indicators.

**Mid-Year Review Process (Recommended)**

1. The employee completes a mid-year self-review in Talent@VCU.
2. The manager completes a mid-year review in Talent@VCU and meets with each direct report to discuss progress.
3. Both Manager and employee acknowledge in Talent@VCU that the discussion has taken place.

**Annual Review Process (Required)**

1. The employee completes an annual self-review.
2. The manager completes an annual review.
3. The reviewer approves and signs the annual review.
4. School/ Division leadership team completes the Ratings Calibration discussion.
5. The manager and employee discuss the annual performance review.
6. The manager acknowledges in Talent@VCU that the discussion has taken place.
7. The employee acknowledges in Talent@VCU that the discussion has taken place.

**Ratings Descriptions for Reviewing Goals and Competencies**

**Exceptional –**  
*Performance:* significantly and consistently exceeds goals  
*Competency:* consistently demonstrates exceptional behaviors; serves as a role model and mentor

**Advanced –**  
*Performance:* consistently achieves and often exceeds goals  
*Competency:* consistently demonstrates effective behaviors and often demonstrates exceptional behaviors

**Successful –**  
*Performance:* consistently achieves goals  
*Competency:* consistently demonstrates effective behaviors

**Developing –**  
*Performance:* proactively making progress in learning and adapting to new responsibilities and goals  
*Competency:* demonstrates proactive growth in exhibiting effective behaviors

**Needs Improvement –**  
*Performance:* achieves some, but not all goals; needs improvement  
*Competency:* demonstrates some behaviors but not others, or uses behaviors inconsistently

**Below –**  
*Performance:* rarely achieves established goals; requires significant and immediate improvement  
*Competency:* rarely demonstrates competency behaviors; requires significant development
Mid-Year Review Steps

The mid-year review is an opportunity for managers and employees to have a formal check-in at the mid-point of the performance cycle. The review contains the following sections:

1. A progress update on each of the employee’s SMART goals.
2. A competency review to document employee’s demonstration of VCU’s core competencies.
3. A comprehensive rating, which takes into account both goal progress and competency behaviors.

Employees will be required to complete a self-review in Talent@VCU before their manager completes the mid-year review. After the manager has completed the review in Talent@VCU, the manager and employee will meet to discuss its contents and confirm performance expectations for the remainder of the performance cycle. The final step of the mid-year review occurs when the manager and then the employee sign-off on the review in Talent@VCU.

Step One: Prepare for the Mid-Year Review

Manager:
- Explain that the purpose of the Mid-Year Review is to capture achievement toward performance goals and behavioral expectations, talk about “how things are going and identify any steps that can be taken to facilitate success toward achievement of the goals for the remainder of the performance cycle.

Employee and Manager:
- Review performance goals and competencies (behavioral expectations).
- Examine notes from conversations and comments (achievement or challenges related) made by the manager and employee in Talent@VCU on goals since the beginning of the performance cycle.
- Consider whether job or department changes may require performance goals revisions or replacement.

Step Two: Complete the Mid-Year Review in Talent@VCU

Employee:
- Log-in to Talent@VCU and complete the self-review which requires:
  - A comment/narrative update on progress towards achievement for each goal
  - Example(s) for demonstration of each core/leadership competency (as applicable)
  - An overall rating, comment, and submission to the manager, which notifies them to complete their mid-year review of the employee’s progress.

Manager:
- An email notification is sent to the manager when an employee completes their mid-year self-review
- Log-in to Talent@VCU and complete the mid-year review for each employee which requires:
  - A comment/narrative update on progress towards achievement for each goal
  - Example(s) for demonstration of each core/leadership competency (as applicable)
  - An overall rating and comment and submission when completed
Step Three: Conduct the Mid-year Review Meeting

Manager:

- Confirm the employee understands the purpose of the mid-year review.
- Ask the employee for a verbal self-assessment (sharing highlights from the self-review completed in Talent@VCU)
- Reinforce (positively) favorable performance and accomplishments
- Create an environment for open discussion of cause and solutions to performance issues/problems
- Ask how you can help the employee succeed
- Discuss whether changes justify restate of performance goals.
- Summarize conclusions about:
  - Progress
  - Favorable results
  - Performance issues/problems
  - Solutions
  - Agreements and commitments

Manager and Employee:

- Sign-off on the mid-year review in Talent@VCU by the deadline
- Follow through on agreements and commitments
- Schedule periodic follow up discussions
Tips for Employees: Building a Self-Review

VCU’s performance management process is and should be focused on the employee; therefore, it is very important for employees to be engaged in the entire process. Employees begin the process by completing a self-review. This self-review provides employees with an opportunity to showcase their accomplishments and have their opinions heard. All employees must complete an annual self-review.

A self-review is a great opportunity for employees to honestly and objectively consider and document their performance. Properly completing a self-review can make the difference between a meaningful one and one that is less effective. This section is meant to enable you to complete better self-reviews.

What Is A Self-Review?

A self-evaluation includes thoughtful and considered written review of an employee’s performance during the performance cycle. It involves rating established goals, competencies, and overall performance.

What Are The Benefits of a Self-Evaluation?

During a self-assessment, the individual becomes an active participant in their own evaluation. Involvement enables the employee to honestly assess strengths and areas needing improve and/or grow. Employees can participate more constructively in the performance review meeting with the manager. Self-evaluation also serves to increase commitment to goal setting/achievement, competency development, and career planning.

What Do You Need To Do In Order to Complete Your Self-Evaluation?

**Time.** Allow enough time to complete the self-review. That includes time you may need to review documentation that you’ve kept throughout the year relating to your goals and competencies.

**Quiet.** Complete the self-review in a quiet place without interruptions so you can devote your full attention and reflection to the process.

**Relax.** Try to relax and reflect upon individual goals, experiences, and incidents. No one is perfect, and it is very likely that you will recall both good and bad experiences. The purpose of the review process is to highlight strengths, correct performance challenges, and develop unused skills and abilities. In order to do this, you must be willing to recognize areas that need improvement or development.

**Highlight the highlights.** Don’t be shy about letting your manager know where you excelled during the review period. The self-review is the place to boast with grace and diplomacy and, naturally, without putting any of your colleagues down. Don’t be modest; state your accomplishments objectively and accurately.

**Don’t forget about achievements made early on in the performance period.** Your manager cannot possibly remember all of your projects and your participation throughout the year. Go back over documents and emails to help you remember your earlier accomplishments.

**Don’t be stuffy.** One of the benefits of a self-review is its tendency to lead to constructive dialogue between you and your manager. Therefore, try to write in a conversational style, one that is as natural as the verbal back-and-forth that occurs throughout the year.
Be objective. It's sometimes tempting to give yourself high marks across the board, but it's a little unlikely that you've performed every goal and/or competency at the highest level. Instead of evaluating yourself based on how you wish you had performed, offer the results and quantify them as much as possible by using facts, figures, and specific dates. The more you can point to the tangible benefits you offer the University, the more invaluable you will be. Ask yourself some specific questions: What difference did my efforts make to VCU? What did I do to contribute to my school/unit’s goals and success? Did my efforts further the University’s mission? Did I take a leadership role when the opportunity arose?

Don't use the self-review as a bargaining chip. This is the time to show, not tell. So, it's not the time to talk about your compensation. Be clear about your accomplishments and save salary discussions for later.

Use appropriate language. Choose words that demonstrate some objectivity and distance. Yes, you’re writing about yourself, but you can still stand back and offer a little perspective. For example, instead of mentioning your sparkling personality, document specific behaviors like your ability to get along well with others. Rather than saying how much you like your job, include the ways that you have grown and improved during the review period.

Suggest specific improvements. The self-review is a good opportunity to identify specific ways to improve your performance. Don't be afraid to mention ways that you can do your job more effectively. Making suggestions like this is not the same as admitting weakness. Indeed, it is a mark of strength and professional maturity for employees to identify ways to grow and improve.

Complete the Career Development Plan. Choose, complete, and apply knowledge you gain from development activities to support your performance goals, your competency development and your career direction.

Write more than one draft. The self-review is part of your employment record so you'll want to “get it right”. Make certain you are thorough and professional in your approach and language. And, that you write, review, and revise your self-review to ensure you send forward your best work.
Tips for Managers: Avoiding Common Rating Errors

Validity is the extent to which an employee’s ratings correspond to actual performance and competency levels. Unfortunately, personal biases often cause an employee’s review to be distorted through rater biases. Therefore, it is important that managers understand not only the University’s rating scale, but also these potential rating biases. The following list outlines some of the most common errors.

**Attribution:** Tendency to attribute performance to external causes.

**Central:** Majority of individuals rated in the middle. Managers who display central tendency tend to ignore or suppress differences. This tendency, which produces ratings that do not distinguish between employees, damages morale and makes decisions for pay for performance, promotions, or training difficult to justify. Avoid this tendency by:
- Documenting observable behavior over the entire performance cycle;
- Ask yourself if you are seeing the person’s behavior objectively. Seek behavioral examples from others.

**Comparison:** Tendency to rate people in comparison to other individuals instead of documenting performance goals and competencies. This tendency can be particularly unjust when comparing a person to someone else who is an extraordinarily high performer. Avoid this tendency by:
- Establishing clear SMART performance goals at the start of each performance cycle, and
- Evaluating performance against those goals.

**Halo/Horn:** High (or low) rating given to an individual based on a single performance goal or competency. This effect is also demonstrated if you let an overall global impression of the employee influence the ratings. It often occurs with employees who are friendly or unfriendly toward the manager or who are especially strong or weak in one skill. Avoid the Halo/Horn effect by:
- Establishing clear and specific standards;
- Maintaining good documentation of employee performance over the review period;
- Keeping things in perspective in terms of frequency, significance in the overall picture, and representation of the person’s overall performance;
- Identifying specific behavioral examples which support your ratings; and,
- Asking yourself if you have overemphasized aspects of the person’s performance you find particularly admirable or irritating.

**Leniency:** Majority of individuals rated at the high end of the scale. In order to avoid this bias, measure performance against established standards and expectations that are reasonable and attainable. Compare your ratings with peers. Are your ratings significantly higher than the ratings of others?
Primacy: Ratings reflect only initial observation of behavior. It is often hard to overcome our first impressions of someone’s behavior and we must challenge ourselves to notice behaviors that support other impressions. Avoid this tendency by:
- Documenting observable behavior over the entire review period and giving it balanced consideration; and
- Checking to see if anything you have documented presents a view different from your initial impression. If not, ask yourself if you are seeing the person’s behavior objectively. Seek behavioral examples from others.

Recency: Ratings reflect only the most recent observations of performance or behavior. Recent observations tend to be more in the forefront of the manager’s mind and therefore more “memorable.” Avoid this tendency by:
- Documenting observable behavior over the entire performance cycle and giving it balanced consideration; and
- Asking others for their observations of the employee over the course of the year to see if they have different views than you.

Similar-to-Me Effect: Tendency to rate people who have qualities that you perceive in yourself. There is a common tendency for managers to rate those who are different from them lower than those similar to themselves. Avoid the Similar-to-me Effect by:
- Becoming aware of your own biases and challenging them;
- Having clearly defined and agreed upon goals and competencies identified;
- Regularly collecting documentation of observable performance covering the entire review period;
  Checking to see if your ratings are significantly different across groups, e.g., different for men and women, different across racial lines.

Stereotyping: Tendency to generalize across groups and ignore individual differences.

Strictness: Opposite of leniency; ratings at low end of the scale.
- Ask yourself if your ratings distribution compares to that of your peers.
- Are your ratings significantly lower than the ratings of the others?
General guidelines for avoiding bias and evaluating employee performance objectively include:

- Work with each employee at the beginning of the review cycle to develop S.M.A.R.T. performance goals and corresponding competencies.
- Focus on observable behaviors related to goals and competencies throughout the evaluation period; document observations and provide feedback and coaching to the employee.
- Compare observed behaviors to the established goal or competency, not to other people or the employee’s past performance.
- Consider factors which may have changed the nature or scope of the job, including circumstances beyond the employee’s control, your own role in the employee’s performance.
- Focus on the employee’s work and not on personal matters that are tangential, unless those personal matters affect the work of the employee; and,
- Check your perceptions for accuracy, fairness, balance, reasonableness, and consistency.
The Calibration Process

What is calibration? Calibration is a three-step process that includes managers who are responsible for conducting performance reviews, the reviewers who examine the employee reviews, and the executive to whom these individuals report. Calibration meetings provide a forum for discussion of employees’ performance with the goals of fairly and consistently setting performance expectations and rating performance. Calibration relies on an honest and confidential dialogue among managers, reviewers and the responsible executive.

The Value of Calibration

● ensures managers are well versed in the definitions and application of the rating scale;
● helps managers establish thoughtful reasons for assigning a particular rating to an employee;
● helps prepare managers to have better performance discussions with their employees;
● provides managers with more confidence in their ratings after discussing the rating in a calibration meeting;
● ensures a more consistent and fair evaluation of an employee’s performance by identifying potential manager and reviewer biases; and,
● aids the University’s pay for performance process by increasing the confidence in our differentiation of performance levels.

When does calibration occur? Calibration occurs in the three steps described below.

Step 1. Goals & Competencies Calibration Meeting At the beginning of the performance cycle, the leadership team meets including all reviewers and the HR Professional. Goals for each area are established and communicated in advance and as thoroughly as possible so managers understand and can explain to employees how their daily work contributes to the success of the school/department, so that employees understand the measures and behaviors (competencies) on which their performance will be reviewed.

Step 2. Reviewer Calibration At annual review time, upon completion of employee reviews and prior to the manager’s signature, the employee’s self-review and manager’s review are sent electronically to a reviewer. The reviewer is usually the manager’s manager, but that may vary in certain schools and departments. The reviewer reads each evaluation, looking for constructive comments and ensuring reviews are thorough and aligned with the measures for success defined and communicated at the beginning of the performance cycle. If the reviewer decides a manager should alter a particular review, the reviewer sends the evaluation back to the manager with a request for revision.

Step 3. Ratings Calibration Meeting A meeting is scheduled between all school/department reviewers and the school/department’s responsible executive. The HR Professional produces the ratings distribution reports. The executive meets with the reviewers, and the HR Professional who brings (or may distribute in advance of) the reports to the meeting. In this meeting, the participants look at ratings distribution for the entire school/department and discuss the ratings consistency and consistent application of the ratings scale to all employees based upon the success measures developed and communicated to all employee at the beginning of the performance cycle. The group may ask questions about specific ratings and may suggest adjustments based on their experience with the employee.
Following the discussion, reviewers send any evaluations requiring revision, back to the manager with instructions. After the manager makes the revisions, the evaluation is sent again to the reviewer for signature. The reviewer signs the evaluation electronically and sends it forward to the manager who meets with the employee to discuss the evaluation, then electronically acknowledges that the discussion has taken place. It is then sent by Talent@VCU to the employee for their electronic signature. The annual process is then complete.

Tips for a Successful Calibration Process

- **Communicate School/Department Goals.** Goals for each area should be communicated in advance and as thoroughly as possible so employees understand how their daily work contributes to the success of the school/department, and so that employees understand the measures on which they will be evaluated.
- **Include your HR Professional.** Having a neutral third party adds balance to the meeting and provides an important objective viewpoint, which can lead to the identification and possible elimination of biases.
- **Educate managers.** Managers need to understand what calibration is, why it is necessary, how it works, and what their roles are.
- **Don’t hide the process from employees.** It could de-motivate employees if the calibration process is seen as secretive. Be open about the process, but maintain confidentiality outside of the calibration meeting.
- **Don’t expect perfection.** The calibration process is imperfect because the people using it are imperfect. Each calibration meeting should have checks and balances built in so that leaders are held accountable for their evaluation decisions.
- **Get the right people involved.** Make sure that the reviewer can adequately represent the employees being discussed by articulating what those employees have accomplished. The reviewer must be able to respond appropriately to questions or challenges from the group. If questions arise, make sure the manager is available to clarify them.
- **Set appropriate ground rules for meetings.** Participants must feel open to share and receive feedback. They must also feel comfortable asking their peers for advice if they need help in determining or communicating a rating.
- **Leverage the information gathered during the process.** The power of calibration goes beyond performance ratings. These discussions yield important insight into the University’s talent pipeline and overall development needs.
### Timeline for Calibrations, Performance Plans and Annual Reviews (Suggested)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Preparing Annual Review to End the Performance Cycle</th>
<th>Preparing Performance Plan to Begin the Performance Cycle</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Early Aug. – Late Sept.</strong></td>
<td>• Employees complete required self-reviews in Talent@VCU.</td>
<td>• Manager teams may begin discussing strategic cascading goals or priorities for the next performance cycle.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Manager teams may begin discussing strategic cascading goals or priorities for the next performance cycle.</td>
<td>• Managers have conversations with employees about individual performance and career development goals for the upcoming performance cycle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Manager teams may begin discussing strategic cascading goals or priorities for the next performance cycle.</td>
<td>• Employees enter goals for the new performance cycle in Talent@VCU and send to the manager for approval.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mid Sept. – Mid Oct.</strong></td>
<td>• Managers complete annual reviews in Talent@VCU for all direct reports and send electronically to the reviewer.</td>
<td>• Employees enter goals for the new performance cycle in Talent@VCU and send to the manager for approval.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Reviewers complete their analysis of the manager’s review to ensure alignment with success measures and consistent use of the ratings scale.</td>
<td>• Employees enter goals for the new performance cycle in Talent@VCU and send to the manager for approval.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Management teams meet for calibration session to compare ratings for employees and to ensure consistency, fairness and appropriate justification for rating and makes adjustments as necessary.</td>
<td>• Employees enter goals for the new performance cycle in Talent@VCU and send to the manager for approval.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mid Oct. – Early Nov.</strong></td>
<td>• Managers meet with employees to discuss annual performance reviews.</td>
<td>• Managers review employee goals in Talent@VCU and approve or make adjustments with the employee as necessary.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Manager and employee acknowledge discussion in Talent@VCU.</td>
<td>• Managers review employee goals in Talent@VCU and approve or make adjustments with the employee as necessary.</td>
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Conducting the Review Conversation

Expected outcomes of the performance review conversation include:

- A thorough discussion by both parties of strengths and contributions during the review period;
- A thorough discussion of areas in which the employee needs to improve in the future, including a description of the current behavior and clear understanding of the desired result. Specific actions should be identified and written as a development plan.
- A base is established for new objectives for the remainder or upcoming review period.

Four key factors will facilitate a productive and positive review conversation

1. Preparation
2. Involving the Employee
3. Development Plan
4. Mutual Goal Setting

Preparation
Give the employee sufficient notice of the purpose, date and time of the conversation. Usually three or five days will allow the employee adequate time to reflect on past performance and possible future development.

- Set the expectation of employee involvement by asking for the employee’s reflection on performance and preparation to discuss not only what has been done well, but also the areas in which improvement and/or growth is needed.
- Set aside sufficient time. Often a comprehensive discussion will require one hour. Setting aside less time may communicate to the employees that they are not important enough to receive a sufficient amount of time.
- Choose a quiet setting with no interruptions. Once the conversation has started, do not allow phone calls or other disturbances. The full attention of both manager and employee is important.

Involving the Employee
Involving the employee in an active discussion about performance and developing plans for improvement has the major benefit of encouraging the employee to take an active role in examining their job performance and committing to necessary changes. This is a stronger factor in actual performance improvement than having the manager tell the employee what needs to be done. This collaborative process conveys the sense of working together in a positive way. Employee involvement should occur throughout the conversation. To promote involvement:
Solicit Employee Input: The performance review conversation is also an opportunity to listen and learn about the employee and about the operation of the department. Ask questions that require more than a yes or no answer; for example, “What do you think have been your biggest accomplishments during this review period?” “What things would you like to improve?” “What was most challenging?” “What was most rewarding or enjoyable?”

Ask how the relationship with the employee can be improved. The manager needs to know from the employee what can be done to provide assistance. Keep in mind that helping is not “doing for” someone, but enabling the person to do it for themselves.

Development Plan
To improve performance, both manager and employee need to:

- Identify performance area(s) that are opportunities for growth or rated lower than “Successful” (Meets expectations)
- Examine and agree upon how the opportunities for growth will enhance performance in the employee’s current job or help prepare them for possible promotion. Take the same approach with instances of low performance.
- Develop possible solutions that will enhance performance and/or address the reasons for low performance.
- Decide upon the best solution(s)
- Follow up and evaluate

Mutual Goal Setting
The culmination of the conversation is looking at expectations for the remaining/next performance period. The manager should work with the employee to develop specific goals based on individual needs and department goals. Future goals should be based on the knowledge of the employee’s capability gained through the performance review process. Goals should be challenging but not out of the employee’s reach.

Ending the Conversation
Summarize the discussion. Put the conversation into proper perspective. This is particularly true if there have been some major performance challenges. While problems need to be addressed, the employee should not have the impression that every area of performance is deficient (for some it may be, but this should have been addressed long before the formal performance review). In addition, no one should have the impression that everything they do is perfect – some areas of performance can always be strengthened. The manager should attempt to strike a balance.

End on a positive note! Comprehensive performance reviews are hard work for both manager and employee. The closing of the conversation is the final opportunity to reinforce the idea that a performance review conversation is a constructive experience. Emphasize the importance of the employee to the department and confidence in the employee’s ability to do the job.