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Conducting Meaningful Appraisals

What is an Appraisal?

Whilst this may seem a simple question there are still a lot of Line Managers out there who are unsure of what an appraisal really is, the purpose of it, and how it should be conducted. An appraisal is a tool to aid performance management. Sometimes it can be mistaken as performance management, but it is only a part of the process. It is a meeting commonly held between the employee and Line Manager, and is an opportunity for both parties to reflect on how the employee is doing in their role. It is an opportunity to give the employee feedback and to also hear their ambitions and aspirations. Conducting an appraisal also helps Line Managers to develop a positive relationship with their employees as it is a time for listening and understanding.

The Wrong Approach

Sometimes Line Managers mistake appraisals for an opportunity to do most of the talking, but this is incorrect. The appraisal should not be a "top down" process or an opportunity for one way communication, with the Line Manager asking questions and the employee answering them. Some managers view appraisals as a time to bring up a catalogue of failures and omissions that may have been performed by the employee, something which can make the meeting uncomfortable and disparaging. An appraisal is not the time to make someone feel guilty or ashamed for making mistakes or doing the wrong thing, it is not a "telling off". Whilst feedback is a large part of appraisals it is important to make sure the feedback is not based on the subjective opinions of the person conducting it.

Finally, an appraisal should never end on a disagreement between the two parties. If the meeting ends on a bad note the employee is likely to leave feeling disengaged and demotivated by the whole process.

The Right Approach

An appraisal should be a free flowing conversation between two people during which views and opinions are exchanged from both sides. If anything, the employee should be the one doing the most talking and it is the responsibility of the Line Manager to practice active listening. An appraisal is a time for an employee to reflect on how they feel they are doing in their role, which will allow their Line Manager to understand what levels of support they may need, and how best to help them develop. A large part of appraisals is planning for future development and activities.

Open questions are the best to use in an appraisal, as they allow the employee to express themselves more openly and honestly. If you feel you require more information, include probing questions i.e. "Can you clarify what you mean by that please?"

Conduct your appraisals after a specific time i.e. every six months, and then during the appraisal review the employees' performance over that entire period of time, rather than choosing certain events or mistakes to focus on. This will ensure the appraisal is well rounded and realistic to the employees' performance. Whilst giving feedback, focus on the good and the bad. Recognise the achievements the employee has made and show gratitude, and when providing negative feedback, focus more on what the employee can do better next time. The employee needs to be shown how they went wrong and the implications of that, otherwise they may not learn from their mistakes.

Quite possibly the most important thing for an appraisal is that it ends on a high note. An employee should leave an appraisal feeling motivated to follow up on any plans that have been made, and grateful that they have been listened to. Similarly a Line Manager should leave with a clearer understanding of their employee and a better understanding of how to manage them.

How Can We Help?

We can help you by providing advice and guidance on conducting appraisals and managing employee performance.

If you have any queries relating to any of the subjects raised within this newsletter then please don't hesitate to contact us at hradvice@hasslefreehr.co.uk

For clarification of any of the above updates or for advice and guidance on any HR and/or Health and Safety Concerns contact us by emailing hradvice@hasslefreehr.co.uk or by calling 02476 664092.

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