



# PERFORMANCE FEEDBACK - 5 QUICK TIPS

## 1. Kindness matters

Kindness matters in situations where people tend to be uncomfortable. Very few people enjoy giving or receiving performance feedback. Recognize that the formality of the evaluation process and the annual feedback meeting can increase anxiety for all those involved. Thus, the simple act of being kind can be powerful. It is fine to acknowledge your own initial awkwardness or discomfort. It is also important to do your best at putting your colleague—the person to whom you are giving feedback—at ease.

## 2. Be prepared

Before your performance feedback meeting, summarize your assessment of your colleague's performance. Review his or her publications, teaching awards, student feedback, citation index results, track record for obtaining grants and external support, community engagement, and university service. Know what the university's standards are, and be prepared to provide concrete examples of how your colleague has met those standards.

## 3. Know your role

As an academic administrator, one of your key duties is to provide accurate, timely, and useful feedback to others, faculty and staff alike, about their performance. Your observations interpret the university's standards, as reflected through the lens of your colleagues' performance. In most universities, teaching and research are the two primary areas where faculty performance is measured. Public service is usually the third component—and it often receives less rigorous assessment than do teaching and research. Whether or not you agree with the university's approach, when providing feedback and evaluations, you represent the institution, and must speak from that perspective.

## 4. This is not the moment for diplomatic euphemisms

When giving annual performance feedback, keep your comments and observations clear and focused. Start with the positive news: discuss your colleague's strengths, successes and accomplishments over the last assessment period. The more specific you are in identifying areas that deserve praise, the more your comments will be heard and retained. Praise does not necessarily take the sting out of criticism. Praise will help gain the trust of your colleague so that your critical feedback and suggestions for improvement will be more likely to be heard and acted upon. Refer to the university's standards and expectations, before moving to the areas where improvement is needed. When you move to the part of the conversation where you must address deficiencies, your goal is to be specific and clear. Explain what specific steps your colleague should take in order to improve his/her evaluation for next review period. Performance improvement requires two parties: the performer and the evaluator. As the evaluator, you should identify what you will do to help your colleague meet the university's expectations. The goal is not to criticize for the sake of criticism; the goal is to maximize the contribution of every faculty member.

## 5. Check for understanding

Remember that you may need to deliver both praise and criticism. Throughout your performance feedback meeting, check for understanding. Summarize your feedback, and then ask your colleague for any observations or clarifications that s/he may want to add. The best feedback sessions are dialogues; this is not the time for a lecture. Ask if your colleague is surprised by anything that you have said. If you have done your job during the year by providing feedback at multiple points, the end of period or year's evaluation should not contain surprises.