“I think the Performance Excellence Process is great. I use it with the individuals who report to me. Although it takes a bit more time initially, it will save everyone time in the long run. There is opportunity for much more constructive dialogue and guidance.”

— Lewis J. Smith, professor, Feinberg School of Medicine, and associate vice president for research, Northwestern University
Dear Colleagues:

Among our greatest assets at Northwestern University is our outstanding human capital. The success of our University to meet our academic and research mission and provide exemplary service to the larger community depends on the hard work, commitment, and skills of our faculty and staff. The NorthWestern Will Strategic Plan outlines our commitment to being an engaged partner in enhancing the learning opportunities and professional growth of all employees. We are encouraged to apply high standards to our education, scholarship, and service.

The Performance Excellence Process is an integral part of the NorthWestern Will Strategic Plan. The quality and commitment of the University’s workforce is a critical part of our overall effectiveness. Through Performance Excellence, we seek to make explicit the University’s commitment to high standards of performance and accountability. We know that individual and organizational effectiveness depend on setting priorities, understanding what is expected and how it should be done, and providing effective feedback. The Performance Excellence Process is designed to help employees understand how their work influences the success of the University — a critical goal to Northwestern’s maintaining the highest standard of excellence.

Sincerely,

Daniel Linzer  
Provost

Nim Chinniah  
Executive Vice President
The Performance Excellence Process helps the individuals and organizations of Northwestern accomplish their goals. It encourages leaders and their teams to set priorities for what needs to be accomplished and how things need to be done. This results in greater workplace effectiveness, efficiency, and engagement.

Stage 1: Set expectations at the beginning of the performance year (June)

- Employee and manager work together to write employee performance objectives, discuss Northwestern behaviors, and set development objectives. Individual objectives need to be aligned with those of the department, the school or administrative unit, and the University — and people need to see the connections among them:

The Cascading of Performance Excellence Objectives

University objectives

School or administrative unit objectives

Department objectives

Individual objectives

Tools:
Setting Performance Objectives (page 4)
Demonstrating Northwestern Behaviors (page 5)
Setting Development Objectives (page 6)
Performance Excellence Annual Plan (page 8)

(continued on next page)
Stage 2:
Discuss quarterly progress

- Manager and employee meet to discuss quarterly progress, which is recorded and updated by the employee (beforehand) on the Performance Excellence Annual Plan (page 8). Manager edits as needed. Objectives and progress reports can be adjusted at any time.

- Manager gives feedback and guidance to help employee accomplish objectives and demonstrate behaviors.

  Tool: Giving Effective Feedback (page 7)

- If performance becomes unsatisfactory any time, manager and employee explore the nature of the situation, its cause, and its result. Manager gives additional feedback and guidance to help employee accomplish objectives and demonstrate behaviors. If performance is not raised and sustained, corrective action may be necessary. Contact your HR consultant if you encounter this situation.

Stage 3:
Review performance at the end of the year (May)

- Manager completes the year-end rating sections of the Performance Excellence Annual Plan. To enhance this process, manager may do two things beforehand: 
  a) Ask employee to “self-review” by completing the year-end rating sections, and 
  b) Request confidential feedback about employee’s performance from others (e.g., customers, colleagues, supply partners, supervisor, subordinates).

- When determining the year-end ratings, manager considers the relative importance of all performance objectives, Northwestern behaviors, and development objectives and weighs them accordingly.

- Manager and employee meet to discuss performance for the year.

- Both manager and employee sign and date the form and keep a copy. Manager sends the original to his/her HR consultant.
Good “performance objectives” clarify the work results for which individuals are accountable. These objectives often can be adapted from a person’s job description.

People need to see the link between their individual objectives and the objectives of the entire organization to which they belong.

Performance objectives describe accomplishments, not activities. The goal should be “SMART” performance objectives:

- **S** = Specific
- **M** = Measurable
- **A** = Achievable
- **R** = Results-focused
- **T** = Time-bound

### Examples

#### For an organization

**Not SMART**  
“Improve our student service.”

**SMART**  
“Achieve and maintain an average student service rating of at least 4.5/5.0 on our annual survey by 4-23-07.”

#### For an exempt employee

**Not SMART**  
“Create our 2007 strategic plan.”

**SMART**  
“Create our 2007 strategic plan, obtain final approval from the Budget Committee, and discuss it with our department so individuals can begin setting their performance objectives by 8-29-07.”

#### For a non-exempt employee

**Not SMART**  
“Send out welcome letters to our new students.”

**SMART**  
“Produce and distribute personalized welcome letters, error free, to all new students in our department by 9-26-07.”
Demonstrating Northwestern Behaviors

Working in the area of performance excellence and assessment over the past several years, staff in Human Resources have identified what we call “Northwestern behaviors.” These are, simply, desired behaviors that are consistent with Northwestern’s goals and, if encouraged in and developed by our employees, will help make the University a better place to work, learn, and live.

True success in the workplace depends both on what we accomplish and how we get things done. In the Performance Excellence Process, what we accomplish are performance objectives and how we accomplish things are Northwestern behaviors.* Employees of the University are encouraged to demonstrate the following behaviors in order to successfully accomplish their performance objectives.

**Coachability:** Being receptive to feedback; willing to learn; embracing continuous improvement.

**Collegiality:** Being helpful, respectful, approachable, and team oriented; building strong working relationships and a positive work environment.

**Communication:** Balancing listening and talking; speaking and writing clearly and accurately; influencing others; keeping others informed.

**Compliance:** Honoring University policies and regulatory requirements.

**Customer focus:** Striving for high customer satisfaction; going out of the way to be helpful and pleasant; making it as easy as possible for the customer (rather than the department or the University).

**Efficiency:** Planning ahead; managing time well; being on time; being cost conscious; thinking of better ways to do things.

**Initiative:** Taking ownership of work; doing what is needed without being asked; following through.

**Leadership (as applicable):** Setting clear expectations; reviewing progress; providing feedback and guidance; holding people accountable.

* Detailed definitions are available in the handout “Recognizing and Rating Northwestern Behaviors” available at [www.northwestern.edu/hr](http://www.northwestern.edu/hr).

Northwestern University Performance Excellence Handbook
Good “development objectives” help people acquire knowledge and build skills they need to accomplish their performance objectives and demonstrate Northwestern behaviors.

Effective managers help employees identify their development opportunities and suggest potential solutions (such as special assignments, job shadowing, mentoring, and workshops offered by Training & Development staff (www.northwestern.edu/hr/training).

As with the performance objectives, development objectives should be SMART.

Examples

For an exempt employee wishing to improve efficiency
Development objective:
“Take the Project Management Essentials workshop on 2-5-07, report what I learn to our team by 2-19, and apply the relevant concepts while creating and communicating our 2007 strategic plan.”

For an exempt or non-exempt employee wishing to improve coachability
Development objective:
“At each quarterly progress meeting with my manager, ask for feedback about what I am doing well and what I can improve. Keep a journal with this information, try my manager's suggestions, and reflect each week on what worked, what didn’t work, and what I will do the following week.”

For an exempt employee wishing to improve leadership
Development objective:
“Find a mentor by 1-1-07, schedule two informal lunch meetings in 2007, and call him/her for guidance as needed.”

For a non-exempt employee wishing to improve written communication
Development objective:
“Take the Better Business Writing workshop on 3-12-07, report what I learn to my manager by 3-19, and apply the relevant concepts while writing our student welcome letters.”
Effective managers give employees feedback to encourage desirable behaviors and results and to change undesirable behaviors and results.

Valuable feedback is delivered objectively. It addresses the result of what someone actually said or did, not what they may have thought or felt. You can use the following formula as a guide:

1. Describe what employee actually said or did.
2. Explain the result of employee’s words/behaviors.
3. Ask employee to continue (or change) his/her words or behaviors as needed.

### Examples

**To reinforce desirable behavior and results**

Ineffective feedback:

“You’re doing a great job with our monthly budgets. Keep it up!”

Effective feedback:

1. “You’ve done a great job of reconciling our budget statements by discovering and correcting the occasional error.”
2. “This gives us accurate records of a) how much money we have to purchase materials and b) where we might need to cut back to balance our budget.”
3. “Please keep doing this.”

**To change undesirable behavior and results**

Ineffective feedback:

“You know how much I like you, but I’ve noticed you’re coming in late more often, so I have to admit I’m starting to wonder about your attitude.”

Effective feedback:

1. “You arrived late for our last two department meetings, which couldn’t begin without you.”
2. “This forced us to rush through the agenda, and that frustrated our team members who needed more information to do their work.”
3. “If you’re running late, would you please call so we can postpone our start time?”
Key to the Performance Excellence Process is the Annual Plan. With this document managers and employees together set performance objectives, review quarterly progress, assess Northwestern behaviors, track development objectives, and rate performance for the entire year.

Below is an example (at reduced size) of the first page of the Performance Excellence Annual Plan. The complete document can be downloaded as a Word document from www.northwestern.edu/hr for use in your own department.