Performance Excellence Ratings during Covid-19

The Covid-19 pandemic has taken a toll on every aspect of our lives – home, work and family. As a manager, you have rapidly adapted to managing your people and goals remotely, while your team members are juggling productivity with family responsibilities and the stress and pressure of these times.

And now it’s Performance Excellence season. How do we make the process meaningful and fair?

Guidelines for evaluating performance before and during Covid-19

The Performance Excellence review is meant to summarize and evaluate performance over the past performance year, which for many schools and units is approximately June 2019 to May 2020. That means 75% of the review year took place before Covid-19 and the shift to work-from-home, and approximately 25% took place during Covid-19. A method to consider is:

Consider goals, responsibilities and values and behaviors for the time before Covid and during Covid as two distinct parts of the year. Take the time to rate each part of the year individually before you determine the final rating.

- The staff member has performed equally before and during Covid: evaluate the work as a whole and give feedback and a rating based on that consistent performance

- The staff member’s performance has improved or declined significantly during the Covid event, consider the percentage of the year before Covid and during Covid in order to determine your final rating. Include your observations about performance changes in the year-end conversation.

Should reviews and ratings be completed for furloughed staff?

A Performance Excellence Review for furloughed staff members is optional. If the review and rating is on track for completion before the furlough begins, you may choose to complete it. Another option is to wait and complete the review when the staff member is recalled to their role, so as to not rush the process in a time of potentially high stress. Either choice is acceptable.
Why Performance Ratings Matter

Without merit increases and the part ratings play in determining increases, you may be tempted to be less rigorous in performance review and rating this year. This can have a negative impact on your team members in the following ways:

Without ratings, time spent on informal performance conversations drops and the quality of conversation between managers and staff members declines.

Every staff member benefits from knowing where they stand, and without a rating, staff members lack a barometer with which to compare their current and future performance. For many, this “not knowing” can increase anxiety.

An Opportunity and a Challenge

The absence of merit increases presents an opportunity and a challenge.

+ Opportunity

You can rate staff members on your team without the pressure of it being tied to a merit increase. This year will be purely about performance and how people are doing their jobs today, and your honesty provides a solid foundation for conversation about forward-focused growth and development.

Challenge

Higher ratings provide immediate gratification for givers and receivers. Avoid the temptation to inflate ratings in response to stress and instead, commit to honesty (and kindness) which can help build strong relationships over the long term.

For additional resources to support supervisors and staff in Performance Excellence in 2020, visit http://perform.northwestern.edu. Resources will be added throughout May and June.