

2600 Phrases for Effective Performance Reviews

Ready-To-Use Words and Phrases
That Really Get Results

Includes special section
featuring job-specific phrases

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Introduction:

How to Use This Book in Order to Save Time and Write Compelling Performance Appraisals



If you've purchased this book, you're serious about strengthening your written communication skills and developing your subordinates. The truth of the matter is that most performance reviews in corporate America are drafted without much thought and are submitted well after the deadline—not much of a motivational tool for workers longing for appreciation for a job well done. Yet taking the time to formally appraise employees' performance once a year has much more significance than many managers realize.

In poll after poll, workers rank pay fourth or fifth on the list of critical workplace factors—well below the critical areas of open communication and recognition for a job well done. American management teams fail to recognize the critical importance of ongoing feedback and staff development in employee retention matters—even when there are scarce dollars available for merit increase pools. The optimal leadership style provides ongoing feedback day in and day out on a regular and predictable basis. The best people managers realize that by shifting responsibility for employee performance evaluations back to their staff members, they take themselves out of the role of unilateral decision maker and disciplinarian and place themselves into the role of career mentor and coach.

In addition, managers who stand out among their peers recognize that the Development section of any performance appraisal is the most critical piece of the process because it constructs a blueprint for employee growth and learning. The learning curve is indeed the glue that binds people to companies. Despite small merit increase pools or opportunities for vertical promotion available in any company at any particular time, satisfied employees will perform at their best and remain loyal when they feel connected, sense that they make a difference at work, and add critical skills and experiences to their resumes.

They say that people “join companies and leave managers.” It’s also said that the difference between an active job seeker and a passive job seeker is one bad day in the office. If your most respected critic were to objectively evaluate your leadership abilities and staff development skills, how do you feel you would rank if were evaluated according to the following criteria:

- How effective are you at delegating to and motivating your staff?
- How consistent are you in putting their career and development needs above your own in a goodwill attempt to help them build their resumes and prepare for the next step in progression in their careers—at your company or elsewhere?
- How well do you address performance achievements and problems day in and day out so that subordinates understand what is expected of them and how success is measured in your group?

The annual performance appraisal process is the once-a-year validation that someone is making a positive difference—that their contributions over 365 days of work are formally recognized and celebrated. Yet, too many managers fill in an-

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nual appraisal forms in a perfunctory fashion, looking at the process as a bothersome, yet mandatory task. Enlightened managers, on the other hand, make their jobs much easier by delegating appropriately, listening attentively, and having fun at work. It's not that hard to transition to "enlightened management" status: All it takes is a willingness to rethink your role in your company, your influence over those you supervise, and your ability to bring out the best in others by motivating them to reach beyond their comfort zone.

Remember that motivation is internal. You're not responsible for motivating your staff, per se; people are responsible for motivating themselves. You are, however, responsible for creating a work environment in which people can motivate themselves and find new ways of reinventing their work in light of your company's changing needs. To that end, this book will serve as a handy time saver, a narrative assistant, and an insightful guide into new ways of recognizing and rewarding performance.

How to Use This Book

It is often the case that managers avoid or delay written communication tasks that may appear to be confrontational. Similar to a book I've written called *101 Sample Write-Ups for Documenting Employee Performance Problems: A Guide to Progressive Discipline and Termination*, this book's key purpose is to help you find the right words and descriptive phrases to communicate your thoughts and perceptions in a concrete manner for specific situations.

In Part I, we'll address the most commonly rated performance factors, or "core competencies," that a majority of companies use to assess their workers. Included among the core competencies are the topics of "managerial style" and "personal style"—often the most difficult issues to describe in an

annual performance review. The phrases in these sections fit a variety of interpersonal and managerial styles, commitment levels, pace, need for structure, emotional intelligence, and ability to prioritize and juggle multiple tasks. Refer to these sections any time you have a difficult time finding the right words to describe an individual's preferences, inclinations, peculiarities, or other outstanding features. You might just find a special way of phrasing something that, up to now, you've had a hard time identifying and describing in others.

For each of the commonly rated performance factors in Part I, we provide descriptive phrases that can be used to evaluate *historical* performance, organized in two sections:

Meets/Exceeds Expectations

Needs Improvement

For all of the core competencies we also provide a third section called "Goals." This section provides multiple examples of development plans for outlining key areas of *future* growth and learning. These phrases will help you structure your recommendations for employee improvement over the coming review period. As with the two other sections, you could simply use these statements "as is" or customize them for your particular needs.

Simply stated, forward-looking development plans give you a process to prevent future performance problems and to create an environment in which employees could motivate themselves. That, more than anything, will give you peace of mind and turn you into a motivator and coach rather than a unilateral disciplinarian and decision maker. Your employees will benefit too as they're given the freedom and discretion to self-monitor and self-correct in an empowered environment. There's no greater formula for enlightened leadership.

Whereas Part I covers general core competencies, in Part II we address the *functional* components of many common posi-

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tions in Corporate America, including positions in sales, marketing, finance, legal, human resources, operations, information technology, and manufacturing. It is important to be able to benchmark particular functions and responsibilities that are common in such universal positions, and to address performance expectations for each.

There are four appendixes in the book. Appendixes A and B provide useful lists of high impact verbs and adverbs that will prompt you when finding just the right word tends to escape you. Appendix C is a brief discussion of merit increases and the five-point grading scale. Appendix D is a short index of the titles and roles that appear in this book.

In essence, in this book you have a handy library of practical, ready-to-use phrases that will help you acknowledge outstanding job performance, address substandard work quality, and outline developmental opportunities for your direct reports. In addition to saving time, you'll strengthen your self-confidence and distinguish yourself in writing as a leader and career builder.

The Performance Management Cycle

There are three components of the Performance Management Cycle:

1. Goal setting and planning
2. Ongoing feedback and coaching
3. Appraisal and reward

The annual performance appraisal clearly speaks to the third issue, but appraisal and reward can't be accomplished in a vacuum. That third stage is the culmination resulting from ongoing efforts in the first two stages. The performance management cycle is a continuum leading to a particular resolution

in the final (third) step, but all three stages are intrinsically linked to the end result—the performance appraisal and associated merit increase (reward).

Annual performance appraisals are not meant to be a paper chase—a mandatory exercise that creates a snapshot of your impressions as a supervisor about a subordinate’s work. Instead, they should be a collaborative effort that builds on open communication and constant feedback. Thus, investing in goal setting should be a two-way communication: Employees who have advanced input into their own career development will typically buy in to the suggestions much more readily than when those goals are imposed from above. And remember, no matter how “perfectly written” these goals are on the actual performance appraisal form, they’ll be useless without ongoing communication throughout the review period.

So keep a copy of each of your staff member’s annual reviews in your desk, and make sure they do the same. Develop a habit of reviewing the status of performance achievement and skills development on a quarterly basis. You’ll find that your business relationships will be focused, you’ll never again feel like you’re flying blind, and your subordinates will have less of a need for ongoing supervision.

Ten Tips to Maximize Your Performance Appraisal Documentation Skills

Whenever you pull this book down from your bookshelf as you’re preparing to write a subordinate’s performance review, keep the following rules in mind:

Rule 1: There should be very few surprises in the annual review.

This is a “total recall” document reflecting twelve months of work. If something totally new needs to be surfaced now,

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you probably didn't do a thorough enough job communicating with the employee throughout the review period.

So sharing performance concerns for the first time during the performance appraisal should be the exception, not the rule. Still, sometimes it may be necessary to do so, even though that may appear to "blind side" the employee. Nothing is more demotivating than finding out that your overall performance didn't meet company expectations when you thought you were doing fine. Typical complaints sound like this:

"I can't believe my boss. She gave me an overall review score of 2 out of 5, meaning that I didn't meet expectations. It would have been nice if she'd told me some time over the past year that I needed to improve in a particular area. She's always so nicey-nice and perky to your face, and then she stabs you in the back on the annual review. Well, I have a pending meeting with the division president to discuss my supervisor's shortcomings, and this review she gave me will be the first item of discussion."

To avoid such lose-lose situations, whenever you're faced with documenting new issues for the first time in an annual review, acknowledge in writing that the matter hasn't been formally brought to the employee's attention beforehand. For example, "I recognize that we haven't formally discussed . . . , but I felt it appropriate to bring this issue to your attention during this annual performance review because. . . ."

Assuming you have a compelling reason to include brand new information in a document that covers an entire year's performance, this open and honest approach will make your documentation appear to be more objective and evenhanded. More importantly, the employee may perceive the entire matter as ultimately fairer because the disclaimer at least acknowledges that this is new terrain.

Rule 2: Review the employee's prior year performance review(s) before attempting to draft a new appraisal.

Performance reviews aren't meant to be conducted in a vacuum. They only make sense if they logically follow the prior year's performance appraisal notes. Therefore, look to prior reviews for areas of particular strengths, weaknesses, or areas for development. Which areas have improved? Which areas have remained stagnant and in need of further development? What's the overall performance trend when comparing this year to last year?

Rule 3: Understand how documentation can be used against your company if composed the wrong way.

Here's a special consideration: When employees are terminated for cause and bring wrongful termination actions against prior companies, judges and arbitrators look to the consistency in a company's written communication in order to justify the termination and determine which party prevails. This *written record* is typically found in the form of written warnings and annual performance reviews, laid out side by side on a table as exhibits. But which one is more important in an arbitrator's eyes: the annual review or the written warning?

Generally speaking, the annual appraisal is given more weight in legal deliberations because it covers an entire year's work. A written warning, in comparison, could simply be the result of one bad day in the office or a short-term string of thoughtless acts or omissions. Think of it this way: A written warning typically functions to *break the chain* of positive performance evaluations that's been documented over a number of years. Still, the annual appraisal is generally viewed as the "anchor" document that evidences the company's formal communication record with its worker.

In comparison, the written warning serves to reestablish and redirect the company's written communication record by

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placing an individual on notice that *failure to provide immediate and sustained improvement may result in further disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal*. Disciplinary consequences written this way clearly state that an individual's position is in serious jeopardy of being lost. It would subsequently be very difficult for plaintiff attorneys to argue that their client (your ex-employee) was denied workplace due process because the individual couldn't discern—based on your company's formal communication record—how serious the situation had become.

The question you have to ask, of course, is whether one written warning or multiple warnings will be necessary to justify a termination. That can only be answered on a case by case basis, depending on an individual's tenure, historical performance record, and protected category status. Remember, however, that you have a lot more discretion to terminate or issue a final written warning for a first-time "conduct" offense (like theft or insubordination) than for a "performance" infraction (like substandard work quality). In the case of performance infractions, you'll typically be expected to provide workers with all the steps of progressive discipline typically accorded under your company's policies and past practices, which could include written and final written warnings as well as suspensions, in some cases.

However, if written warnings are subsequently followed by a positive annual performance review showing that the employee has improved and now meets company expectations, then that positive performance evaluation will, in essence, nullify the written warning issued during the review period. So if you have any remote hesitations about an individual's ability to make it in your department or company in the upcoming year because of his subpar job performance or inappropriate workplace conduct, document it! You should grade the individual as "not meeting expectations" in the "Overall Score" section at the end of the performance appraisal form.

Otherwise, the positive record that you create today will make it harder to terminate the individual tomorrow.

Rule 4: Performance reviews are absolute, not relative.

Too many unsuspecting, yet good-hearted managers feel that they've given an employee a *real* message regarding their substandard performance by assigning them lower grades than everyone else on the team. If the other four employees in your unit received "exceeds expectations" scores (for example, 5 out of 5), and this particular individual received only a "meets expectations" score (for example, 3 out of 5), shouldn't she realize that she's performing poorly?

Absolutely not! If the company deems a 3 an acceptable score, then the employee *hears* that she's met expectations. In a court of law, that individual employee may state that she realized that she scored lower than everyone else in the department or that she had no idea what scores the others received. In either case, her lawyer's argument will simply state that she had no idea that her job was in jeopardy because her overall score was acceptable.

The lesson here is simple: If the *overall score* for the performance period shows that the individual is not meeting company expectations, then your communication record will remain consistent and incontestable in its intent. On the contrary, trying to hang your hat on the "message" that one person received the lowest overall score in the unit is no defense to a wrongful termination charge. A jury most likely would not sustain your logic that the employee had cause to believe that she was heading down the road to termination.

Likewise, most performance appraisal forms have nine or ten individual categories in addition to the "Overall Score" at the end. Substandard scores in individual categories will certainly help your case if you're forced to defend a termination, but in and of themselves, they may not be an absolute defense. Instead, be sure to give the individual a failing

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“Overall Score” at the end of the appraisal form to reflect unacceptable performance for the entire review period.

Rule 5: It's okay to give an A.

Do you remember those college professors who never gave A's? It seemed that no matter how hard you worked or how much extra credit you turned in, they were simply implacable: An A was little more than a lofty dream.

It shouldn't work that way in the workplace. Saying thank you for a job well done and recognizing special achievements should be a matter of practice, not a matter of exception. It's perfectly acceptable to write at the conclusion of an appraisal:

Patty, thank you for your ongoing contributions and continued hard work over the past year. You've made our department a better place by your willingness to assume additional responsibilities, your friendly customer service, and by the care you put into everything you do. Keep up the excellent work, and remain a role model for your peers. I'm proud of you and very appreciative of all you've done.

Again, your merit pool may only be 2 percent, or maybe you have no merit pool at all this year. The overall score on the review shouldn't be lowered because you have a smaller merit pool than you'd ideally like to have. What's important is the written message: Those parting words in the annual review, now made into a formal company record, will have an incredible impact on your employee's sense of job satisfaction and self-worth. And think what a gift you'll have given her to share with family and friends at home as well as perspective employers in years to come.

Of course, you should also be a bit cautious about being too flowery in your accolades and compliments. Should that employee later fall from grace and you terminate the individual for cause, your stellar recommendations from prior years

may be enlarged and placed before a jury as evidence of the individual's worth and work ethic.

Rule 6: Don't give everyone A's!

If you routinely give all of your direct reports the highest overall grade rankings, you're probably doing something wrong. It's possible to say that at one particular point in your career, every individual member on your team may be the best worker you've ever had the joy of supervising. Maybe you've got the best line-up of staff members in your entire industry. Reality, though, is probably not quite as optimistic: Managers who award A's to everyone on their team often have the problem of distinguishing between genuine superior performance and overall good work. They also often wish to avoid the confrontation that comes with providing more down to earth, albeit realistic performance scores.

The solution is pretty simple: Rank order your staff in terms of who is your most critical contributor versus who probably would make the least difference if she resigned tomorrow. Your superstar would be a 5; your "least stellar" worker, who still performs at a very acceptable level, would be a 3. Your other staff members will probably fall into the 4 category.

Think of it another way: You're not doing your subordinates any favors if you continuously give them 5s. Agree together on areas for growth and learning and push them to develop their technical skills and formal education by attending discipline-specific workshops and conferences. It's a more honest appraisal methodology, and a 5 will really be something to strive for.

If you've only given 5s in the past but want to give more 4s and 3s this year, simply hold a staff meeting in advance of the performance appraisal meetings and let your subordinates know that you'll be evaluating everyone differently this year. State that although you've typically given higher grades to the

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group in the past, you want to work on customizing each appraisal this year in terms of objective feedback and development plans. That means the overall scores may be a bit lower, but the value of the entire process, especially the development plan, will increase, and that's to everyone's benefit.

Rule 7: Whenever possible, shift the responsibility for evaluating performance back to your employees.

The reason most employees receive their evaluations late is because supervisors don't have the time to collect the data necessary to write a good review. In addition, since relaying negative news can be confrontational (and we all know that the path of least resistance is avoidance), many supervisors postpone documenting subpar performance for fear of making matters worse with the staff.

You'll find (much to your surprise!) that many employees will appreciate the opportunity to bring to your attention their perceptions of how they've done, what they plan to do, and how you could help. And that automatically puts you in the role of career mentor and coach—not unilateral decision maker and disciplinarian. You'll also learn that the majority of workers will be harder on themselves than you would have ever been. That should take some of the stress off of you in terms of having to surface negative information.

It works this way: About a week before you need to draft your staff appraisals, instruct your direct reports to address their overall performance in three critical areas:

1. Address your overall performance track record for this review period. Specifically address your achievements that have resulted in increased revenues, reduced expenses, or saved time. Why is XYZ Company a better place for your having worked here? How have you had to reinvent your job in light of our department's changing needs? And how

- would you grade yourself in terms of work quality, reliability, interpersonal communication, and technical skills?
2. In what area(s) do you feel you need additional support, structure, or direction? Specifically, where can I, as your supervisor, provide you with additional support in terms of acquiring new skills, strengthening your overall performance, and preparing you for your next move in career progression?
 3. What are your performance goals for the next year? What are the measurable outcomes so that we'll know that you'll have reached those goals?

Once you receive their initial feedback, you could then go on to draft your own staff appraisal. By allowing employees to take the first stab at outlining their goals and achievements, you'll automatically capture what they feel are their most significant issues. You'll be reminded of the achievements they've made throughout the year, and you'll be in a much better position to draft a comprehensive and objective annual report.

Expect an “emotional involvement rate” of 20–70–10 in this exercise, as follows:

- 20 percent of your staff will love this exercise and provide you with all the bells and whistles—productivity graphs, cost savings spreadsheets, and copies of letters of recommendation they've received from customers throughout the review period. (This is the key target group for the exercise.)
- 70 percent will do an adequate job in engaging themselves in the self-review process; however, their answers may be somewhat superficial or unsubstantiated.
- 10 percent may refuse to participate: They might argue that it's your job to evaluate them and not theirs. But then

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again, that tells you a lot about their motivation and entitlement mentality, doesn't it? Maybe their own refusal to participate should be incorporated into the narrative of the annual review as evidence of their overall work ethic.

On the other hand, you may naturally fear confrontation by allowing employees to initiate the process and have first say. For example, if you feel that one particular employee is a subpar performer, but that individual may think he's the best thing since sliced bread, then you're sure to invite conflict, right? Wrong! Remember, *you* write the actual review. This pre-review draft is not the actual appraisal form that will end up in the employee's personnel file.

And if it turns out that you both have very different perceptions of the individual's contributions, it's okay to disagree. This will provide you a key opportunity to open up the lines of communication regarding reasons for the differences in your *perceptions*. After all, if you simply roll over the individual in the annual review process like a Sherman Tank with a one-sided diatribe, you'll only initiate a paper war with a stark rebuttal. Talk first, then write. If you both agree to disagree, then so be it. In the end, you'll keep control of the entire process, your authority will remain intact, and you'll initiate a dialog to reach a mutual ground. If the employee follows your review with a rebuttal nonetheless, it will likely be milder and "less attacking" if there have been open discussions before anything was committed to writing.

One final thought: Some employees will request formal feedback on a more regular basis than once per year. (You know who they are.) Consider formally reviewing them twice a year or even possibly once per quarter by shifting the responsibility for data collection and initial review back to them. In essence, they'll do all the legwork, and you'll create an environment in which they could motivate themselves. It requires a minimal time investment on your part, and you'll

find that they'll spread the good news about your enlightened management style with their peers. Objective feedback on a consistent basis is what it's all about.

Rule 8: Don't formally document or otherwise discuss the merit (salary) increase during the performance review process.

If you document, "I believe Janet should receive a 5 percent merit increase this year based on her performance" or raise this issue verbally during the performance appraisal meeting, expect Janet to focus on salary from that point forward. Whether she challenges your overall merit increase recommendation or simply spends the next few minutes of the meeting trying to determine how much that 5 percent uplift will impact her biweekly paycheck, the focus will shift away from performance. Since this is a *performance* review as opposed to a salary review meeting, keep merit increase discussions out of the meeting. They will only weaken your message and lessen your ability to bring about change in the individual's performance levels over the upcoming review period.

Rule 9: You have the right to add disciplinary language to an annual performance review, turning it, in effect, into a written warning.

When managers confirm ongoing substandard performance issues in an annual appraisal, they often mistakenly believe that they must then wait an additional 30 or 60 days before initiating a formal written warning. In essence, the two steps may be combined to hasten the progressive discipline process.

Occasionally, it may be appropriate to add disciplinary language to the performance review itself, thereby turning the substandard performance appraisal into a formal written warning. Your narrative might look like this:

In addition to documenting that your overall performance for this review period does not meet company expectations, this annual ap-

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praisal will also serve as a formal written warning. Failure to demonstrate immediate and sustained improvement may result in further disciplinary action up to and including dismissal.

You'll thereby have established a written record of communicating that the individual's employment is in serious jeopardy of being lost.

Of course, this suggestion could seem a bit extreme, depending on your company's policies and past practices, or a collective bargaining agreement may preclude such aggressive actions. Still, depending on the nature of the infraction as well as the employee's tenure with the company and status as a protected worker, it could certainly be worth pursuing. When in doubt, speak with your HR department or qualified outside counsel, especially if this will be the first time your company will have engaged in this practice of combining annual reviews with formal written warnings.

Rule 10: Follow a few narrative-writing tips that will help you consistently strengthen your overall message.

First, be sure to avoid writing anything that could be interpreted as discriminatory. You may not document or reference anything protected by privacy or employee protection laws. For example, writing "Michael, you are performing well since you began your new medication to combat depression, and I encourage you to continue" could very well violate the protections afforded by the Americans with Disabilities Act if the individual is later denied a promotion or terminated for cause. Similarly, if you reference an individual's age, ethnicity, sexual or gender orientation, religious beliefs, medical history, or any other categories protected under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act or other state worker protection laws, then your own documentation could be used against you in a court of law.

Similarly, if an employee was on a leave of absence for a

significant part of the review period, simply document that “Michael was on an approved leave of absence from May 10 to August 8” and leave it at that. The reason for the leave (pregnancy, workers comp injury, stress leave) is superfluous and should not be included as part of the formal record established by the performance review. It follows that all performance appraisals should be reviewed in advance by your HR or Legal departments before they are shared with your employees to ensure, among other things, that no discriminatory language exists.

Second, avoid the term *attitude* in your formal business communication with your subordinates. “Attitude” is a very subjective judgment that courts will typically dismiss because it is often associated with a mere difference of opinion or a personality conflict. Instead, be sure to describe the objective behaviors that create a negative perception of the employee in others’ eyes. Only behaviors and actions that can be observed and documented belong in work place discussions and may be presented as evidence in court.

For example, replace an admonition like this:

“As we have discussed throughout the year, you have received many complaints regarding your attitude. You need to demonstrate immediate improvement in this area.”

with something concrete like this:

“Peggy received a written warning on January 14 for raising her voice in anger and for using profane language directed at a coworker. The disciplinary warning specifically stated that if she ever again lost control of her temper, used profane language in the workplace, or demonstrated behavior that could be perceived as hostile or threatening, further disciplinary action up to and including termination could result.”

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Third, use the phrase “For example” at least three times in an individual performance appraisal. Managers often make sweeping comments about perceptions without documenting the factual circumstances that justify their points of view. You could therefore easily turn a perception statement like “Your planning and organizational skills are satisfactory, but you sometimes require additional assistance in this area” into something more concrete and instructional for the employee by including an example.

Fourth, use the terminology “needs improvement” cautiously in your narrative writing, as it may not convey the message you intend. The examples in our book are structured according to the following two criteria:

Meets/Exceeds Expectations
Needs Improvement

Note, though, that these are categories only for ease of use. In reality, stating that performance or behavior “needs improvement” is not the same as stating that *it does not meet company standards* or is *unsatisfactory*. Similarly, documenting that “Richard has been *spoken to* regarding excessive absenteeism and tardiness” does not convey that his performance was unacceptable. Don’t assume that the employee understood (or a jury would agree) that just because you *spoke about* performance which *needed improvement*, it was assumed to be substandard. Instead, clearly document when performance is unacceptable, unsatisfactory, or fails to meet standards.

Fifth, you should document the efforts you’ve made to help the employee meet performance standards throughout the review period. When writing annual performance appraisals, for example, you should include the fact that you gave the employee a copy of the attendance policy, paid for her to attend a workshop on dealing with interpersonal conflict in the work place, or encouraged her to take an accounting course at a

local college. Such documentation will serve as evidence that you acted responsibly by attempting to proactively rehabilitate the worker.

Finally, when documenting core competency or technical issues, expand your basic ideas by employing a “*by . . .*” format, like this:

✧ Regularly places support staff in positions of leadership *by* appointing them subject matter experts in particular technical areas or by selecting them for workshop/seminar facilitator roles.

✧ Assumes responsibility for areas beyond his immediate control *by* preparing the monthly income statement, the comparative balance sheet, and overall general ledger maintenance.

✧ Has done very little to maintain and advance his technical knowledge and skills *by* upgrading his software skills, attending educational workshops, establishing a professional network of peers, or participating in professional societies.

✧ Masters all phases of the project development life cycle *by* identifying and documenting requirements, technical processes and procedures, test documentation, and environment and deployment plans.

✧ Successfully negotiates salary offers and preempts counteroffer possibilities *by* “pre-closing” and proactively engaging finalist candidates in discussions about their future career development.

✧ Ensures that newly learned skills are repeated and enforced *by* following up with 30, 60, and 90 day quizzes and questionnaires.

Similarly, when documenting future development goals, you could easily strengthen the clarity of your message by applying the “*I expect you to . . . by . . .*” format. For example, it would be simple to turn a statement like:

“In the upcoming review period, you must improve your client relations skills and better utilize your time.”

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into a more instructional, future-oriented statement by applying the “*I expect you to . . . by . . .*” structure, which would look like this:

“I expect you to improve your client relations skills *by* following up with customers within two hours of their initial calls, *by* meeting them in their offices rather than asking them to come to yours, and *by* maintaining weekly contact regarding the status of their work order processing.”

Of course, the examples themselves will easily stand on their own without the “*by*” predicate. Still, this structure should help to remind you to complete your thoughts and provide appropriate examples for your statements. Selectively added to the annual review at strategic points, it will add critical mass to the statements that you make and justify your perceptions. It will likewise help you clearly outline your performance expectations and how they will be concretely measured. Clarity in your written message will not only protect your company from potential outside legal challenges; it will help build a shared sense of open communication, a greater sense of partnership, and increased accountability with your workers.

A final tip to readers:

A book like this will necessarily contain overlap. When you look up a title relating to *management*, be sure to look under both Parts I and II in the text. Part I contains sections on the core competencies of “Leadership,” “Managerial Style,” and “Supervision,” which will surely help you crystallize your ideas. Part II, in comparison, contains *specific* managerial positions in the functional areas of manufacturing, operations, and sales and marketing. Be sure to cross-reference other sections of the book whenever possible.

