5 Ways to Put Learning at the Center of Performance Reviews

A guide to transform managers into learning champions and develop high-performing teams
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Performance reviews are a hot topic amongst managers, employees, and executives alike this time of year—and it’s up to Learning & Development (L&D) and HR professionals to empower managers to make them successful. Unfortunately, performance reviews today are widely unpopular. But performance reviews are important. When done well, they go beyond a standard performance appraisal of strengths and areas of development. They can offer an opportunity to strengthen manager and employee relationships, enhance performance, and provide employees a path to learn and grow. Even more importantly, it’s an opportunity to engage managers in learning content—something that is consistently rated a top challenge among talent developers.
Are performance reviews the key to unlocking manager engagement?

We think so.

New 2019 LinkedIn Learning data, gathered from over 1,500 managers globally, may surprise you. When it comes to making managers aware of learning, email and performance reviews are equally important.

Top 3 ways managers find about learning resources globally

- Email Promotions: 32%
- Performance Reviews: 31%
- Onboarding: 25%

The #1 way managers globally find out about learning resources for themselves and their teams are in email promotions (32%), followed closely when learning is integrated into performance reviews (31%), and onboarding (25%).
This is even more true in enterprise companies. Performance reviews are far and away the #1 way that managers find out about learning resources. Surprisingly, they are even more effective than promotional emails or when learning is integrated into the onboarding process.

**Top Ways Managers Find Out About Learning Resources**

**Enterprise Companies**
(5,000+ employees)

- Performance Reviews: 42%
- Onboarding: 35%
- Email Promotions: 33%

**Mid-Market Companies**
(1,000-4,999 employees)

- Performance Reviews: 39%
- Email Promotions: 33%
- Team Recommendations: 29%

The #1 way managers at large enterprises globally find out about learning resources available to them and their teams is when they are integrated into performance reviews (42%), more than during onboarding (35%), or email promotions (33%).

The same is true for mid-market companies at 39%, with email trailing at 33%, and team recommendations at 29%.
So, grab a coffee and discover how you, as a learning leader, can help managers put learning at the center of performance reviews to drive higher employee performance while transforming them into learning champions. The practical tips and courses in this guide will help you get there. That’s a win-win in our book.
1. Delivery

Performance reviews are more about the ‘how’ than the ‘what.’

Give managers the information that they need to make performance reviews an opportunity to strengthen their management skills and facilitate a valuable experience for team members.

By integrating learning into performance reviews, employees have an actionable roadmap to help them build the skills they need to succeed in their current role and take their career to the next level.
Top Tips

Take Your Time
Often, managers are evaluating a full year of performance, so it’s worth encouraging them to put in at least 2 hours to gather 360-degree feedback and thoughtfully craft a review that is positive, unbiased, and helpful.

No One Likes Surprises
Giving employees a chance to review the feedback a few days ahead of a performance review meeting helps them prepare, too. Even better, having effective, frequent check-in conversations throughout the year can also help avoid surprises.

Be Prepared
Rescheduling performance reviews can send the wrong message. Managers should schedule the meeting a few weeks ahead, show up on time, and be ready for the conversation.

This Isn’t a Negotiation
The focus of a review is an opportunity to review and discuss feedback rather than negotiating the review itself. If the discussion takes an unproductive turn, then managers should firmly pivot to the path forward.
“Effectively giving and receiving feedback are two sides of the same coin. When you understand what it takes to receive feedback well, you’ll also master how to provide feedback effectively and vice versa.”

Gemma Leigh Roberts, Director, Resilience, Performance & Wellbeing Consultant, Kona Coaching
Follow Gemma
Every great player needs a coach, especially during pivotal career moments.

At their best, performance reviews are not only an opportunity for managers to discuss performance, but they are also coaching opportunities to help their direct reports grow and develop.
2. Coaching

Top Tips

Ask Powerful Questions
Open-ended probing questions invite people to find clarity, new perspectives, and can trigger employees to generate new ideas and solutions.

Listen Actively
When coaching an employee, managers should give them their full attention. By putting their phone on silent and closing their laptops, they are signaling that they are solely focused on their employees’ success.

Give Specific Feedback
Providing feedback in generalities can lead to misunderstandings. Managers should be specific and focus on observable actions and facts so that everyone is on the same page.

Coach Compassionately
When in coaching mode, managers should choose their words wisely and deliver them tactfully to ensure that the conversation stays positive, constructive, and growth-oriented.
“What’s in it for those being coached? The obvious answer is the growth in their skills, but it’s so much more than that. When employees are coached, they feel like their talent is being recognized and their potential is being respected. It’s a huge motivator.”

Sara Canaday, Keynote Speaker, Consultant, and Author, Sara Canaday & Associates

Follow Sara

Learn More on LinkedIn Learning

Coaching Skills for Leaders and Managers

(Unlocked through 12/31/19) Leadership expert Sara Canaday gives you coaching models and skills to support employee development. View course

Cornerstones of Coaching

Leadership coach Lisa Gates explains how managers can establish a coaching relationship with their direct reports. View course
3. Goals

Setting the right goals leads to employee and company success.

Help your managers set performance goals that drive the right behavior, helps prioritize work that moves the business, and guides high-quality decision-making.
Create SMART Goals

When managers set goals with employees, make sure that they are SMART. It’s an acronym for specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound.

Link Goals to Strategies

Managers should work with their teams to ensure that their goals and priorities ladder up to larger strategic initiatives or your company’s mission and vision.

Everyone Loves Stretch Goals

Stretch goals push team members to achieve more, reach higher, and build new skills. If they are intelligent risks, then make sure that the potential payoff is exponential.

Hold Team Accountable

When evaluating performance, did employees achieve their goals? Whether they knocked them out of the park or fell short, a performance review is a great time to discuss future goals.
3. Goals

“For maximum success, everyone needs at least one BHAG—a big hairy audacious goal. The idea is simple. If your goals aren’t sometimes audacious, then your performance won’t be either.”

Dr. Todd Dewitt, Best-Selling Author at LinkedIn Learning, Inspirational Speaker, Leadership and Authenticity Guru

Follow Todd

Learn More on LinkedIn Learning

Setting Goals and Managing Performance
Dr. Todd Dewitt will help you set smart goals for your employees that align with your business strategy and their skills. View course

Setting Team and Employee Goals
Mike Figliuolo walks you through different types of goals including bottom-up, zero-based, commit, and stretch goals. View course
4. Teams

High performing teams amplify positive outcomes.

Performance reviews are an opportunity for managers to not only evaluate individual performance, but also promote key cultural expectations to create high-performing teams.
Top

Tips

4. Teams

Define High Performance

Whether you factor in hard business metrics, such as revenue, or qualitative metrics like employee engagement, define and measure what high-performance means in your organization.

Recognize Positive Behavior

Rewards reinforce behaviors that are consistent with the culture you’re trying to build and performance you’re trying to drive—individually and collectively.

Be a Storyteller

Stories help build a high-performing culture because they are memorable, engaging, and can demonstrate the culture a manager is trying to create.

Promote Inclusivity and Belonging

Diverse teams that celebrate differences and accept them, are well-known to collaborate more effectively and achieve more together.
“Your mission is your purpose. It explains why the organization exists and how it contributes to the world. The culture you build is an enabler of accomplishing your mission. High performance cultures stand for something, the vision and mission represent an ideal or a goal that people can get behind.”

Mike Figliuolo, Managing Director, thoughtLEADERS

Follow Mike
5. Growth

Help managers grow the careers of everyone on their team.

Within a team, performance typically falls along a bell curve—some exceeding expectations, a few struggling, and most in the middle—and each requires a different approach during a performance review.
5. Growth

Top Tips

**Stretch High-Potentials**
Most high-performers thrive when their skills are stretched and their job scope increases. Give them new challenges while providing the right level of support and independence.

**Coach High-Performers to Learn**
When new challenges are given, high-potentials are terrified of failure. Help them build new skills by integrating learning into their individual performance plan to help them feel more confident and succeed.

**Talk About Poor Performance**
Tough performance evaluations can sometimes hinder performance. Instead, managers should have a conversation about it, listen to the context an employee gives, and then work together on a plan to move forward.

**Set Clear Expectations**
Make sure that an employee who is struggling understands what managers expect of them moving forward and the gap between current performance and what is acceptable.
5. Growth

“High-performers are best rewarded with growth opportunities. Whether it’s a promotion or assignment to a new project. This type of recognition results in a clear win-win for you and the employee.”

Don Phin, Keynote Speaker and Emotional Intelligence Trainer
Follow Don

Learn More on LinkedIn Learning

Managing High Potentials
Sara Canaday helps you understand the mindset and motivations of high potentials so you can meet their needs and help them grow and develop. View course

Improving Employee Performance
(Unlocked through 12/31/19) Don Phin explains how to get to the root of poor employee performance and coach low-performing employees. View course

Bonus: Individual Performance Plan
This template that managers and employees can work on together, can help them document learning goals and then the recommended courses to build their skills. View course
Putting it All Together

We hope that this guide has helped you empower your managers to deliver performance reviews that not only look at past performance, but also create a path for employees to develop new skills and grow their careers. And, because performance reviews are the most effective way for managers to discover learning resources, they are a great opportunity to activate managers and foster a culture of learning.
## Top 20 Tips to Put Learning at the Center of Performance Reviews

### Delivery

1. **Take Your Time**
   - Often, managers are evaluating a full year of performance, so it’s worth encouraging them to put in at least 2 hours to gather 360-degree feedback and thoughtfully craft a review that is positive, unbiased, and helpful.

2. **No One Likes Surprises**
   - Giving employees a chance to review the feedback a few days ahead of a performance review meeting helps them prepare, too. Even better, having effective, frequent check-in conversations throughout the year can also help avoid surprises.

3. **Be Prepared**
   - Rescheduling performance reviews can send the wrong message. Managers should schedule the meeting a few weeks ahead, show up on time, and be ready for the conversation.

4. **This Isn’t a Negotiation**
   - The focus of a review is an opportunity to review and discuss feedback rather than negotiating the review itself. If the discussion takes an unproductive turn, then managers should firmly pivot to the path forward.

### Coaching

5. **Ask Powerful Questions**
   - Open-ended probing questions invite people to find clarity, new perspectives, and can trigger employees to generate new ideas and solutions.

6. **Listen Actively**
   - When coaching an employee, managers should give them their full attention. By putting their phone on silent and closing their laptops, they are signaling that they are solely focused on their employees’ success.

7. **Give Specific Feedback**
   - Providing feedback in generalities can lead to misunderstandings. Managers should be specific and focus on observable actions and facts so that everyone is on the same page.

8. **Coach Compassionately**
   - When in coaching mode, managers should choose their words wisely and deliver them tactfully to ensure that the conversation stays positive, constructive, and growth-oriented.

### Goals

9. **Create SMART Goals**
   - Managers are evaluating a full year of performance, so it’s worth encouraging them to put in at least 2 hours to gather 360-degree feedback and thoughtfully craft a review that is positive, unbiased, and helpful.

10. **Link Goals to Strategies**
    - Managers should work with their teams to ensure that their goals and priorities ladder up to larger strategic initiatives or your company’s mission and vision.

11. **Everyone Loves Stretch Goals**
    - Stretch goals push team members to achieve more, reach higher, and build new skills. If they are intelligent risks, then make sure that the potential payoff is exponential.

12. **Hold Team Accountable**
    - When evaluating performance, did employees achieve their goals? Whether they knocked them out of the park or fell short, a performance review is a great time to discuss future goals.

13. **Define High Performance**
    - Whether you factor in hard business metrics, such as revenue, or qualitative metrics like employee engagement, define and measure what high-performance means in your organization.

14. **Be a Storyteller**
    - Stories help build a high-performing culture because they are memorable, engaging, and can demonstrate the culture a manager is trying to create.

15. **Recognize Positive Behavior**
    - Rewards reinforce behaviors that are consistent with the culture you’re trying to build and performance you’re trying to drive—individually and collectively.

16. **Promote Inclusivity and Belonging**
    - Diverse teams that celebrate differences and accept them, are well-known to collaborate more effectively and achieve more together.

17. **Stretch High-Potentials**
    - Most high-performers thrive when their skills are stretched and their job scope increases. Give them new challenges while providing the right level of support and independence.

18. **Coach High-Performers to Learn**
    - When new challenges are given, high-potentials are terrified of failure. Help them build new skills by integrating learning into their individual performance plan to help them feel more confident and succeed.

19. **Talk About Poor Performance**
    - Tough performance evaluations can sometimes hinder performance. Instead, managers should have a conversation about it, listen to the context an employee gives, and then work together on a plan to move forward.

20. **Set Clear Expectations**
    - Make sure that an employee who is struggling understands what managers expect of them moving forward and the gap between current performance and what is acceptable.
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LinkedIn Learning, the leading online learning platform, helps organizations increase learner engagement and close critical skills gaps. With over 15,000 courses taught by real-world experts — and more than 60 new courses added every week — the library is always up-to-date with the most in-demand business, technology, and creative content. Additionally, LinkedIn insights and social experiences make learning more personalized and interactive so employees develop the most relevant, applicable skills. To learn more, visit http://learning.linkedin.com.