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# Employee's Guide to Workplace Best Practices: Navigating the Employee / Supervisor Relationship



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# EMPLOYEE'S GUIDE TO WORKPLACE BEST PRACTICES: Navigating the Employee / Supervisor Relationship

*The workplace provides employees a daily opportunity to partner and work with management on achieving common goals. While developing professional relationships with management and collaborating to achieve objectives, disagreements may arise as a result of varying opinions. Sometimes these disagreements, if not resolved quickly and constructively, can result in larger issues in the workplace leading to employees feeling uncomfortable and unhappy and not knowing how to constructively address the situation with their manager.*

*The goal of this guide is to provide employees with tools and resources that assist with addressing conflict with their supervisor so that a productive and professional work environment is realized by both the employee and the supervisor.*

If you can answer “**yes**” to any of the following questions, this guide is for you! Believe it or not, you can take control of your work environment and bring success to yourself, your supervisor, and your team.

- Are you unhappy in your current position, but do not want to leave?
- Do you recognize weaknesses in your environment, team, or work relationships and want to make it better?
- Are you a leader who wants to make a positive impact on your team?
- Do you want to strengthen collaboration between yourself and your supervisor?
- Do you want more feedback?
- Do you have an opinion, but do not know how to express it?



# Relationships Matter!

## Continuous Performance Management

***Continuous Performance Management is ONLY successful with a collaborative supervisor-employee relationship where BOTH parties BUILD TRUST and PROVIDE CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK.***



**Understand, be prepared, and involve yourself** in the Performance Evaluation/FAR Process including the Self-Evaluation/Self-Assessment.

This is an opportunity to share your feedback, self-reflect, and seek feedback from your supervisor.



## Self-Evaluation/Self-Assessment

It's all about YOU! The self-evaluation/self-assessment is optional, but it highly recommended for you to include yourself and your voice in the process. You can give your supervisor feedback, provide evidence, and identify your development and career aspirations.

Be prepared to discuss these five important questions relating to your performance:

- Describe your most significant accomplishments this year.
- Describe any barriers or challenges that impacted you in effectively completing your job responsibilities or accomplishing your goals.
- Please list your area(s) of strength and area(s) of improvement.
- What skills or new knowledge would you like to develop to improve your performance?
- Is there any other information you would like to share with your supervisor regarding your work performance?

**Don't MISS *YOUR* opportunity to be a part of *YOUR* success!**



## Constructive Feedback

As an employee, you should participate in collaborate feedback with your supervisor. After all, you are your best advocate when it comes to your performance and success.

Frequent constructive feedback helps:

- Keep goals and expectations aligned - identify roadblocks.
- Avoid miscommunications that affect performance and growth and being blindsided.
- Build and strengthen collaborative relationships.
- Provide guidance and coaching from your supervisor.
- There are no surprises at evaluation time!



***Don't wait for feedback to come to you!***

**Begin by building a strong working relationship with your supervisor.** Be willing to take initiative and blend with your supervisor to strengthen yourself, your leadership, and your team.

Ask yourself, what will you do to improve your employee-supervisor relationship?

- **Advocate for yourself.** Remember, it begins with YOU. Make it happen!
- **Embrace opportunities** to give and receive ongoing feedback. Connect on a personal level with your supervisor, partner with them, and practice “upward feedback”.
- **Stay connected regardless of your work environment.** Communication is vital to your success!
- **Listen** and **communicate** effectively.
- Work on building **trust** and **collaboration**.



**Remember:** Ongoing constructive feedback that is honest, well-intended, and delivered with tact, whether from **supervisor to employee** or **employee to supervisor**, can help facilitate positive change, motivate engagement, and achieve optimum performance.

## Embrace Continuous Feedback Opportunities for Better Performance Management

**KEEP** MOMENTUM  
**THE GOING**

- **Schedule Ongoing, One-on-One Touchpoint Conversations**
  - ✓ **Keep it lightweight.** Try to keep your one-on-one to five questions or less.
  - ✓ **Be prepared** to share your recent accomplishments, challenges, and goals.
  - ✓ **Be clear and specific** about any inquiries and where you need input. Share what you expect from your supervisor.
  - ✓ **Challenge yourself** and focus on your path. It's time to be proactive and create your own benchmarks. Detail the actions you will take to enhance your performance, and set up a timeline to track your improvements.
  - ✓ Always **record** and **document** key discussion points, action-items, and feedback.
  - ✓ **Schedule recurrent follow-up meetings** with your supervisor at least **once per month**. If a meeting gets canceled, **reschedule immediately**.
- **Unscheduled Check-In Sessions** – Grab those impromptu check-in sessions before or after a meeting with your supervisor and/or your team to keep the two-way communication practice in motion.
- **Initiate Regular One-on-One Informal Collaborative Sessions** – Some ideas: Call your supervisor and ask how their weekend was? How are things going? How can you better support them?

### After meetings, ALWAYS:

- **Email a recap of the meeting**
- **Look ahead to future meetings**
- **Record key discussion points, action-items or feedback**
- **Document and file**
- **Reflect**
- **Recognize areas for improvement**
- **Take immediate action and follow through**

*Watch video:* [Learn and Grow Video](#)

# TOUCHPOINTS

Touchpoints are ongoing, one-on-one conversations between supervisors and employees about work progress, goals, performance to date, and plan of action going forward.

Share Responsibility for Performance

Meetings should be held on a recurrent schedule, at least once per month.

Touchpoints are **simple**, quick, and informal, allowing time and attention to develop a strong working relationship and ensure progress is being made towards goal attainment.

Keep Priorities and Goals Aligned

Improve Communication

*Employee and Supervisor* feedback is prepared in advance. Resources are available to help guide the collaborative discussion and sharing that will foster trust and build relationships.

Reinforce Your Team

Inspire Engagement and Morale

***Take time to meet and stay on track  
to success with TOUCHPOINTS!***

## Touchpoints

### Touchpoints Conversation Guide for Employees

This guide helps employees:

- Prepare for a productive two-way conversation
- Organize ideas and make note of key successes and challenges
- Anticipate what topics both parties will want to cover
- Decide together what is next for the employee going forward



Collaborate and partner with your supervisor and you practice continuous performance management. Be willing to take initiative and be an active participant in each meeting. Agree on your work goals together, learn where you fit into the department and broader institutional goals, and share what you expect from your supervisor for success in your position.

#### Tips to consider:

- **Be specific** and **provide structure**. Present the feedback you want to share. Be prepared to provide examples.
- **Come prepared** and **provide your buy-in**. Ask your supervisor to share the agenda and add to the key talking points before the meeting.
- **Be honest**. Adopt a growth mindset to overcome challenges and practice self-awareness.
- **Be considerate** with your delivery in these conversations and invite feedback.
- **Be present**. Take an active role by actively listening, asking questions, and silencing devices.

#### Both parties should:

- After each meeting record key discussion points, action-items or feedback.
- Save a copy of each month's notes for the annual appraisal.
- Regularly ask for and offer informal feedback between the touches.
- Set-up recurring invites for future Touchpoints/one-on-one meetings.

## Touchpoints Frequently Asked Questions

### What are Touchpoints and why do we have them?

Touchpoints are ongoing, one-on-one conversations between supervisors and employees about work progress, goals, performance to date, and plan of action going forward, held at regular intervals throughout the year. They are quick and informal, allowing time and space to develop a strong working relationship and ensure progress is being made towards goal attainment.

### How do Touchpoints work?

1. Employee and supervisor confirm a meeting time to exchange feedback.
2. Feedback is prepared by the employee and supervisor in advance of the conversation.
3. Employee and supervisor discuss successes, lessons learned, growth opportunities, short and long-term goals and priorities.
4. Employee and supervisor document the insights, guidance and feedback, as well as any important reflections.
5. Employee and supervisor agree and arrange to meet again.

For both supervisors and employees, the focus is on conversations and meaningful connections to help you maximize your contributions at work and help you feel fully satisfied by the work you do.

To have meaningful conversations, it is good to focus on:

- having a positive mindset about your working relationships;
- having a sense of shared responsibility for performance conversations;
- asking questions, seeking examples, and clarifying meaning.

### How do I prepare for Touchpoints with my supervisor?

Here are some tips for making the most of your Touchpoints:

- Bring an agenda of things to talk about. If your supervisor shares the agenda, add to the key talking points!
- Pick some great questions. Examples of discussion questions can be found on page 10 and [here](#).
- Consider where your professional development is right now and where you would like to take it in the short and long term.

In the beginning, you will likely work more on getting rid of blocks and issues that are keeping you from doing your best work. Later, that will transform into more coaching time as you collaborate on priorities and goals.

Keep all this in mind when planning your Touchpoints and deciding what to focus on.

### **How do you do a Touchpoints meeting?**

If you are new to having Touchpoints, it really just takes a few basic steps:

- **Create an agenda** - Bring some topics to discuss to build your relationship and learn key things from your supervisor. You can view more discussion questions [here](#).
- **Ask questions during the meeting** – Good, open-ended, questions are a key component of effective meetings, especially in the beginning. Questions will help unearth important insights.
- **Listen for insights** - Listening is an important part of Touchpoints because you are looking to uncover valuable information that will allow you to grow and excel. Ask follow-up and clarifying questions.
- **Follow up** - Ensure progress is made by committing to priorities: Before the meeting ends, agree on what you are responsible for taking action on. Cover what needs to get done between now and the beginning of your next Touchpoint/one-on-one meeting.

Over time, your Touchpoint meetings should change as your relationship with your supervisor enhances and you develop new skills. So, keep in mind that this is just a good starter framework and should be adjusted over time.

### **What do you talk about in Touchpoints?**

You can focus on everything from career development, to building rapport, to learning how to improve certain skills, your team, or your department.

Here are some good Touchpoint questions to ask:

- How could I improve as an employee?
- How can I help my coworkers succeed?
- How could I have handled a recent situation differently?
- What can I add to my plate for a greater challenge?
- What advice do you have on improving my work-life balance?

Effective questions will help get the conversation started and keep it going in the right direction. The feedback and insights you uncover will help improve your performance and standing in on the team.

## ***Remote work***

Working remotely introduces unique challenges and employees may need time to find their remote working style. It is important to partner with your supervisor on this journey.

- What do you like and dislike about working from home?
- What tools are you using that work for you? What's not working well?
- What can other people in your department or your supervisor do to make remote work easier for you?
- How has remote work impacted the team dynamics – positively and negatively?

## ***Relationship building***

Building a strong relationship with your supervisor is more challenging when you are not in the same office. Chatting about non-work topics can replace those vital water cooler moments.

- How has working remotely impacted your family routines?
- What vacation (or staycation) plans do you have coming up?
- Can you recommend any good podcasts or books?
- What was one of your funniest moments at work?
- Any cool movies you watched recently?

## ***Well-being***

Remote work can impact your physical and mental health. Discuss these questions with your supervisor to help keep your well-being high.

- Does work feel energizing or draining to you right now?
- What adjustments can we make that would improve your well-being?
- Have you been able to find clear boundaries between work and personal life?
- Do you feel like you are able to maintain a healthy, active lifestyle?
- Do you ever feel lonely or isolated at work?

## ***Communication***

Frequent, effective communication is a pillar of successful remote collaboration. *Touch* with your supervisor on your communication needs.

- How do you feel about the amount of communication in your team and department? Would you prefer more or less?
- Are you getting enough feedback from your colleagues and supervisor?

- How well do you feel informed about what is going on in the rest of the department?
- What is something your supervisor can improve on with their communication style and habits?

### ***Productivity***

Working remotely can increase productivity when employees have a supportive work environment.

Discuss these topics with your supervisor:

- How productive have you been feeling lately?
- How is your workload? (Anything needed to be delegated or deprioritized?)
- Do you have enough clarity about your role and responsibilities?
- How challenging is it for you to stay focused when working from home?
- Do you have access to all the resources and information you need?

### ***Bonus Questions***

- What's one win you had as a team this past week?
- What's your work and non-work highlights of the past month?
- If there was one thing you could do differently to help you more, what would it be?
- On a scale of 1-10, how happy are you with your work-life balance? How can you get closer to 10?
- How can your supervisor best support the team as a manager?
- What's one skill you'd like to improve this quarter?
- What, if anything, feels harder than it should be in your day-to-day work?

***For both Supervisor and Employee – try viewing the other's perspective:***

- What does success look like?
- What are the challenges?
- Are you pulling the other up or bringing them down?
- What is one thing you can do to support the other?

**Watch video:** [Starting Something New Video](#)

**More Touchpoint resources can be found here: [Continuous Performance Management - Touchpoints](#)**

## Practicing Upward Feedback

Practicing upward feedback (giving feedback to your supervisor) can sometimes be intimidating, but has many rewarding benefits. Upward feedback builds trust and a strong collaborative partnership between employee and supervisor, and allows an opportunity to discuss the positives and negatives that affect the relationship and team dynamics.

### When to partner up and practice upward feedback:

- Workload becomes difficult to manage.
- Miscommunication - always ask for clarification; don't assume. **BE ON THE SAME PAGE!**
- Projects - Seek advice before becoming overwhelmed. You are a team, right?
- Managing Expectations - make sure your thoughts and theirs are aligned.
- When you recognize and identify your developmental needs and career goals - **COMMUNICATE IMMEDIATELY!**
- Regular meetings are not being scheduled or followed. It is a good idea to have recurrent meetings scheduled on calendars.

### When practicing upward feedback, it is important to:

- ✓ Be timely and positive.
- ✓ Remember, you are working on building trust and collaboration.
- ✓ Listen and communicate effectively.
- ✓ Be specific and non-confrontational.
- ✓ Evaluate what you want to say and how to say it.
  - Stay away from “you” statements.
  - Do not complain!
- ✓ Keep the focus on work not the individual
- ✓ Focus on the future
- ✓ Think ahead of how your supervisor will take the feedback. Be cautious, do not accuse or assume.
- ✓ Be respectful and professional
- ✓ Provide clear reasons and support
- ✓ Discuss one thing at a time
- ✓ Offer recommendations, ideas, solutions, and support



## Ongoing constructive feedback involves YOU!



**Take responsibility for AND be in control of YOUR future – TODAY!**

On the following page, you will find a Team Member Discussion Template resource you can use to record your Touchpoint meetings with your supervisor. It is a helpful tool to complete and file after each meeting to use as a reference for your self-evaluation during the performance review cycle.

## 10/10/10 Touchpoint – Team Member Discussion Template

<b>Team Member:</b>	<b>Date:</b>
<b>Personal:</b> (Remote, Hybrid, In-person, Family, Hobbies, etc.)	
<b>Team Member:</b> (Preparatory notes and best parts from YOUR 10 mins.)	
<b>Manager:</b> (Highlights from THEIR 10 mins.)	
<b>Week Ahead/Follow Up:</b> (Items that you will review at the next Touchpoint)	
<b>Sample Questions</b> (Recommend keeping questions to five or less)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What are the most important skills needed in my role? How am I performing and improving on these skills?</li> <li>▪ Can you recommend any professional development opportunities?</li> <li>▪ What outputs are most valued by you? By the team?</li> <li>▪ What were my highlights from last quarter?</li> <li>▪ What do you think is keeping me from achieving my goals?</li> <li>▪ Do you think my long-term goals are attainable and realistic?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ How do my goals align with our team and organizational goals?</li> <li>▪ Which of my projects or tasks is the highest priority to the team?</li> <li>▪ What can I add to my plate for a greater challenge?</li> <li>▪ How could I improve as an employee?</li> <li>▪ How can I help my co-workers succeed?</li> </ul>

## Giving Effective Feedback: A 4-part model

1

### CONTEXT

Describe the situation. Be as specific as possible. Give the feedback in a timely way.

#### Positive Feedback

*Yesterday when Professor Smith stopped by your office...*

#### Corrective Feedback

*At our staff meeting yesterday...*

2

### BEHAVIOR

Describe the behavior as clearly as possible, as if you were watching a movie. Avoid drawing conclusions.

#### Positive Feedback

*I saw you put down the budget you had been working to get done and go to our website to get some information. You then got up and walked her from your office towards the office that could help her.*

#### Corrective Feedback

*Every time that Susie spoke, you turned away and started talking with Bob, or you opened your laptop and checked your email.*

3

### IMPACT

What were the results - positive or negative - of this behavior?

#### Positive Feedback

*She stopped by later to tell me how helpful you had been. Your flexibility and willingness to go out of your way to help really model our commitment to customer service!*

#### Corrective Feedback

*I saw that Susie noticed this. After the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> time you did this, Susie stopped saying anything for the rest of the meeting. Susie knows a lot about our topic; I think we really missed out on her ideas.*

4

### Next Steps

What specific behavior should be changed or repeated in response to the feedback? Why should this change be made?

#### Positive Feedback

*I really appreciate that you'll continue to do this. It shows your commitment to customer service.*

#### Corrective Feedback

*From now on, during staff meetings please focus your full attention on each speaker so that everyone continues to participate and we work more effectively as a team.*

## **PREPARE**

- ✓ Identify concerns and gather documentation.
- ✓ Think about key messages you will share in advance of the meeting.
- ✓ Consider how you will deliver feedback (e.g., face-to-face, via email).
- ✓ Focus on clear examples you'll use to highlight points.

## **FOCUS ON YOUR TONE**

- ✓ Be informal, approachable, and empathetic in your approach.
- ✓ Help the other person find solutions rather than dwell on development areas.
- ✓ Be candid and transparent.
- ✓ Make the other person feel comfortable.

## **EXPLORE FACTS AND USE CONCRETE EXAMPLES**

- ✓ Gather various examples to help explore a broad perspective rather than a one-off event.
- ✓ State which parts of feedback are just your personal opinion (which is still valid), and which parts are based on facts.
- ✓ Ask the other person for feedback to find out if they see the event or situation in the same way.

## **LISTEN**

- ✓ Let the other person digest the information if necessary before discussing their views—they may want to follow up at a later date.
- ✓ Ask the other person for their perspective on your feedback, and how that fits with feedback others have provided.
- ✓ Actively listen, which means taking the other person's perspective on board and understanding what they're saying.

## **CREATE A FORWARD FOCUS**

- ✓ Frame your feedback in way that's useful and can help the other person make improvements.
- ✓ Use data, facts, and examples, but focus mainly on future opportunities.
- ✓ Help the other person explore how they can use the information you provide to enhance performance.

## WRITE YOUR STORY

### Situation Overview

Write a brief couple of sentences about the situation and the feedback you received.

### Negative View

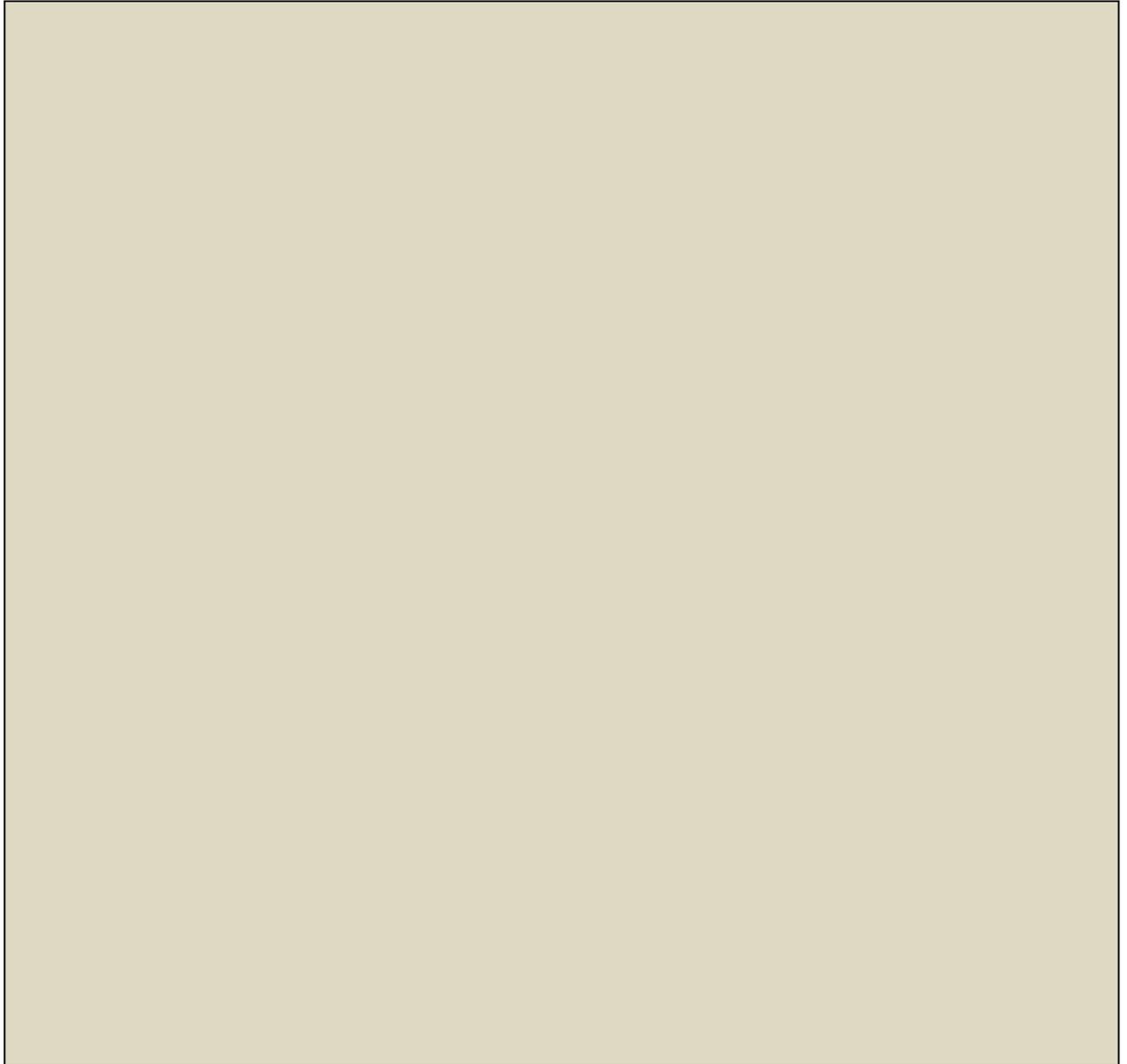
Write the story of the event and feedback taking a completely negative perspective.

### Positive View

Write the story of the event and feedback taking an entirely positive perspective.

## Choose Your Story

Now, write your story in a way you can see all points of view and learn from the situation in order to develop grow, and get better at how you behave, interact, and collaborate with others in the future.



## Additional Support and Resources

The workplace provides opportunities for employees to work collaboratively with their supervisor and stay on track with performance goals and expectations. This employee guide provides many resources that assist with addressing conflict and improving the employee-supervisor relationship.

[Performance Management Website](#) – What is Performance Management; The Performance Management Process (Planning and Setting Goals, Continuous Performance Management, Evaluation); Resources

[Continuous Performance Management](#) – Learn more about Touchpoints

[Employee Relations Website](#)

For additional support, please contact your Human Resources Representative or Employee Relations (540-231-5303/4272/2850).



***Relationships Matter!***



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