



Harvard John A. Paulson
School of Engineering
and Applied Sciences

Effective Documentation, Continued: Year-end Performance and Development Conversations

Tuesday, June 22, 2026

Harvard's Performance Management Philosophy and Guiding Principles

Philosophy

- Our philosophy supports **employee development** by prioritizing ongoing, regular feedback and meaningful career discussions.
- We strive to strengthen **employees' connection** to our institution's mission and align personal aspirations with development efforts.
- This approach aims to create a culture of **mutual accountability and respect** that achieves both individual and organizational success.

Guiding Principles

1. Prioritize Ongoing **Feedback**
2. Foster **Personal Development Conversations**
3. Reinforce **Organizational Values**
4. Nurture **Inclusive Relationships**
5. Promote **Collective Success**
6. Encourage **Continuous Learning**
7. **Lead by Example**

By embracing the philosophy and guiding principles, we aim to facilitate dialogues that:

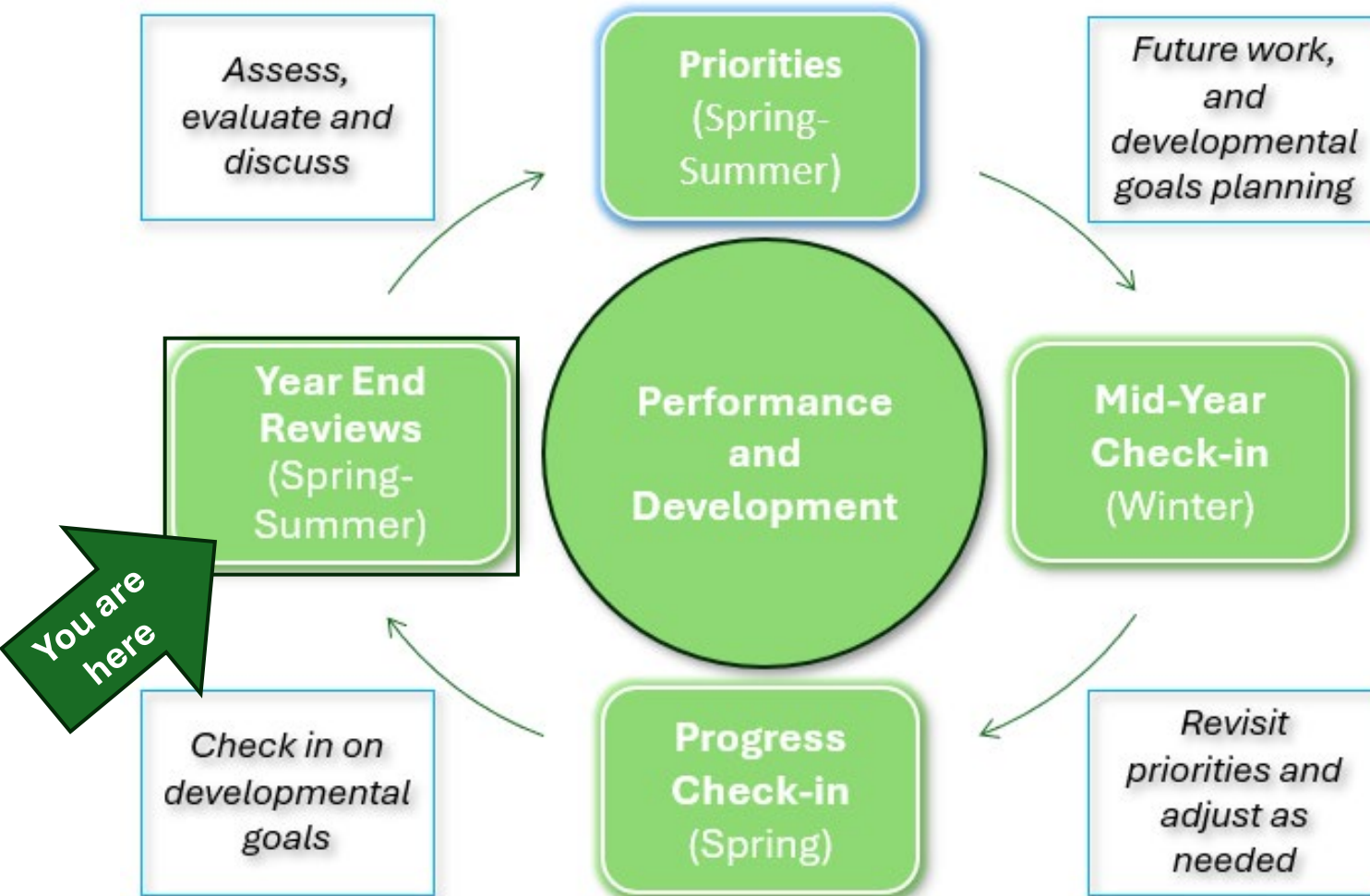
Enable clear expectations

Foster mutual accountability

Encourage ongoing feedback and career conversations



The Process



Performance Management

Meaningful Conversations (What they are)

- Help **move things forward**, not just tasks.
- Advance **understanding, trust, or clarity**.
- Go **beyond surface-level** updates (e.g., “did you finish that?”) and get into **why things matter, how people are doing, and what could be better**.
- Usually involve some level of **honesty** or **vulnerability**.
- **Connect work to purpose**.
- **Open doors to better ideas**.



Meaningful Conversations (Benefits and Impact)

These Conversations can...

- Build **trust** and boost **engagement** and **satisfaction**.
- Clarify **expectations** and strengthen **accountability**.
- Foster **collaboration, alignment**, and a **positive work culture**.
- Improve **performance, productivity**, and **decision-making**.
- Support **growth, development**, and **talent retention**.



Feedback

Can...

- Be **positive, constructive**, or **difficult**.
- Be in **private** or in a **group setting**.
- Be **planned** and **intentional**, or “**in the moment**”.

Should...

- Occur **regularly** and be **timely, specific**, and **factual** and be delivered with **respect** and **empathy**.
- Focus on areas for **growth, development, change (where needed)** and **ways forward**.
- Occur regularly between managers and employees throughout the year.
- Be **positive** (when possible) and **constructive** (when warranted).
 - **Positive** feedback **acknowledges success** and **behaviors** that lead to **positive impact**.
 - **Constructive** feedback **acknowledges a “less than ideal” impact** and **focuses** on **desired, different, or new behaviors moving forward**.



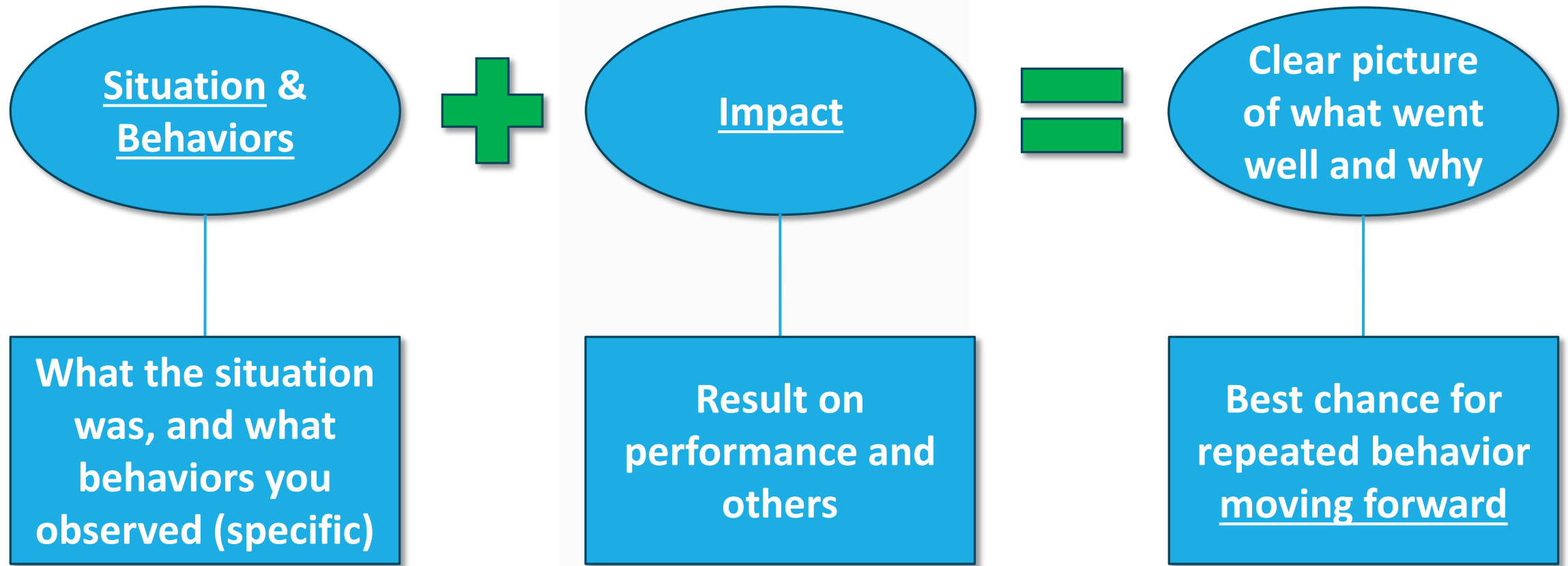
Feedback (Benefits and impact)

- Builds **trust**.
- Strengthens **relationships**.
- Clarifies **expectations** and drives **accountability**.
- **Connects** individual **work** to broader **goals** and **impact**.
- Sparks **ideas** and improves **decision-making**.
- Reinforces **positive behaviors**.
- Generates **innovative ideas, options, and solutions**.
- Drives **continuous improvement**.
- Produces better **performance, results and outcomes**.

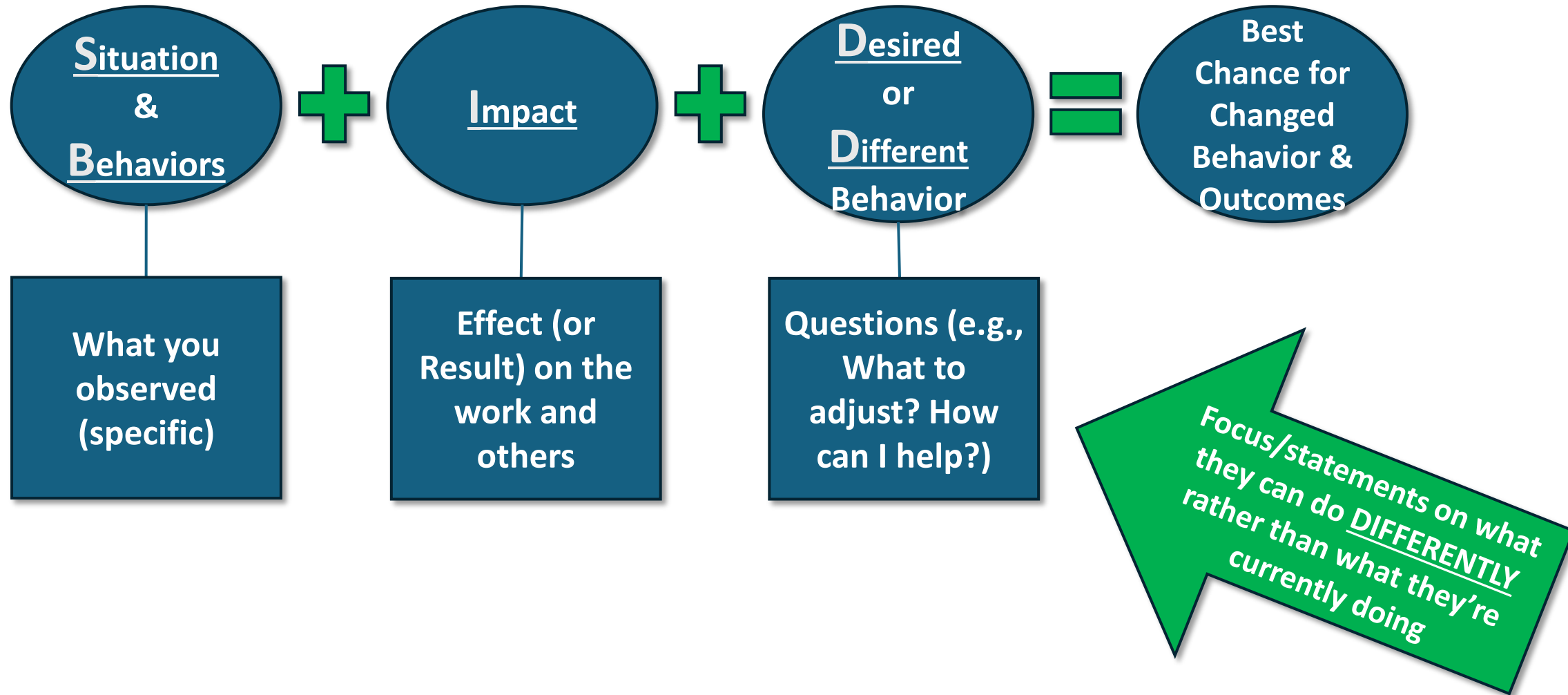


Giving and Receiving Feedback

Formula: Positive (SBIF)



Giving and Receiving Feedback Formula: Constructive (SBID)



Effective Documentation Principles

What:

- The **events, behaviors, and outcomes**.
- Relevant **examples**.
- Description of the **impact** on the work and on others.
- Relevant **dates** and **timelines**.
- Desired **changes** needed **for success**.
- Encouraged **behaviors to repeat** for **continued success**.
- Any **follow up** meetings, deliverables, and trainings for the employee to attend.

How:

- Be **concise** and **specific**.
- Use **clear, neutral, professional language** and **tone**.
- **Avoid** **acronyms** or **jargon**, **casual phrasing**, **filler language**, and **irrelevant** or **overly detailed information**.



Effective Documentation Principles

When:

- Within a **reasonable timeframe** after **conversations**.

Why:

- **Provides clear expectations.**
- **Creates a reference point** for **future conversations** and **performance assessment**.
- Helps **recognize patterns** of **poor performance** or **illustrate areas of good performance**.
- **Demonstrates the manager's effort to address and correct issues** and/or **to encourage behaviors to repeat for continued success**.
- **Protects the organization.**



Effective Documentation Exercise

Breakout Rooms (15 minutes)

- Read the 4 documentation examples provided.
- Make notes and discuss what works well and what needs improvement for each example.

Return to Full Group (20 to 25 minutes)

- Facilitated discussion about your observations.



Duration: 40 minutes



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Annual Performance Documentation Manager Section Examples

1. “Over the past year, Jane has continued to answer incoming calls and greet guests when they arrive, monitored the reception area, handled mail and deliveries, maintained office supplies, scheduled conference rooms, responded to emails, and assisted with various projects as needed. In addition, she helped coordinate meetings and supported staff with administrative requests.”
2. “Recently, there have been concerns about professionalism and communication. There have been times when emails could have been handled differently, and there have also been issues with responsiveness. Several people have mentioned that interactions at the front desk were not always as positive as they could have been.”
3. “I hadn’t mentioned this to Jane before, but another concern is that Jane sometimes makes errors in her written communication.”
4. “Jane says she is engaged and that she contributes to a positive office environment. She also feels that her contribution to teamwork and relationships with colleagues is strong. Jane says that she consistently demonstrates professionalism and takes initiative when opportunities arise. She also believes that she effectively supports departmental goals and responds well to changing priorities.”



Effective Documentation Exercise

Before (Listing Job Duties without Feedback)

Over the past year, Jane has continued to answer incoming calls and greet guests when they arrive, monitored the reception area, handled mail and deliveries, maintained office supplies, scheduled conference rooms, responded to emails, and assisted with various projects as needed.

In addition, she helped coordinate meetings and supported staff with administrative requests.

After

Jane effectively handled the day-to-day responsibilities of the receptionist role and demonstrated dependability in maintaining front office operations.

She was generally responsive to staff and visitors' needs and helped ensure administrative processes ran smoothly.

While she successfully met many of the basic requirements of the position, greater initiative, stronger communication, and improved organization would enhance her effectiveness and allow her to contribute at a higher level.



Effective Documentation Exercise

Before (Recency, Lack of Detail)

Recently, there have been concerns about professionalism and communication.

There have been times when emails could have been handled differently, and there have also been issues with responsiveness.

Several people have mentioned that interactions at the front desk were not always as positive as they could have been.

After

Participants from each of the monthly programs over the past year have mentioned that interactions with you at the front desk were brief and lacked detailed information.

They also commented that they had to wait several days to receive a response to their inquiry.

As we have discussed throughout the year, our guidelines include replying to email messages within a day of receiving them and to provide participants with a link to the website or a printed version of the program details.

This allows for timely communication of details to program participants so that they may efficiently plan their visit to campus.



Effective Documentation Exercise

Before (Adding an Issue not Previously Discussed)

I hadn't mentioned this to Jane before, but another concern is that Jane sometimes makes errors in her written communication.

After

Do not include this in the review. There should be no surprises.

This issue should be addressed in a separate conversation with Jane and monitored to assess whether it is a pervasive issue or something that she can change once it has been brought to her attention.



Effective Documentation Exercise

Before (Employee Self-Assessment Inserted into Manager Section)

Jane says she is engaged and that she contributes to a positive office environment. She also feels that her contribution to teamwork and relationships with colleagues is strong. Jane says that she consistently demonstrates professionalism and takes initiative when opportunities arise. She also believes that she effectively supports departmental goals and responds well to changing priorities.

After

Do not include this on the review in the manager section in lieu of providing your own assessment of Jane's performance. Alternative approaches:

1. Managers may incorporate their own assessment into Jane's comments: "Jane effectively handled the day-to-day responsibilities of the receptionist role and demonstrated dependability in maintaining front office operations. She was generally responsive to staff and visitors' needs and helped ensure administrative processes ran smoothly. While she successfully met many of the basic requirements of the position, greater initiative, stronger communication, and improved organization would enhance her effectiveness and allow her to contribute at a higher level."

2. The employee may add their own comments to the employee comment section.



Key Takeaways and Additional Guidance

1. **Focus on performance, not duties:** Share your observations, feedback, and perspective on how well the employee performed; not just what they were responsible for.
2. **Avoid surprises:** The annual review should not be the first time an employee is hearing feedback about performance concerns.
3. **Reflect the full year:** Provide examples from across the entire review period, not just recent events.
4. **Be specific and actionable:** Use clear examples that describe the situation, behavior, impact, and next steps. Avoid vague comments such as “joy to work with,” “helpful,” or “doesn’t cause problems” without context.
5. **Use the manager section for manager feedback only:** Do not copy and paste the employee’s comments.
6. **Recommended Areas of Focus:**
 - Strengths, Accomplishments, and Challenges
 - Work Goals, Status, and Support Needed
 - Professional Development Goals, Status, and Support Needed



Summary of Practices Shared by SEAS Managers

(During 6-23-26 Session)

Writing Difficult or Constructive Feedback

- Consider using AI to help make it clear, specific, and thoughtful. The goal isn't to soften or dilute the feedback, but to frame it in a way that is more likely to be heard, understood and applied.

Soliciting Upward Feedback from Direct Reports Options

- Offer your own assessment of where you could improve or grow and ask direct reports if your assessment aligns with theirs and whether they would offer any additional suggestions or feedback.
- Ask staff for feedback throughout the year at 1:1 meetings as well as during the annual performance assessment conversation.
- Send a google form where staff can submit feedback.

Consider the Full Year in Review

- To assist with writing a comprehensive assessment that reflects performance over the entire review cycle, consider keeping notes on interactions throughout the entire year.



SEAS Manager Resources

- [Managing at SEAS Resources Page](#)
 - [Manager Toolkit](#) (scroll down on Managing at SEAS Page)
 - [Manager Retreat Deck - May 2026](#) (scroll down on Managing at SEAS Page)
- [SEAS Performance Management Page](#)
 - [Additional Performance Management Resources](#)



We Would Love your Feedback!

Thank you for participating in our
SEAS Manager Learning Session
today!

*Please scan the QR code with
your phone to complete a short, 3
to 4-minute evaluation.*



Thank You!



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