Preface

Performance reviews seem to be a lightning rod for disappointment, dread, or even wrath on the part of employees who have to be "reviewed" and managers who feel they have to do the "reviewing." It's hard to find people who express satisfaction with their review processes, and it's not an understatement to say that, by and large, almost everyone hates them—whether getting them or giving them . . . and for very good reasons.

Somehow or other, we've managed to forget what performance reviews are for, and even in situations where someone *does* remember, the process is so poorly implemented that it ends up having no value to anyone. Worse, poorly conducted performance reviews create more problems than they solve and end up costing real time and money that should be used more productively.

It's almost as if human resource departments, managers, supervisors, and employees conspire to make sure performance reviews end up as wasted effort. You couldn't mess them up more if you tried.

Most people have had poor experiences with the review process because it hasn't been implemented well. As a result, people (and this applies to managers and employees) have come to the conclusion that the performance review is a necessary evil, so they go through the motions, create a maddening paper chase, and grumble all the while. In effect, they've given up.

Of course, giving up isn't exactly the best way to improve something. So people carry on, every year repeating what they did last year and even pretending the badly executed process is

valuable. In some circumstances, someone will make a sincere effort to revamp the process, and guess what? The result is a bunch of cosmetic changes that have no effect on the value of the performance review.

Here's the vicious cycle sequence. Most people have not had the chance to benefit by being involved in performance reviews that actually work. When you have unpleasant experiences with something, and had have never pleasant ones, it's not surprising that you are unable to shift your thinking in ways that will actually *help* you use the "thing" productively. You tend to believe it's useless, and it becomes that necessary evil mentioned above.

Making Performance Reviews Work

It doesn't have to be that way. It may be true that most performance reviews are wasted, but it is also true that there are many organizations, managers, and employees who are using the performance review as a tool to improve individual and organization performance, reduce managerial workload, improve employee morale, and create other benefits and advantages. They may be in the minority, but they prove that performance reviews *can* work and they *can* benefit everyone involved.

The thing is that performance reviews will work only if they are done properly. Doing them properly may mean a small shift in perspective and mindset, but that shift is one easily achieved. We also know that effective performance reviews share a number of characteristics and look different from those that are ineffective. Managers lead the meetings differently. Both managers and employees talk differently in effective performance review meetings. The communication patterns are different. Believe it or not, when reviews are done well, a lot of the pressure and unpleasantness associated with them disappears. Dread disappears.

That's where this book comes in. It's a hands-on, "as-practical-as-you-can-get" guide to making reviews work. It explains the

mindset you need to review performance properly. It identifies the most common pitfalls for you to avoid. It reminds you about and teaches you how to use communication skills differently.

Above all, it brings you back to the real reason we do performance reviews. It's simple—to improve performance and create the most success for everyone, from the stockholders and shareholders right down to the backbone of your organization, the employees.

But …

If you are looking for some way to use performance reviews to hit employees over the head or whip them into shape, you will not like this book. If you are unwilling to give up the idea that performance reviews are something done *to* employees, and not *with* them, then this book will drive you batty.

If however, you really want to reap the benefits that are possible when you review performance effectively, and you are willing to commit to the goal of *improving* performance by working with employees, you will benefit from this book.

Whether you are hoping to completely revamp your performance reviews or whether you just want to tweak them, you'll find this book full of very practical ideas. These ideas, actions, and suggestions will work only if you start with an open mind and entertain the possibility that the performance reviews can be an exceedingly powerful tool.

Special Features

The idea behind the books in the Briefcase Books Series is to give you practical information written in a friendly, person-to-person style. The chapters are relatively short, deal with tactical issues, and include lots of examples. They also feature numerous sidebars designed to give you different types of specific information. Here's a description of the boxes you'll find in this book.

These boxes do just what their name implies: give you tips and tactics for using the ideas in this book to intelligently manage the performance review process.

These boxes provide warnings for where things could go wrong when you're planning and conducting performance reviews.

These boxes give you how-to and insider hints for effectively carrying out performance reviews.

Every subject has some special jargon, including the this one dealing with performance reviews. These boxes provide definitions of these terms.

It's always useful to have examples that show how the principles in the book are applied. These boxes provide descriptions of text principles in action.

This icon identifies boxes where you'll find specific procedures you can follow to take advantage of the book's advice.

How can you make sure you won't make a mistake when conducting a performance review? You can't, but these boxes will give you practical advice on how to minimize the possibility of an error.

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About the Author

Robert Bacal is CEO of Bacal & Associates, a training and consulting firm dedicated to contributing to the work success of both individual and companies, by helping managers and employees work together more effectively to create bottom line results for everyone. He holds a graduate degree in applied psychology and has been training, providing consulting services and writing on workplace issues for 25 years.

This book is his fourth on performance-related topics. He is the author of *Performance Management*, also in the Briefcase Books Series, and has authored *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Consulting* and *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Dealing with Difficult Employees* and was co-author of *Perfect Phrases for Performance Reviews*.

Robert is also an accomplished keynote speaker on performance, communication, and customer service issues; is the founder of the world's largest discussion group on performance management; and hosts a number of sites containing free resources and performance management-related tools. You can visit his main Web site at www.work911.com. His e-mail address is ceo@work911.com, and he invites comments or suggestions about any of his books.

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