

# BUILDING A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Best Practices Guide & Resources



LIMITLESS

# Focus on Professional Development

Managing a successful team is more about mentorship and engagement than management. Adopt a holistic view of the employee engagement by establishing a professional development process will allow you and your team to engage in the employment process with a head, heart & hands approach, as opposed to the traditional exchange of head/hands and pocketbook. In order to involve the heart in the work of the employee, we must focus on the value and competency each team member contributes, and the growth each team member needs to succeed.



## OLD SCHOOL

- Top-down performance review
- Head/hands to pocketbook
- \$ reward

## NEW SCHOOL

- Collaborative, professional development meetings
- Head, heart & hands fully engaged
- Intrinsic value & reward

The traditional annual performance review that is tied to compensation is not as effective as clarity and agreement around expectations and regularly touching base to coach and mentor rather than reprimand. Creating a process that supports these goals will enable you to engage with your team in a way that fosters engagement and mutual success. The following is a helpful timeline for when check-ins and meetings should occur:

1. WEEKLY: Team meeting
2. REGULARLY: One-on-one
3. QUARTERLY: Professional Development Check-In
4. YEARLY: Compensation & Career Pathing

## BEST PRACTICES FOR A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

1. **Rule #1: Call it a check-in or professional development meeting, not a performance review**  
Annual performance reviews often have a negative connotation, and tend to be more about rating, reprimanding and bonuses than working collaboratively to develop and grow team members. Though small, a simple title change better reflects the positive focus of these meetings - to create a dialogue that celebrates successes, identifies opportunities for improvement / professional development and establishes clear goals for the future.
2. **Rule #2: It isn't annual, and it should never be as surprise**  
Annual performance reviews are ineffective and prone to recency bias. Schedule regular check-ins instead. Quarterly works well, but at a minimum, conduct them every six months. Another rule of thumb - ensure that you have good daily communication practices. This means feedback shared during check-ins should never be a surprise to anyone.



3. **Rule #3: Don't over complicate it**  
Keep the process simple and prepare in advance. Don't create a laundry list of everything that has happened in the past quarter. Instead, point out key themes and specific examples. This should be an open dialogue and discussion, not a checklist of what was done right or wrong.
  
4. **Rule #4: Set clear expectations and discuss them regularly**  
Rating scales may be passé but setting clear expectations around performance is not. Below are some examples, but don't hesitate to create custom ones for roles on your team. The more specific you are the better!
  - **CONSISTENT STAR:** The "Jedi-master" of their role, these team members are experts in all aspects of their role, they actively go above and beyond their current responsibilities and consistently demonstrate alignment with firm values and role competencies. They can effectively train others and their positive, team-oriented attitude is infectious. Demonstrate a "Master" level of proficiency.
  - **RISING STAR:** These team members are solid performers that regularly meet expectations. While they have not yet mastered their role, they often go above and beyond and demonstrate the attitude and aptitude necessary to be a Consistent Star. Demonstrate a "Proficient" level of proficiency.
  - **KEY PLAYER:** These team members are solid performers that generally meet expectations, but there is room for professional development in one or more areas of their role. They demonstrate a willingness and ability to improve in their role. Demonstrate a "Competent" level of proficiency.
  - **INCONSISTENT:** These team members inconsistently meet expectations or struggle to maintain a positive and professional manner when under pressure or in stressful situations. There is significant room for improvement in one or more areas of their role and they need substantial supervision to achieve their responsibilities and goals. Demonstrate an "Introduced" level of proficiency.
  
5. **Rule #5: Don't couple compensation and performance in a single meeting**  
While performance should impact compensation, you should hold compensation discussions separate from check-ins. Placing them together tends to create a focus on "how much am I getting" instead of "how am I doing." It is also helpful to avoid giving bonuses at year end, when employees may already be stressed about finances and not receptive to an open dialogue. Instead, consider paying out bonuses at the end of February or March. This may take a period of adjustment, but will help the employee view check-ins as a continual conversation, and compensation as a separate, annual discussion.

## COMPENSATION CONVERSATION

When discussing compensation, it is important to frame it around career and professional pathing. This is a time to evaluate where the employee is on their career ladder and set goals for moving forward. Remember to align this conversation with the philosophy that motivation for most people is first intrinsic (for purpose, meaning, contribution) and then extrinsic (rewards, consequences, money, time off, etc.)

Use the Firm Compensation Plan and Individual Compensation Plan Template to help determine what type of compensation you will offer to new employees, as well as how you will continue to reward employees with annual bonus incentives.



## SAMPLE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

1. **Schedule Recurring Check-Ins**  
Set up recurring meetings on your calendar each quarter (or at a minimum semi-annually) to meet with individual team members. Be sure that the invitation includes an outline of the process and the forms you'll be using to capture or provide feedback.
2. **Everyone Prepares**  
A few days before your scheduled meeting, the manager and team member should prepare their check-in form, see sample and template on the following pages. Each of you prepare your version in advance of the meeting and have available for discussion. Consider sharing completed forms in advance to allow time to process the information and prepare for a constructive dialogue.
3. **Hold the Check-In Meeting**  
Ensure that you are available and on time to your meeting. It shows that you respect the person and process. Be open and honest, these meets are designed to create a dialogue that celebrates successes, identifies opportunities for improvement / professional development and establishes clear goals for the future. (See Team Check-In Form resource.)
4. **Follow Through and Follow Up**  
Key to a successful meeting is to follow through on any commitments made during the meeting. For example, if you shared feedback regarding specific training be sure to follow up and provide more information on where and how to access that training. If you set goals in the meeting, don't wait until the next check-in to discuss them. Periodically, follow up and employ ongoing communications strategies with your team

