



MANAGER RESOURCE:

# MANAGING NEWCOMER PERFORMANCE

Managers have the power to use performance conversations to enhance individual outcomes and advance organizational objectives. As the number of newcomers in the workforce grows, managers should consider applying a “newcomer lens” to their performance management processes.

This begins with acknowledging that newcomers may face a variety of challenges, related to settlement (e.g. difficulties finding childcare, stress related to cultural adaption) and the transition to a Canadian workplace (e.g. learning how to navigate new processes, intercultural communication challenges), which could impact their performance. Then, with this awareness, managers can make small adjustments to the way they approach goal setting and performance conversations, which could help them engage newcomers and other employees more successfully.

**This resource provides tips for managers on navigating the performance management process with newcomer staff, shedding light on aspects to be mindful of and offering strategies to enhance the process.**

**For additional employer resources, visit [ottawa-worldskills.org](https://ottawa-worldskills.org).**

# GOAL SETTING



Setting clear, measurable goals is essential for managing employee performance. Utilizing a structured approach, where goals are documented and revisited periodically, clarifies performance expectations and fosters accountability. Another benefit of this practice is the potential for greater alignment between individual, team and company goals.

Most organizations include goal setting in their onboarding and performance review processes, and they may recommend or require that a particular format be used. Three common frameworks are SMART goals, Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and Objectives and Key Results (OKRs). If your organization does not require a specific format, we recommend that you begin with SMART goals, since they are less complicated to develop and track.

If your organization does not have a prescribed timeline for goal setting, you can start by setting annual goals. Then, goals can be broken down into monthly, quarterly and biannual targets, as relevant.

During goal setting conversations, managers should also consider talking with their staff about the tasks they will need to complete in order to accomplish their objectives. This can be especially helpful for employees who are new to a particular role or who are taking on projects that require them to gain additional knowledge and skills.

Finally, goal setting meetings should include conversations about your team member's strengths and areas for improvement. These discussions create opportunities for coaching and for identifying training and development needs.

## TIPS FOR ENGAGING NEWCOMERS

- **Provide context.** Goal setting conversations may be a new experience for some newcomers. To help these staff gain an understanding the process, explain the rationale for goal setting and the roles of the employee and the manager.
- **Offer employees time to prepare.** Once the newcomer understands the process, they may also need time to consider their goals, strengths and areas for improvement. If you are going to ask for the newcomers' input, let them know in advance so they can come to the conversation prepared.
- **Clarify potential consequences.** Some newcomers may fear that they will lose their jobs if they do not meet all their targets. To prevent misunderstandings, managers should explain how the organization handles performance issues.

# PERFORMANCE CONVERSATIONS



The other key element of performance management is engaging employees in conversations about their performance. These conversations typically happen during annual reviews; however, many organizations also recommend that managers conduct informal check-ins with their employees periodically. Newcomer staff who are still getting used to the workplace and the expectations of their role would benefit from this agile approach, which allows you to coach them in real time and provide any necessary direction. Arrive at a check-in frequency that works best for you and your team members.

## **Performance check-ins can include the following areas:**

- Discussing progress on key metrics and goals.
- Giving feedback on what's going well and what needs to change. Identifying challenges and determining what types of support or changes are needed.
- Asking for feedback on your working relationship and managerial style, including any changes that may help them deliver better results.
- Celebrating wins and encouraging positive behaviours
- Discussing future deliverables, skills the team member needs to develop and their career goals.

## **KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL PERFORMANCE CONVERSATIONS**

**Give team members time to prepare.** Similar to the recommendation regarding goal setting conversations, schedule check-ins/reviews in advance and brief the employee on what you plan to cover. This will help newcomers know what to expect. You can also set reoccurring meetings (e.g. bi-weekly, monthly, quarterly) so these conversations become a routine part of your interactions with the employee.

**Create an open and safe space to share.** Some newcomers may be hesitant to discuss their challenges with you due to fear of potential consequences. Keeping that possibility in mind, we recommend adopting a relaxed tone and less formal structure for check-ins. Also, pay attention to cues, like body language, to learn which topics energise or create stress for the employee. Finally, you can enable your team members to express their thoughts and concerns more freely by building psychological safety. For more information, see the Harvard Business Review's article, [What is Psychological Safety?](#).

**Don't shy away from giving constructive feedback.** Some newcomers have shared that they are not receiving constructive feedback from their supervisors, and that this may be impacting their ability to learn and improve. We recommend that you provide timely feedback using a model that fits the situation, your management style and the needs of the employee. For more information about different feedback options, check out JOIN Solution's blog post, [10 powerful feedback models to use at work](#).



**Create opportunities for learning.** Newcomers, like other employees, want to perform well. In situations where newcomer staff make mistakes or fail to meet a goal, it can be helpful to frame the situation as a learning experience. This will encourage your team member to approach issues with a problem-solving mindset, and it could help them feel more comfortable seeking support when they experience challenges. Additionally, consider and discuss relevant development opportunities to provide your team member with the required skills and knowledge to better succeed in their roles. You could use the [70-20-10 model](#) as a framework for solutions.

**Be aware of differences in communication styles.** While the Canadian context leans towards an indirect style of communication, newcomers may be accustomed to other styles. These differences may lead newcomers to interpret your expectations and feedback differently. To help you identify your team members' communication styles, see Manitoba Start's [Communication styles](#) article. Once you have this information, consider how you can bridge differences between your communication style and your employees'.

**Take steps to reduce bias.** As with any human interaction, unconscious bias can impact how we view other people's performance. To obtain a more holistic perspective on your staff's work, consider seeking feedback from other managers or stakeholders who interact with your team member. You can also explore the use of a 360-degree feedback survey tool. For more information, check out Qualtrics' [The ultimate guide to 360-degree feedback](#).

**Focus on behaviour.** When assessing and communicating about employee performance, concentrate on specific examples and behaviours demonstrated by the team member.

## ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

**Performance Issues:** In cases where a team member isn't meeting the required performance standards, try to determine the cause of the issue and use informal coaching to help identify solutions. If the issues persist, consider creating a performance improvement plan (PIP) in consultation with your HR Team.

For additional guidance regarding PIPs, check out the Society for Human Resource Management's article, [When to Turn to PIPs and When to Skip Them](#).

**Career Planning and Promotions:** In many organisations, performance conversations can provide a good segue to discuss career planning and opportunities for promotions. We recommend that you explore these topics with all employees, especially newcomers. These conversations could help newcomers gain new insights about potential career paths and opportunities for growth within your organization.

During these conversations, it is also important to keep in mind that each employee may have different needs and goals. Some team members may prefer to specialize more deeply in their area of expertise, while others may be looking to change fields or develop complementary skills. Regardless of their objectives, we recommend that you use your check-in conversations to understand these aspirations better and help staff prepare for their next steps. For resources to help you initiate these discussions, check out TRIEC's [Immigrant Inclusive Career Advancement](#) webpage. This page also contains resources for newcomer staff.