

RIT

Human
Resources



COVID-19: STAFF PERFORMANCE EVALUATIONS & MID-YEAR CHECK-IN'S

HAVING RELEVANT AND
MEANINGFUL DIALOG

DECEMBER 2020

WHY ARE WE TALKING ABOUT THIS?

- Since March, 2020 life at RIT and around the world has been anything but “business as usual” - working remotely, figuring out what the work is, adjusting work and schedules and spending hours on Zoom. For some, the work resembles very little of our pre-COVID-19 life and for others, what we do has been significantly altered.
- Employees and managers shifted and adjusted “on the fly”. Change for some was more than for others. Most of us, even if temporarily, experienced uneasiness while we moved through all the unknowns related to our health and safety, job security, family needs and other concerns.
- While all this was happening, life and work went on.
- It may not have been the work that was outlined in our annual goals or even ones that immediately followed the pandemic. But the work went on. The necessary work. The important work. The work that needed doing. New work. Sometimes taking the form of things not discussed or perhaps things that before now weren’t considered.
- 2020 has been a year of incredible change, loss, uncertainty and disruption. For some, grief and heartache. It’s been a year of adjusting and shifting. It’s also been a year where learning occurred, initiative was taken, and progress was made.
- As we go into year-end conversations, let’s recall the circumstances under which most carried-on, - showing-up at kitchen counters, dining room tables or bedroom dressers every day ready to work, ready to put in the effort, ready to contribute even when goals were in flux and the work was murky. Acknowledging this lends credibility to our experiences and allows us to continue to adjust while remaining productive.
- Let’s have conversations about what happened and how it happened; and let these conversations lead us to how we will do it differently, stronger and better as we move into 2021.

1

Stay the Course

The need for feedback and reassurance is greater than ever

2

Put People First

Walk a mile in their shoes: demonstrate empathy

3

Widen the Dialog

Acknowledge changes; talk about results but also progress, initiative and learning

4

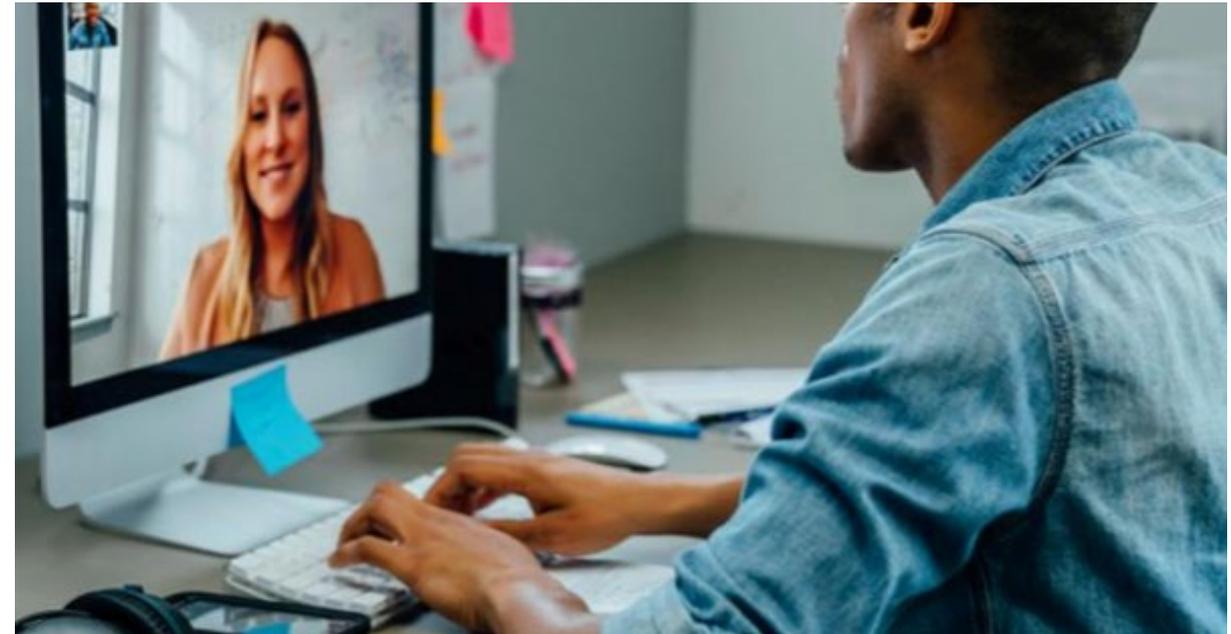
Listen

Hear what people are really saying

FOUR STEPS FOR MEANINGFUL DIALOG

STAY THE COURSE

- As we navigate so many changes due to COVID-19, it's important to continue having regular conversations about performance. Whether it's an annual review or a mid-point check-in, scheduling these conversations provides a sense of normalcy amid a less-than-normal year.
- Keep the intention of the meeting supportive yet constructive. Some goals may have fallen short while other accomplishments not initially identified may have been fulfilled. Whether the contributions are associated with a pre-determined goal or came out of a COVID-related need, employees still want to share their contributions and accomplishments. Acknowledge what went well and what didn't. Spend more time on positive contributions.
- Consider how you can make the conversation an "exchange of ideas" including how the work stayed the same and how it changed to address the new environment. Find ways to reassure people by "catching people doing things right". This will go a long way toward boosting morale at a time when people are feeling fatigued.
- With several unprecedented months behind us and the close of 2020, the timing of these conversations offers meaningful opportunity to highlight staff contributions, express gratitude and offer optimism for 2021.



PUT PEOPLE FIRST



- Although most employees want to receive feedback from their supervisor or manager – they may be extra-sensitive in anticipation of performance meetings this time around. Remember that “these conversations can have a visible positive effect, but they can also hurt people, lower their self-esteem or make them feel underappreciated.” Unless you have reason to believe an employee’s work was sub-par even with consideration for the circumstances, err on the side of keeping it positive (but be honest). Request another meeting to have a discussion about helping the individual be more successful in the coming year.
- Prepare for the conversation by making a list of all the things that changed in your own world and the efforts you made to achieve goals or contribute to the work and tasks of the university. Doing so will give you empathy for the challenges others have had.
- “The more we have empathy for the other person’s experience, the more we are attuned to what’s really going on for them. This allows for better communication and mutual understanding that can build the relationship. Providing feedback (or insights) to others is a valuable way to not only develop your people, but to build your relationships.”

[HTTPS://WWW.ACTITIME.COM/PROJECT-MANAGEMENT/IMPORTANCE-OF-FEEDBACK/](https://www.actitime.com/project-management/importance-of-feedback/) AND [HTTPS://WWW.NOVOED.COM/RESOURCES/BLOG/THE-ROLE-OF-EMPATHY-IN-FEEDBACK](https://www.novoed.com/resources/blog/the-role-of-empathy-in-feedback)

WIDEN THE DIALOG

- Goals were set; plans were made and your team was excited about how to contribute in 2020. Then COVID-19 crashed the party. Share your own disappointment while encouraging employees to think about the year with both goals and effort in mind. What progress was made? Did new goals replace old ones? In what ways did they get creative to keep tasks on track? What additional learning took place? What new skills were learned? What practices worked well and which ones should be re-evaluated in 2021?
- Rethink productivity in terms of impact to the team or the university. Managers tend to focus on tasks and activities. Now is a great time to challenge this by considering impact. Ask “what impact did you make?” (even if every goal and task wasn’t accomplished).
- Remember that some jobs are easier to do from a remote location while others are less so. It’s important to take this into consideration. While each of us is expected to solve most job-related problems and challenges, some circumstances may have been out of individual’s control. Take time to ask about and level-set your understanding of the situation – consider location constraints, information flow, lack of informal communication, and the impact of less visibility to department operations. These are just a few things that can influence an employees ability to be productive.



LISTEN



- *“We think we listen, but very rarely do we listen with real understanding, true empathy. Yet listening, of this very special kind, is one of the most potent forces for change that I know.” – Carl Rogers*
- Listening is one of the most important skills we can have. How well we listen has a major impact on our job effectiveness, and on the quality of our relationships.
- Given the events of the past several months, people may welcome the opportunity to talk – uninterrupted and with a deep sense of being heard. Be sure to schedule conversations to allow for uninterrupted time for at least one hour. This can provide time to listen not only to the content of the conversation, but to the context and meaning as well.

MANAGER RESOURCES AND TOOLS

Step 1: [The Importance of Feedback](#)

Step 2: [Empathetic Feedback: The Role of Empathy in Feedback](#)

Step 3: [Pandemic Performance Considerations for Staff](#)

Step 4: [Active Listening: Hear What People Are Really Saying](#)

RIT Human Resources
References and Support

[RIT Performance Management](#)

Questions regarding the overall [Staff Performance Appraisal Policy](#) may be directed to Human Resources.

[Human Resources Managers \(HRMs\)](#) are assigned to specific colleges and divisions and are available to assist, support and answer questions about the overall staff performance management process.

Questions regarding the [Annual Review of Faculty](#) and updates to the procedures may be directed to the Office of the Provost.



“Great bosses challenge people in the right way – by leading, not managing and supporting them by giving them both a platform they can count on and expectations they can strive for.” -- Seth Godin