

Maximize your leadership potential:

# CULTIVATE TALENT



## Making the Most of Performance Notes



### The Importance of Documenting Performance Conversations

Have you ever heard the phrase: If it's not documented, it didn't happen? Supervisors should take this notion to heart. Accurate documentation is critical to good management and engaging employees. It aids leaders in providing useful feedback to employees, leads to improved and more effective communication with employees, and tracks both positive performance as well as areas needing improvement. To help supervisors document valuable information regarding employees' work performance and conduct, UF has adopted a tool called Performance Notes (a module within myUFL). Information regularly documented in Performance Notes make preparing for Quarterly Check-ins with staff easy by preserving key events and issues.

Documenting performance empowers supervisors to have meaningful and engaging conversations with their employees—noting both good, great, and not so great performance and conduct.

Documenting performance concerns is also important when taking necessary disciplinary actions. Although, a majority of employees never engage in performance or conduct warranting discipline, supervisors are expected to address such concerns; remember, performance management *is* management. When performance is poor or conduct is unacceptable, it is useful to have a method to conveniently, objectively, and fairly document the concerns, conversations, and actions taken to address employee deficiencies.

### Performance Notes and Check-ins

Performance Notes is an effective and convenient place to document workplace activities. By regularly using Performance Notes, preparing Quarterly Check-ins will be convenient and easy (if you develop a regular habit of using Performance Notes, the Check-ins will practically write themselves!). Some key components of clear and effective documentation of events and performance would include noting facts of the situation, noting your objectives in addressing and noting the situation, noting some suggested solutions, and what actions you would like to see occur.

Utilizing these guidelines for entering information into Performance Notes can not only help you keep a reliable record of employee performance but also serve as a guide to follow prior to completing the Quarterly Check-in and then meeting with an employee to discuss his or her performance. Let's take a more detailed look at each element in this process.

### **Why documentation matters?**

*When leaders make documenting a habit, not only are they helping their employees but they are also helping themselves.*

*Documentation empowers leaders to organize their thoughts and be better prepared to deliver feedback—both positive and negative—to employees.*

*Documentation is also a memory aid. It is easy for leaders to think they will remember important topics and significant events, but this just isn't consistently true. Good documentation helps leaders refresh their recollections of important events and also minor details relating to employee performance and conduct.*

## Facts

First things first: what are the verifiable facts? When recording the facts keep them brief, specific and focused on behavior, avoiding labels. Be careful not to interject your own opinions, emotions, or judgments. Facts are not conclusions (although they may eventually serve to back up your conclusions). Keep them simple and straightforward by capturing the following:

- What happened?
- When did the incident or event happen?
- Where did the incident or event happen?
- Who was involved and who was an eye-witness?

## Objectives

Objectives state specific expectations for the employee. Employees are not mind-readers and sometimes we, as supervisors, are not great at articulating our expectations either. Delineating objectives is useful for both parties in communicating and understanding expectations. Define a specific behavior or result for the employee in measurable terms against which you (and the employee) can gauge performance.

## Solutions

Solutions are ideas and suggestions in the form of assistance or coaching that are offered to the employee to help solve the performance problem or address the undesirable conduct. Examples of solutions include training, coaching, mentoring, education, setting goals, or providing resources. The solutions offered should be designed to help the employee reach his or her objectives. Remember to include the employee in providing suggestions for solutions. You can decide whether or not they can be pursued but the employee may be able to come up with alternatives that you have not even considered. This may help the employee become part of the solution while increasing accountability and a sense of ownership.

## Actions

Actions are the consequences for the employee if he or she does not improve their performance. This is an important component because it communicates the significance of the situation and your commitment to helping the employee resolve the problem. The actions should clearly outline what will happen if the objectives are not met. When reinforcing positive performance, the actions may be outlined as accomplishments or the positive impact that the act had.

### Maintaining Performance Notes

It is not practical to mentally manage employee performance. Using Performance Notes is a way to track both good performance as well as concerns. Another benefit of this tool is to keep a continual, up-to-date record of your efforts to help your employee be successful in his or her role. Observe your employees and document behaviors related to performance and pay attention to the following:

#### Performance and conduct trends

- Is performance or conduct improving or declining?
- Are there performance or conduct highs and lows – spurts of exceptional performance followed by extended periods of average performance?

#### Significant events

- Noteworthy successes or failures
- Performance incidents that stand out from usual behavior

It's important to note that recording information in Performance Notes is not a substitute for having continuous conversations in addition to the Quarterly Check-in regarding employee performance.

## Conclusion

Leaders have a responsibility to help employees be successful and maintain an effective and safe work environment. One of the ways in which they do this is by ensuring that all employees understand the expectations of their roles and receive ongoing feedback about how they're doing. Successful leaders recognize the importance of balancing both reinforcement and redirection. This way, if or when you do need to provide redirection, it's not demoralizing and may be better received and appreciated.

Often, continuous and frequent informal feedback can correct unsatisfactory work performance but in the event that informal feedback does not correct a problem, with proper documentation you will be better positioned to support your actions, should the issue escalate. Utilizing the Performance Notes and the Quarterly Check-ins effectively, and communicating the facts, objectives, solutions, and actions of incidents at the time they occur, ensures that the Quarterly Check-ins will be effective in ensuring expectations are clear and prevents many issues from becoming problems.

For more assistance, please contact your Employee Relations Satellite Office:

E&G and Auxiliaries – 352-392-6615  
IFAS – 352-392-4777  
Health Science Center – 352-392-3786  
Facility Services – 352-392-2333

## Resources

[UFHR – UF Engaged](#)

[UFHR – Employee Relations – Disciplinary Process](#)

[UFHR – Leadership Job Aids – Holding Difficult Performance Conversations](#)

[UFHR – Leadership Job Aids – The 2-Minute Challenge: A Guide for a Difficult Coaching Conversation](#)

[UFHR – Leadership Job Aids – OH NO! Do I have to have THAT Conversation?!](#)

## References:

Deblieux, Mike. 1995. *Documenting Discipline*. New York, NY: American Media Inc.