



One of the main reasons managers give for avoiding performance conversations is the fear of how the employee will respond. This guide will help leaders prepare for any performance conversation.

First, knowing the employee well from holding ongoing performance conversations, you can use those experiences to prepare for conversation derailers before engaging in the end-of-year performance appraisal.

Review the 'common derailers' below & prepare for your conversation

					
<i>Employee becomes...</i>	<i>Employee displays behaviors...</i>	<i>Employee says...</i>	<i>Manager becomes...</i>	<i>Manager must...</i>	<i>Manager says...</i>
The Apologizer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Apologizing Jumping to confession before listening to P-E-C or ST/A/R 	<i>"I'm sorry. I know it's my fault. I don't mean to cause trouble."</i>	The Clarifier	Verify that the employee understands their action, what the standard is, and the consequence of their future choices.	<i>"I'm glad you take responsibility. I need to make sure you understand <u>exactly</u> went wrong; so I still want to review your performance, my expectations, and consequences for next time."</i>
The Denier	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arguing with the data presented Questioning your measure of their performance 	<i>"I don't believe I've been late as many times as you say I have. In fact, I know I'm almost always early!"</i>	The Presenter	Present concrete, well researched evidence of the employee's action, the standard, and the consequence of future actions.	<i>"I am surprised to hear you say that. I've looked at timesheets for the last two months and you've been late twelve times and early only once."</i>
The Tear-Jerker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reacting in a way that doesn't fit situation Crying, sobbing, tearing up 	<i>Through sobs: "I try so hard to be good - I don't know what went wrong - I can't believe this is happening right now."</i>	The Soother	Reassure them they are going to be ok with support from you. Display empathy with body language, speak slower and with a quieter voice.	<i>"I realize it can be upsetting to receive performance feedback. You and I will work together to help you become a high performer here at AU."</i>
The Blame Shifter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shifting the blame to another employee or process Pointing the finger to avoid responsibility 	<i>"I don't know why I'm being blamed for being late to work every day. It's the traffic and construction's fault."</i>	The Mirror	Restate your expectations and help the employee to see how they have control over their behavior.	<i>"Right now, the focus is on you getting to work on-time. That's what needs to happen - regardless of traffic. What can you do over the next few weeks to make that happen?"</i>
The Subject Changer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Changing the subject Engaging in tangential conversations 	<i>"I realize the project isn't going well, but what I really want to talk about is my career growth here at AU."</i>	The Guardrails	Highlight that the tangential conversation can be had later, refocus discussion on performance.	<i>"I'm happy to talk about career growth. I'll set up time later this week. Right now, I want us to focus on what is happening with your project."</i>
The Scorekeeper	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Excusing behavior based on what other people have done 	<i>"I don't know why you're picking on me. Tammy is late all the time."</i>	The Umpire	Assure the employee you are fair and equitable. Shift focus back to the employee's behavior, your expectation, and the consequence.	<i>"My job as the manager is to make sure everyone is performing to the best of their ability. I'm constantly providing feedback to everyone on the team. Right now, I need to have you focus on your performance - let's talk about getting to work on time."</i>

Second, employees occasionally disagree with the assessment of their performance. A good sign this may happen is when there is significant discrepancy between the employee's self-rating and your evaluation of their performance. This will happen less frequently as managers become better at setting clear expectations, measuring & documenting performance, providing ongoing performance feedback throughout the year, and coaching employees on performance improvement when necessary.

In the meantime, be prepared with some key phrases to use if the employee becomes combative or resistant or insists that their self-evaluation is the correct one. For example:

- **“I hear you that you see it differently, but ultimately I’m not seeing the performance I expect to in the areas X and Y.”**
- **“My preference would be for us to agree about the ratings, but ultimately it’s my responsibility to make that judgment.”**
- **“What I’m hearing is that we see this very differently. I really appreciate hearing your perspective, but I stand by my assessment, for the reasons I laid out in the evaluation. From here, I’d like us to focus on what your work will look like moving forward.”**

Finally, at the end of the day the manager must take accountability and responsibility for rating employees on performance. As FDR famously believed, as a manager “the buck stops here.” Transition the conversation away from a two-way dialog using ST/A/R or P-E-C models of performance feedback. For more information on performance feedback models, take the online training [Performance Coaching - Providing Performance Feedback](#).

For additional coaching techniques contact our Talent Development Consultant, Matt Schwartz at mschwartz@american.edu

If the employee acts inappropriately during any performance discussion, contact Employee Relations at employeerelations@american.edu