

7 Expert Tips on Driving Employee Performance from HR Unplugged



HR Unplugged Performance Playlist

EPISODE 6:

What's Your Talent Philosophy? 3 Reasons You Need One Today

EPISODE 10:

Providing a Clear Vision to Drive Engagement & High Performance

EPISODE 32:

How HR Leaders Can Improve the Employee Experience

EPISODE 40:

How to Fix Your Broken Performance Review Process

Performance management is a critical piece of the employee experience. It can offer real-time insights into how happy employees are at work, how well everyone is tracking against their goals, and engagement across the organization.

But even while understanding the importance of performance management, HR professionals and managers with direct reports still struggle to get it right.

Too often, performance management highlights a misalignment between managers and employees. In fact, in some recent data pulled by BambooHR in 2024 (and shared in [HR Unplugged episode 40](#)), we found that over the last 4 years, managers and employees don't appear to be aligned on the value they bring to the company. Out of the people who were categorized as "easy to replace," 42% of those employees said they were highly valuable. And out of the people who managers said weren't "working out," 37% of those employees said they were highly valuable.

The missing link here? A better performance management process.

We've rounded up the top 7 performance best practices we learned from HR Unplugged—a BambooHR podcast that tackles tough HR topics—plus a few bonus tips on how to boost employee morale. Check out our [podcast](#) archive—featuring 40+ episodes with BambooHR's Head of HR, Anita Grantham, and HR Business Partner, Vanessa Brulotte—for even more ideas!



Top 7 Performance Management Best Practices from HR Unplugged:

1. Link employee goals and work to the business.

A successful performance management process starts by connecting employee goals and their work to the mission, vision, and values of the business. Without a direct link to the broader business, employees can't see how their work contributes to overall goals.

Businesses who do this see positive results. At least **80% of over-performing companies** link everything they do to purpose. Plus, **Gallup** research shows that just a 10% improvement in employees' connection with the mission or purpose of their organization leads to an 8.1% decrease in turnover and a 4.4% increase in profitability.

HERE'S WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Make sure employees are clear on how their work impacts the overall mission of the business. Structure feedback, goal setting, and even weekly priorities to align to the overarching goals of the business.

2. Build a culture of feedback.

Successful performance management also relies on a culture built around feedback. In this environment, there should be no surprises to employees. If you find that employees are consistently surprised in their performance review, you likely have a management problem or a feedback problem (or both!).

A performance review should be an intentional macro-level conversation that summarizes the many micro-level conversations managers have with their direct reports in weekly or biweekly 1:1 meetings. When you skip micro conversations, you are left with performance reviews that not only surprise employees, but also demotivate them.

HERE'S WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Deliver feedback consistently, not just in an annual review. Consider using the two-medium feedback approach that includes a verbal conversation and two mediums of follow-up. Slack and email are great examples. This can help you document conversations, reiterate expectations, and keep everyone informed.

Pro tip #1

The term "feedback" can elicit a fight or flight response for some. Understand the psychological impact of feedback—be thoughtful about your language and the way you frame constructive criticism or any other feedback to employees. Build feedback around the framework that you want people to improve. Show commitment to their journey at your organization by creating a consistent culture of communication—once-a-year performance conversations just won't cut it.

3. Measure performance regularly.

Goal setting and goal tracking are clearly standard pillars of performance management. But if you aren't measuring performance regularly with your employees, they will be surprised if they don't perform to your standards. Be crystal clear as often as possible. Communicate how well employees are performing and how they are measuring against their goals and your expectations.

HERE'S WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Complete a performance review in every 1:1 conversation. Don't wait for an annual review conversation. Embed the performance conversation into the cadence of running the business. And if you need to correct behavior or recommend adjustments, do it quickly—don't wait. If you can't commit to weekly 1:1s or performance conversations, find a better cadence (e.g., monthly or quarterly).

Pro tip #2

92% of HR leaders intend to increase their AI use in at least one area of HR (and most plan to increase their usage in the next 12–18 months). Out of those 92%, 43% say they will use AI in performance management. While AI can't replace the human aspect of performance management, it can analyze long-form, peer-based feedback, number-based scoring, and other KPIs backed by data. Consider ways you can use AI in your performance management processes to find valuable insights.

4. Keep 1:1s simple

Don't waste precious 1:1 time. More than **60% of employees** report that they want more feedback at work, and **more than 50% of employees** who quit their jobs believe their manager could have done something to prevent them leaving. While regular 1:1s are a key piece of performance management success, they're also critical for employee satisfaction, retention, and productivity.

HERE'S WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Follow a 1:1 format that works for you and your organization. A strategy that many find helpful follows this outline:

- Walk through accomplishments and the impact of the employee's work.
- Discuss cultural alignment and how new work or tasks are connected to the company's mission and vision.
- Go over any growth and development feedback or plans.



5. Include the right self-evaluation questions.

A performance review shouldn't just rely on how managers see their direct reports. Self-evaluation can help employees see their own progress or areas for improvement. By adding in self-evaluation, employees and managers can create better plans for the future and open up conversations that may be difficult to start if the manager is the only one providing feedback and analysis.

HERE'S WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Ask your direct reports the following self-evaluation questions:

- My biggest area of impact of _____ period was _____.
- I accomplished _____ amount of my goals and objectives.
- My manager and I have identified this as my top growth area: _____.
- I am interested in growing and developing in this area over the next 6 months: _____.
- I need the following support from my manager to meet my goals: _____.

Pro tip #3

If you don't have a manager that's prioritizing productive 1:1s or performance management, you can take your career growth and development into your own hands. Self-evaluation questions like the ones listed above can help you find direction and keep you engaged in your own progress and success.



6. Empower leaders to be effective.

HR is responsible for training managers to be effective people leaders and performance boosters, but managers alone are responsible for how their teams perform. And as they engage in the frameworks, processes, and training, managers—not HR—should be the ones taking the lead on demonstrating effective 1:1s to their people and other managers.

HERE'S WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Build a leader-driven organization, not an “HR said” organization. To do this, you need to rely on effective training for every manager. This can vary based on the maturity of the leadership team. In the beginning, you may need to be overprescribed in the level of guidance you offer leaders. As you progress, you can take the training wheels off and help managers become more self-reliant.

Pro tip #4

Include resources to help managers be effective in your onboarding process. Revisit these resources in your annual or bi-annual manager training sessions.

7. Include performance management in your talent philosophy.

Performance management shouldn't just be part of the employee experience. It should also be included as part of your talent philosophy—how you manage employees and refine workflows from the top down. If you're struggling to create a performance management process that works, your talent philosophy is often the perfect place to start making changes.

HERE'S WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Include performance management in your talent philosophy. Set guidelines around performance for each of your employees. Outline how you treat high performers vs. average or low performers and how transparent you'll be with these plans. And address accountability. To what extent are managers responsible for building their teams? How much accountability do they have in the process?

Bonus Tips on Employee Morale

Employee morale can impact employee performance. Here are a few bonus tips to improve employee morale:

Help new hires and current employees feel welcome.

- Make the choice to intentionally touch base with everyone that works for you. Connect via text, chat, Slack, Microsoft Teams—whatever your group uses to communicate. While some employees might be comfortable with a hello, others will need more conversation.
- Consider asking your direct reports a weekly question. Ask everyone what their favorite food is this week and change it up to their favorite movie next week. Other good options include their favorite superpower, vacation, or way to relax. Use a Question of the Week approach to start conversations among the team and to get to know individual team members on a more personal level.

Recognize and reward good work.

- Praise positive improvements in your 1:1s. Follow the format listed in this article for effective 1:1s. Discuss accomplishments and praise good work in every 1:1.
- Take advantage of employee recognition programs. If your organization has an employee recognition program, publicly recognize employees for their good work. Submit names for quarterly or annual awards and publicly thank employees for their efforts and contributions to the organization.

Listen to employee feedback.

- Make changes where necessary. As you implement a culture of communication, don't let managers be the only ones to deliver feedback. Listen to employee concerns, communicate to show they've been heard, and make changes where possible.
- Share updates with employees. Express gratitude for employees who are willing to share feedback with you and the management team. Build trust with the team and each employee by delivering updates on any changes that are a direct result of employee feedback.

Learn more about onboarding and other HR topics by listening to [HR Unplugged](#).