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# **Performance Reviews Using Customer Feedback**

(Version 2)

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## Performance Reviews Using Customer Feedback

When was the last time you had to do a negative performance review with one of your employees? I mean the kind where you are the bearer of bad news and have to lay down the law in a forceful manner?

This type of performance review can be one of the most painful and yet delicate interactions that a manager can have with an employee. In this article, I will address a simple, yet effective way to offset two of the more difficult issues related to this type of employee review. They are – (1) the subjective nature of the manager’s “evidence” for change, and (2) the “selective memory” of most employees when presented with performance weaknesses.

### Summary

The bottom-line summary is this: Let your customers provide real-time feedback, specific to each service employee, as close to the service experience as possible. In this way, you’ll be presenting the literal voice of the customer to the employee, and the suggestions for improvement will be direct, applicable, and devoid of the inherent bias that is present in all employee-supervisor relationships. Specific training needs will be highlighted and employee retention will go up.

### “My Subjective Boss”

I wish I had a nickel for every time I listened to an employee appeal their performance review with these words, “This isn’t a fair review, because my boss doesn’t like me.” This accusation is usually followed with examples of the boss giving more positive performance evaluations to others in the department because, “The boss likes them better.” It seems to be an almost unavoidable part of human nature to throw up a defensive posture when confronted by our weaknesses. Another often-used defense is to blame the human bias of those who are asked to subjectively judge us. “She’s not fair. She doesn’t like my politics. We were peers, and then he got promoted to be my boss. He’s holding a grudge, etc.”

### “That’s not How I Remember it Happening”

With apologies to those who really are having memory loss, I point out the simple fact that most of us seem to remember the positive parts of an experience, while lapsing greatly in our ability to remember areas where we fell short. (Interestingly, the exception to this phenomenon seems to be the story-telling of “most embarrassing moments” at cocktail parties or other such gatherings.) The point is this: when confronted with examples of our weakness, or areas of improvement, we manage to forget the sticky details of our poor performance.

### “Oh Yeah, Well Give Me Some Examples”

Yet another defensive response is this quick rebuttal by the employee, “Give me some specific examples of this weakness.” The problem with this request is that the supervisor is put into a difficult box. If the supervisor has numerous specific instances recorded, then the employee accuses him of being on a “witch hunt” and being purposely “out to get me.” If the supervisor has no examples, then the employee simply responds that the accusation of weakness is exaggerated and not based in fact. If the supervisor has only one or two examples, then the associate passes this off as not representative of his general behavior, but rather a momentary (and non-repeatable) lapse.

## The Solution: Real-Time, Actionable Customer Feedback

The simple solution to the common situation outlined above is to give your customers (all of your customers, not some random sample) the opportunity to provide immediate feedback on their service experience.

Such feedback needs to be:

- 1) Collected as close to the service experience as possible,
- 2) Anonymous, if desired by the participant,
- 3) Available and accessible to all customers,
- 4) Track-able all the way down to the individual employee, and
- 5) Delivered to all layers of management, but specifically to the lowest supervisory level.

My favorite example from one of our clients at Mindshare is an experience with a food service company that runs the concessions at stadiums and ballparks across the country. On one occasion, a business customer at Wrigley Field in Chicago had ordered chicken strips, which were cold by the time they were delivered to her seat. Immediately, she took a Mindshare survey using her cell phone. Her negative survey response triggered an alert, and a warm (replacement) basket of chicken strips was delivered directly to the suite by the seventh inning. The customer was “blown away” by such immediate and urgent service lapse recovery.

In this example, the survey was immediate. The response was immediate. The customer was given the option of providing his name or not. The process flaw that caused the chicken strips to be cold in the first place was able to be investigated and repaired, and the employee who allowed the chicken strips to go to the customer cold was identified and able to receive follow-up training and improvement.

## Additional Company and Employee Benefits

The benefits of such a program to the customer are fairly obvious, as are the benefits a company can accrue on the operations side of things by listening to their customers. In this document, we have reviewed the benefits of objective customer feedback and its use in employee performance reviews. The logical next step is to use the voice of the customer to pinpoint specific training areas needed for specific employees. Also, actual customer responses can be used not only to point out needed training opportunities, but also in the training itself, for example, in role plays and “what if” situations. And finally, it has been my experience that using actual customer feedback in employee reviews and employee training improves employee retention. Why? Because the standard criteria for performance evaluation has been switched from a subjective supervisor, to an objective set of feedback from customers, who are the target of the service experience to begin with. This causes employees to feel like “things are fair” and decisions are more objective.

## Conclusion

If you don't already have some form of immediate customer feedback, you are falling behind best-practice organizations that are using real-time feedback to not only improve operations, but also to enlist the voice of the customer in removing bias in evaluations, pinpointing needed employee training, and eventually improving employee retention.

This is how I see it.

### **About Richard D. Hanks and Mindshare**

**Richard D. Hanks** is the President of **Mindshare Technologies**, a leading provider of real-time, automated customer and employee feedback solutions. His experience spans multiple industries and disciplines, including many years as an adjunct professor at Cornell. He is an author and frequent teacher/speaker at trade, academic, and professional gatherings. Mindshare's business monitoring tools help companies improve operational excellence and minimize customer attrition through personal customer involvement. Mindshare's proprietary survey technology captures the voice of the customer in real-time and immediately transforms it into actionable intelligence through powerful enterprise reporting. As a hosted system, Mindshare is affordable and flexible, with surveys and reports tailored to fit a company's individual needs. For more information please visit: [www.mshare.net](http://www.mshare.net). To reach Rich directly, contact him at [rhanks@mshare.net](mailto:rhanks@mshare.net) or (801) 263-2333.