

Excelling in an Entry-Level Job

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Key Takeaways

- Performance reviews are opportunities for employees to learn, share career goals, and seek tailored guidance for their career development.
- High-performing employees exhibit similar characteristics, including persistence, hard work, organization, responsibility, and interpersonal skills.
- An employee who is often absent, performs tasks poorly, or has a negative attitude is likely to experience turnover.
- An organization that fails to meet employees' needs regarding compensation, workload, culture, or career advancement may also result in turnover.

Entry-level jobs fulfill the basic tasks of business operations. These roles provide employees with work experience and can help them progress to higher-level positions within an organization's hierarchy or between different organizations. Experience in an entry-level job becomes more valuable over time, especially when performance is exceptional. Managers conduct periodic performance reviews to provide feedback that entry-level employees can use to improve. Performance reviews are an opportunity for employees to learn, share career goals, and seek tailored guidance for their career development. This fact sheet provides insights into the character and qualities an employee should demonstrate to become a high performer, and what organizations can do to retain such employees.

Employee Performance

An employee's performance is a leading factor in management's retention decisions, and those recognized as high performers tend to keep their jobs and advance to higher-level positions (James & Mathew, 2012; Singh,

2019). A well-regarded meta-analysis conducted by Barrick and Mount (1991) found that high-performing employees across multiple professions exhibited similar characteristics, including:

- Persistence,
- Hard work,
- Organization, and
- Responsibility.

Employees who are more likely to be recognized and succeed in higher positions also demonstrate interpersonal skills (e.g., empathy, communication, and conflict resolution) that improve both an organization's productivity and its work environment (Modric et al., 2024). Losing even a single high-performing employee to turnover can be a significant loss to an organization.

Employee Turnover and Retention

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Turnover occurs when an employee leaves an organization voluntarily (i.e., deciding to quit) or involuntarily (i.e., being fired or laid off; Ayodele et al., 2020; Singh, 2019). Acclaimed studies have identified factors that lead to employee turnover, which can result from circumstances related to the decisions and/or performance of either the employee or the organization (Griffeth et al., 2000; James & Mathew, 2012). An employee who is often absent, performs tasks poorly, or has a negative attitude is likely to experience turnover (Ghani et al., 2022; Griffeth et al., 2000). Furthermore, an organization that fails to meet employees' needs regarding compensation, workload, culture, or career advancement may also result in turnover (Ayodele et al., 2020; James & Mathew, 2012; Singh, 2019). Although some level of employee turnover is inevitable, the costs associated with training and onboarding new employees can be significant (Ravesangar & Narayanan, 2024). As such, organizations continually prioritize efforts to limit turnover, especially among high-performing employees, through various retention efforts (Singh, 2019).

Employee retention is an organization's responsibility to keep employees by addressing their various employment needs (James & Mathew, 2012; Singh, 2019). High-performing employees possess valuable institutional knowledge and skills but can also be highly sought after by competitors (Singh, 2019). Their departure means losing a valuable asset to an organization's operations, resulting in the financial burden of incurring new hiring

and training costs (Ayodele et al., 2020; James & Mathew, 2012; Ravesangar & Narayanan, 2024; Singh, 2019). Furthermore, when employed by competitors, their expertise can have negative economic implications for an organization.

Performance Reviews



A performance review is a formal meeting in which an employee's performance is evaluated and discussed, specifically their strengths and weaknesses (Murphy, 2020). Performance reviews are a tool used by management to provide employees with feedback and for managers to receive feedback, including areas for improvement and training (Murphy, 2020).

Employee Responsibilities

In preparation for a performance review, an employee should provide a record of their accomplishments within their role to highlight the value they have contributed to the organization (Larsson et al., 2022). While in a performance review, an employee should maintain a positive attitude, be ready for constructive criticism, and actively participate in the conversation by sharing ideas and asking questions (Larsson et al., 2022; Murphy, 2020). Performance reviews are also an opportunity for the employee to share their goals and request guidance from their manager on how to advance from their current position to a higher-level role (Murphy, 2020).

Employer Responsibilities

Ultimately, the success of a performance review depends largely on the manager, who is responsible for making it a constructive and positive experience for the employee. Aside from providing productive feedback, a manager should listen and provide support, serving as a catalyst for the employee's career goals (Larsson et al., 2022).

A performance appraisal is similar to a performance review, in which an employee is assessed on their work contributions and rewarded, usually with an increase in compensation (Cappelli & Conyon, 2018; Murphy, 2020; Singh, 2019). The appraisal is intended to further

encourage an employee's retention within the organization (Murphy, 2020).

Summary

Entry-level employees can become high performers, thereby increasing the likelihood of retention and advancement by demonstrating competence in their role, taking responsibility, and exhibiting persistence, organization, and a willingness to learn from feedback. Performance reviews provide employees with a valuable opportunity to discuss their strengths, address areas for improvement, and communicate their career goals to managers. At the same time, organizations are interested in retaining high-performing employees by offering support, fair compensation, manageable workloads, a positive workplace culture, and opportunities for career growth. When employees and organizations are both committed to performance, feedback, and development, entry-level jobs can serve as valuable pathways to higher-level positions and greater workplace success.

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