

Know Your Team's Guide to Rethinking Performance Reviews

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Intro

Reviews are not for people

Reviews are for books, movies, and restaurants. Reviews are not for people.

The concept of “performance reviews” has never sat well with you, as a result.

As a leader, you want your team to continually improve and bring the best out in each other — but a “performance review” doesn’t accomplish that.

Too rigid, too stale, too traditional, too annoying... In fact, [Gallup](#) revealed how “traditional performance reviews and approaches to feedback are often so bad that they actually make performance worse about one-third of the time.” Furthermore, a [2019 study by Mercer](#) found that only 2% of companies believe their performance process delivered exceptional value.

If you’re wishing your *own* performance review process was better, you’re not alone. Researcher Josh Bersin [estimates](#) that about 70% of multinational companies are moving away from traditional performance review processes.

The question is: **What is *better*?**

Chapter 1

What performance reviews are & how we got here

In order to rethink performance reviews, we must begin with understanding what performance reviews actually are, and what they were originally intended for.

Defining performance reviews

You've heard the term a thousand times. But what are we actually referring to when we talk about "performance reviews"?

Performance reviews, most traditionally, are a tool used by organizations to formally assess individual performance, share strengths and weaknesses, and offer suggestions for improvement.

This can happen in a variety of ways, but most commonly, they occur once or twice a year: A manager will write a performance review, based on collecting survey data from their team, and then summarize those points and share it with the individual in both writing and in a 1:1 meeting.

Sometimes performance reviews are called “performance evaluations,” “performance appraisals,” or “annual reviews” ...

But regardless of what we choose to call it, the concept of performance reviews has emerged from the same history.

How did we get here?

History reveals much.

[Beginning in World War I](#), performance reviews were first developed as a rating system to help the U.S. military identify and dismiss poor performers. Focused on succession planning, the reviews were *not* shared with the members of the military being evaluated. The intention of performance reviews was to help the *organization* decide who to promote or dismiss — not to help the *individuals* themselves grow.

In short, performance reviews originated as an *organizational* tool for succession planning, rather than a *performance* tool to help people improve their performance. Fast forward to the present, and our thinking has changed. In our survey with 1,087 managers and employees, we discovered **70% believe the primary purpose of reviews in an organization is to help a team member develop**. We live in a fast-moving global context, where the success of a team is predicated on how quickly a team can improve its own performance by

way of ongoing feedback. Thus, modern organizations require some sort of *performance* tool — a way to give feedback to an employee so they know how to improve. Quite simply: We want performance reviews to help our teams *perform* better.

However, we don't succeed at this, using performance reviews for other purposes beyond performance feedback: Bonuses, promotions, and compensation raises are often part of the traditional performance review process. In our survey of 1,087 people, 63% said that their performance reviews were tied to compensation. Additionally, some organizations use performance reviews as a means of legal protection and to justify future firings.

These convoluted intentions lead to convoluted outcomes. Organizations struggle with what to optimize for: If the performance review is *supposed* to be about giving constructive feedback, how do you then *also* use it to justify future firings? If you're using a performance review to promote growth and development, how then does it factor into someone's compensation that year? Understandably, managers and employees find themselves frustrated, fearful, and demoralized by the process. In our survey, one respondent disparagingly referred to performance reviews as "HR theater." Many problems emerge, as a result. We're left with a performance review process that hurts more than helps.

In the [next chapter](#), we'll dive into what those exact problems of performance reviews are.

Chapter 2

A broken process with 6 distinct problems

Here are the 6 most pernicious problems of performance reviews, based on research from the last decade.

From all the research and literature written on performance reviews in the last decade, six consistent problems appear in traditional performance reviews...

#1: “So, what’s this really for?”

Performance reviews try to **do too many things at once**. Many teams will use performance reviews to do some mix of the following:

- offering advice on how to improve
- setting an employee’s bonus or raise
- deciding on a promotion
- justifying a future firing

Unfortunately, this diluted focus leads to the performance review not being able to do *any* of these things well.

#2: “Are you judging me, or coaching me?”

Most performance reviews are tied to compensation and/or ratings. In our survey, we found that 63% of 1,087 people surveyed said that their performance reviews were tied to compensation. While popular, this backfires. This means the minute you try to offer feedback during a review, the person on the other side is bracing themselves for whether they got a raise or got promoted... not, “Oh, is this feedback I should internalize in some way.” In fact, [studies](#) show how rankings trigger a fight-or-flight response in the brain. When performance reviews conflate growth with judgment, it damages the likelihood of growth.

#3: “I don’t want to say anything bad.”

We fear that what we write in our performance reviews might negatively affect ourselves — or someone else. We keep our feedback surface-level and vague, rather than meaningful and specific. Poor delivery by the manager and/or the organization often leads to botched performance reviews. Managers haven’t been trained to give effective feedback. HR managers [believe](#) 8 in 10 managers have skill gaps in giving feedback and coaching, and only 14.5% of managers [strongly agree](#) that they are effective at giving feedback.

#4: “I’ll wait to bring this up in the next review cycle.”

We sit on feedback until the performance review cycle happens, enabling feedback to inevitably build up. We surprise our team if and when it does come out in the end — and not in a good way. This means the feedback that’s given is imprecise and/or too late to truly matter, as it’s been built up over the past year. Or, the feedback has been completely absent and hits the other person like water from a firehose: In fact, [in many organizations](#), it’s “the only time where they can force managers to give feedback.”

#5: “I have to triangulate and summarize 3+ people’s perspectives.”

Performance reviews are not a direct, frank conversation. They are a telephone game of “he said she said,” leaving us confused on what exactly we need to improve. Rarely do performance reviews feel fair or accurate. Tellingly, according to [Gallup](#), only 29% of employees strongly agree that the performance reviews they receive are fair, and 26% strongly agree that they are accurate.

#6: “Sheesh, this takes forever.”

In a [study](#) by the advisory service CEB, the average manager reported spending about 210 hours — which is close to five weeks of doing performance reviews per year. In our survey, most people reported that their performance review takes more than two weeks to

implement, with 66% of managers spending 4 hours or more to complete them — with 13% spending 12+ hours. That's longer than some projects themselves. One could only wonder how much energy could be directed toward the work itself with that amount of sheer effort and time.

If we want to have better performance reviews, first and foremost, we'll need to solve these 6 underlying problems.

Curious how other organizations have tried to solve these problems? Read on in [Chapter 3](#).

Chapter 3

Attempts at rethinking reviews

What have other organizations tried when rethinking performance reviews? Here's what they've learned and used.

Naturally, many organizations have sought to rethink performance reviews.

In the past decade or so, GE, Adobe, and Gap are just some of the companies that have experimented with different techniques and transitioned away from traditional performance reviews.

What have they moved toward?

Frequent one-on-one conversations between managers and direct reports

At [GE](#), one-on-one meetings are held that are called “touchpoints” that focus on two questions: What should I keep doing, and what should I change? At [Adobe](#), managers hold quarterly “Check-ins,” that are forward-focused conversations. At [Gap](#), they call their system “GPS” — “Grow. Perform. Succeed.” — which encourages 12 informal conversations throughout the year that focus

on three questions: What went well? Where did you get stuck? What would you do differently next time?

Ongoing, real-time requests for feedback by anyone

Many organizations focus on the ability for people to request and invite feedback, at any time, from anyone with the organization. GE, IBM, and Amazon all [have](#) internal apps each company has developed to both invite and give feedback to peers — even outside their team or division.

Removal of stack rankings or ratings

Diverging strongly from the original incorporation of ratings in performance reviews by the military, many companies, including GE and Adobe, have completely eliminated any kind of numerical ranking or ratings from their performance review process.

Compensation determined by a separate process

To enable greater focus on team growth and development, a compensation and promotion discussion is often held *separate* from these coaching conversations. At [Gap](#), compensation conversations are held once a year, and managers are given a detailed model to match compensation with performance. Similarly, at [Google](#), these conversations are separated by a month: In November, a conversation about performance is held,

and in December, a conversation about compensation and role changes is held. At [Netflix](#), a completely different approach is taken: Compensation is purely dictated by the market rate, with Netflix paying its staff always top of market instead of allocating bonuses. (More examples can be found [here](#).)

What have the results been?

Outcomes of moving away from traditional performance reviews have been positive for some companies: Adobe [reported](#) a 10% increase in people saying that the ongoing feedback they receive helps their performance, and Cargill [found](#) “overall, 90 percent of the no-rating pilot participants reported, year after year, that their experience was positive.”

However, **results are not entirely uniform nor conclusive across the board**. Some companies have tried taking steps to revamp their performance review — only to resort to reinstating them a year two later. Other companies have chosen to retain certain components of their traditional performance reviews.

Why is this? Are there certain aspects of traditional performance reviews that some companies still find useful? I share this in the [next chapter](#).

Chapter 4

Why some companies keep traditional performance reviews

Not all organizations seek to replace performance reviews. Here's why some companies keep all or certain elements of their performance review process.

No two organizations are truly alike — what works for one might not work for another. Accordingly, some organizations have chosen to retain certain aspects of traditional reviews.

Specifically, some companies, like Facebook, have held on to a version of the performance review that uses ratings and ties it to compensation. **Facebook, in particular, found in a survey with 300 members of their own staff that 87% of employees wanted to keep performance reviews.** (Facebook's performance reviews include peer reviews with ratings that are delivered by their managers and are a part of a compensation discussion — with a formula used to determine that compensation.)

Similarly, companies such as PwC and Deloitte, have maintained elements of their performance reviews: PwC **gives** ratings to their employees along five competencies, while other companies like Deloitte **assign** them one of four categories that provide a "performance snapshot."

Here's why some companies keep all or certain elements of performance reviews for the following reasons...

Quality of manager conversations can go down without effective training and support

Research conducted by CEB with almost 10,000 managers revealed how the lack of ratings in performance reviews reduced employees' perceptions of manager conversation quality by 14%. That is, without ratings, managers struggled to tell employees exactly how they could be performing better. **This shows that eliminating ratings doesn't solve everything: You still have to equip managers with training and support to communicate feedback cogently and clearly to their direct reports.**

People want to know where they stand

One **study** shows how uncertainty can trigger intense neural reactions, particularly in highly anxious people. Not knowing if you're doing well or poorly can interfere with strong performance. However, **this clarity of how well someone is doing is something that absolutely a manager should be communicating in their one-to-one**

conversations. Ratings merely serve as a *proxy* for a clear message — they are not a requirement for one. For instance, Netflix helps their staff understand where they stand without a numerical or categorical ranking by encouraging their staff to ask the question, “Would you fight for me if I were to think about leaving?” They call it the “Keeper Test.”

Bias happens when a feedback prompt is too open-ended — and when training + support is not provided

Many [studies](#) reveal how “without structure, people are more likely to rely on gender, race, and other stereotypes when making decisions.” Idiosyncratic rater effect is perhaps the most pernicious and widespread of biases in performance reviews: [Studies](#) have famously revealed that 61% of the feedback you give is a reflection of *you*, as the rater, rather than the other person. As a result, some companies find that having more structure (i.e., ratings) prevents bias. But the effectiveness of this has been [debated](#), as bias appears even when ratings are present. **To alleviate bias doesn't mean we must resort to ratings or re-adopt the formal performance reviews. Rather, it shows how structure, training, and support are necessary around (1) how to give feedback constructively (2) the perils of bias in feedback and how to minimize it.** For example, better prompts for feedback, training around framing feedback more objectively, and reading through the feedback for consistency can help.

Where does this leave us?

Given that no two organizations are identical, there are trade-offs to weigh and scenarios to consider when thinking if and how to conduct performance reviews in your organization.

However, if there is one most meaningful insight to zoom in on, amidst all the noise, it is what we've distilled in our KYT methodology shared in our [next chapter](#)...

Chapter 5

The KYT Way

A better way exists. From all the research, here is our recommendation and methodology for a performance review alternative.

When we try to imagine “a better performance review,” we’ve become overly fixated on the design of the process itself.

We endlessly debate amongst ourselves, “Which tool should we use? Should the questions be drop-down or radio buttons? How often should the cycles be? How many people should rate each other?”

We’ve forgotten what matters most: The core interaction between team members.

The interaction matters most

At the end of the day, the most important result of whatever performance reviews process you choose is that it helps your team work better together. As organizational theorist Edgar Schein [defined](#), teamwork is the development and maintenance of helping relationships amongst all members of the group. **Positive**

and helpful interaction is at the core of effective teamwork — and that’s what we as leaders care most about.

A helpful interaction is one where your team member is willing to tell you, to your face, objectively and kindly what could be better and how you can improve. It’s an exchange of feedback where the suggestion is received in a non-defensive way, where the person chooses for themselves the actions to take to change their behavior in the future.

Focus on the interaction — the connection, dialogue, and information and delivery of that information between peer to peer, manager to direct report, direct report to manager — and everything else about the performance review becomes dressing.

Because whether you have a performance review once every six months or once every six weeks, it still begets the need for your managers to have a conversation with their direct reports about what could be better — and interactions between team members that are positive and productive.

As a result, as leaders our focus should not be on answering, “What should our performance review process be?” but rather:

“What is required in the environment to increase the likelihood of helpful interactions?”

Here is the answer...

Our KYT methodology for a performance review alternative

To rethink performance reviews, here are 7 principles we recommend integrating...

1. Separate compensation conversations

Helpful interactions flounder if the primary context for interactions is: “Well, how does this affect how much I’ll get paid?” People can’t focus on how they should be getting better — or feel comfortable sharing with *others* how to get better — if they’re being evaluated for compensation changes at the same time. As a result, you’ll want to separate compensation from your process. This way, you have a set of conversations focused purely on growth and development — and you can optimize for increasing the quality of those interactions, rather than trying to do too many things at once.

2. Safety supports success

Trust is the breeding ground for helpful interactions. No one is going to want to give truthful feedback (especially if it’s upward) unless they trust it’ll be welcomed. This safe environment is what Amy Edmondson’s famed [research](#) deemed “psychological safety” – and what [Google](#) found their most high-performing teams have in common. Tactically, this

means being vulnerable when asking for feedback, appreciating the feedback you're receiving publicly, and employing what author Daniel Coyle calls "belonging cues": Eye contact, verbal tone, and body language to create this sense of safe connection.

3. Invite, don't impose

Only 26% of feedback is [found](#) to be valuable by employees — and a large determinant of this is because the feedback is imposed, rather than invited. Encourage your team members to ask for feedback, as there's a higher likelihood that the feedback will be internalized.

4. High-frequency routines

[Research](#) supports that delays in feedback hurt performance and learning, especially around course-correction. The more you can give feedback closer to the moment it happened, the more likely it will positively change behavior. At the same time, it can be hard to carve out the time to give live feedback in the day-to-day rush of work — and it can also feel unnatural and stilted. As a result, creating high-frequency routines — a time and place to give and receive this feedback that is structured and well-supported — at minimum once a week is critical.

5. **Multidirectional, not unilateral**

The interaction cannot be an opportunity for growth and improvement if it is one-sided. As a result, feedback should not just be collected and aggregated by managers only and direct reports, but enabled peer-to-peer. A huge reason managers dread delivering performance reviews is that they have to **triangulate** feedback from one team member to another... and the manager gets caught in the middle. Instead, offer your team ways to provide peer-to-peer feedback, and equip everyone — not just your managers — with the tools and training to give and receive this feedback well.

6. **Practical training**

For many teams, this is the biggest missing piece: Training that helps team members give actionable, objective feedback, and receive feedback in a productive way. As cited earlier, only 14.5% of managers **strongly agree** that they are effective at giving feedback. But it's more than just watching a video course on feedback and calling it a day — it's giving your team tactical scripts and templates they can use for giving and receiving feedback, and scenarios they can practice.

7. **Active, shared self-reflection**

To further improve performance, one of the most effective forms of practice comes from self-

reflection. [Studies](#) have shown that when a person has the choice between self-reflection or practicing a task, if they choose to self-reflect, their performance will increase more than if they would've used that same amount of time to practice a task. As a result, to help your team continue to level-up and improve the quality of their interactions, you'll want to incorporate some kind of regular shared self-reflection practice.

These are only guiding principles — not tactics or an immediate how-to.

If you're ready to implement these principles *tactically* in your organization, read on in the [next chapter](#)...

PS: The most straightforward way to implement these 7 principles is to use our KYT [Performance Feedback](#) tool. [Request a demo today.](#)

Chapter 6

How to fully implement our KYT methodology

Ready to focus on enabling a culture of feedback, continuous improvement, and high performance? Here's how you can fully implement our KYT methodology.

You're ready for a fresh start. You want to implement the methodology from Chapter 5 and (finally!) focus on the interactions in your team. You're eager to enable a culture of feedback, continuous improvement and high performance.

The process, all together, looks like this:

1. Recommit to enabling honest, helpful feedback
2. Separate compensation from reviews
3. Enable regular, peer-to-peer feedback invitations
4. Give training + guidance
5. Build trust + safety with belonging cues
6. Initiate public self-reflection

If you're thinking, "Hmmm, unfortunately I don't have the organizational buy-in or autonomy to replace our existing

process 100% yet” — then you’ll want to read [Chapter 7: How to implement aspects of our KYT methodology](#).

If you’re thinking, “Yes, yes, I’m ready to try something fresh” — to fully implement our principles into action at your own organization, here are the steps in detail...

(Full caveat, implementing *parts* of our methodology will not be as effective as implementing *all* of it as described here. But I hope Chapter 7 may give you a foothold for further change, as your organization welcomes it.)

Step 1: Recommit to the interaction

Your renewed commitment is not to a tool, not to a process — but a commitment to better interactions between team members. This means you will need to **ensure that your performance review process is about performance feedback**, rather than succession planning or compensation. In short, it’s about growth, not judgment. You can build in a succession planning model and compensation model and promotion on top of this. (I detail this in [Step 2](#).) But the interaction is the most important thing to get right, first.

To share this commitment with your organization...

Send a written note + discuss this renewed commitment to continual feedback in your next all-team meeting. Use your written announcement and all-team meeting to build trust and get people feeling comfortable being vulnerable to share honest feedback. You’re aiming to set a new tone, a new precedent, that what matters is

how everyone on the team can be helping each other improve, more than anything else.

Here's an example of an email you could send to your whole organization to share this renewed commitment to feedback...

Hey team –

I know I've talked a lot about the importance of honest feedback in a team, but I haven't always walked the talk. I find myself not always giving feedback as often – nor as well-delivered – as I'd like. And, I haven't always welcomed honest feedback as explicitly as I could.

Personally, I want to change. I know you're counting on me to give you developmental feedback to help you each grow in your careers. And, likewise, I am heavily relying on you to give me honest feedback so I can become a better leader.

Simply put: We won't thrive – as a team, and as individuals – if we're not able to commit to giving truly honest feedback to one another so we can improve and level-up as a team.

As a result, I'm excited to try a new feature from KYT called Performance Feedback that is focused on creating a culture of feedback and replacing the need for any traditional performance reviews.

We'll be starting on [DAY/TIME], so would love to know what you think + learn as we use it... I'll share more in the coming days – but beyond just an app, I am personally excited to

recommit to giving and receiving feedback with each of you.

– YOUR NAME

Step 2: Separate compensation discussion/ system from performance feedback

You may already separate compensation discussions from performance feedback in your organization — which is fantastic! If so, you can skip to [Step 3](#).

For those of you in organizations where compensation and performance feedback are still coupled, this is often the most daunting step. It can feel nebulous as to *how* an organization can separate compensation from performance feedback when historically the two have been so closely tied...

However, the reality is that this can be a relatively uncomplicated change to make as long as you:

1. Set up a distinct channel and process for compensation conversations
2. Clearly communicate the “why” and “how” around the change

Set up a distinct channel + process. You must make a clear decision in your organization to separate compensation discussions from performance feedback. This means carving out a distinct channel for discussing compensation. You can execute this channel in a myriad

of ways, but the key thing with the first iteration is simply ensuring it is a separate discussion.

As reference, here are some specific examples for how other organizations separate compensation discussions from performance feedback...

- **Two conversations:** At [Gap](#), compensation conversations are held once a year, and managers are given a detailed model to match compensation with performance. Similarly, at [Google](#), the two conversations are separated by a month: In November, a conversation about performance is held, and in December, a conversation about compensation and role changes is held.
- **Career path focus:** At [Spotify](#), a career path is made transparent to team members. Promotions are determined “when you and your manager agree that you are consistently operating at the next step. Specifically, promotions do not need to be tied to the annual salary review cycle.”
- **Salary calculator:** At [Buffer](#), a transparent salary formula is used to calculate compensation.
- **Top of market pay:** At [Netflix](#), a completely different approach is taken: Compensation is purely dictated by the market rate, with Netflix paying its staff always top of market instead of allocating bonuses.

Please note that you could absolutely combine approaches (e.g., two conversations and have a salary calculator) — and there is no one-size fits all. You should choose and pilot a path based on your own organizational context, dynamics, and goals.

After you create a separate channel for discussing compensation, then you'll need to communicate this change...

Clearly communicate the “why” and “how” around the change. At the end of the day, you're wanting to separate compensation from performance feedback to enable a more positive work culture. Make sure to communicate this — the overall aim — of this change, and then detail how this change will be executed.

Here's an example of how you could communicate having a separate compensation discussion to your team...

Hey team —

Here at [ORGANIZATION NAME], we're committed to creating a culture of feedback + continuous improvement.

However, we noticed that in the past, when we lumped compensation conversations with performance feedback conversations, it made things very difficult for us to actually focus on growth and improvement.

We've since realized that there's a more thoughtful, intentional way to discuss

compensation – and separately share developmental feedback with each other. As a result, we'd love to make the conversation around compensation separate from the performance feedback we give each other.

To do this, we'll be holding a "compensation conversation" once a year, as a one-on-one meeting between you and your direct manager. This meeting will occur every [INSERT MONTH] and will be scheduled via KYT's One-on-Ones tool. During it, we'll review how compensation is determined at [ORG NAME] and discuss what changes if any are to be made.

We'll start these compensation conversations this year. Since this is the first time we're doing this, I'd love any and all feedback on what would make those conversations even more helpful and transparent – and what the experience feels like.

Look forward to hearing what you think. Our hope is that this enables us to have a culture of growth and improvement.

– YOUR NAME

If you're wondering what tooling could help you separate these conversations, you can **use KYT One-on-Ones tool to hold a separate compensation discussion every year or twice a year**, and create a template for the conversation as well. Our One-on-Ones tool will automatically schedule the 1:1 meetings for you and insert whatever template you'd like to have for the compensation conversation.

Note: Of course, you do not have to use our KYT One-on-Ones tool in order to send this message and hold a separate compensation discussion, so feel free to omit that part of the messaging if that fits best for your team.

Step 3: Enable regular, peer-to-peer feedback invitations

Now we're ready to get to the heart of our performance review alternative process: Peer-to-peer feedback invitations.

Remember that feedback is more likely to internalize and welcome feedback when you've *invited* it vs. when it's imposed on you. Think of it like a party invitation: When someone invites you to a party, you're much more likely to go, rather than show up unannounced. Invitations for *feedback* have the same effect.

Because of this, your performance review alternative should focus on *inviting* feedback. In other words: Instead of issuing a set of questions people need to answer, you'll want to **nudge your team members to invite feedback from their peers.**

You can invite feedback via one-off requests in an email, Slack or Microsoft Teams. Or, you can schedule a one-on-one meeting to carve out dedicated time to invite feedback. As a manager, you'll also want to encourage your direct reports to also invite feedback from you and their peers as well. All together, everyone on your team should be inviting feedback (and giving feedback) at least once a week.

Here's an example of what a feedback invitation could say...

Do you have any suggestions for what I should "Start, Stop, or Continue"? Please share your feedback directly with the person via writing, or in a 1:1 meeting.

What's one thing recently that you've noticed that I could tweak, adjust, or improve upon? Please share your feedback directly with the person via writing, or in a 1:1 meeting.

How well am I helping you navigate uncertainty? Please share your feedback directly with the person via writing, or in a 1:1 meeting.

As you might imagine, remembering to initiate these feedback invitations can feel tedious and time consuming. This is one of the places where a software tool can be helpful in helping create the habit of inviting feedback so it feels more easeful. Our KYT [Performance Feedback](#) tool was in fact designed with this in mind.

Our alternative also suggests questions to your team members on what they should ask for feedback on and to whom. Here's an example of what setting this up in KYT might look like...

What would you like to ask?

What more can I be doing to help you navigate uncertainty?

[Ask a suggested question](#)

Who do you want feedback from?

Choose who you want feedback from...

How often would you like to invite this feedback?

- Ongoing**
People can respond with feedback as often as they'd like.
- One-off**
People can respond with feedback only once.

Save this question

What happens next? We'll notify the colleagues you choose in the next 3 days. [?](#)

Then, KYT automatically nudges your team and invites that feedback via email, Slack, or Microsoft Teams:

Know Your Team

9:41 AM

Angela Williams is inviting you to give them feedback

To: victor@honcho.design



Angela is inviting you to give them feedback

Hey Victor, I have a few things that I want to get your feedback on. Could you please visit the following link and see if there's anything that you could help with? Thanks in advance!

Give feedback

Note that these are soft, infrequent nudges happening once every two weeks, that integrate with whatever communication channel your team already is using

(email, Slack, or Microsoft Teams). This way, you're receiving unintrusive reminders — and you + your team don't have to constantly remember if or when you've been giving helpful feedback.

Additionally, in our [Performance Feedback](#) tool, not only do we automate the invitations for you so you don't have to remember to manually send each one, but we curate the specific questions, based on our research, to enable the best feedback possible.

Here's an example:

Ask a suggested question ×

Communication Honesty Learning Progress Trust

What areas would you like me to be giving you greater feedback on?
Communication

Anything I've done that was particularly helpful or not helpful recently?
Honesty

What advice might you share with me to help me level up and further improve my work?
Learning

To what degree can I be better about sharing my progress and what I'm working on?
Progress

How could I improve how I collaborate with other team members?
Trust

Curious how it might work for your team? [Request a demo](#) of our KYT [Performance Feedback](#) tool.

What about more sensitive feedback?

You may be thinking, “I could see this working for low-level feedback... But what if someone needs to give meatier, sensitive feedback? Can it be invited through the tool alone?” I hear you: You absolutely want to make space for more sensitive feedback to be brought up and talked about more deeply, one-on-one.

As a result, **we recommend holding a performance-focused 1:1 meeting once a month**, where you actively invite even deeper feedback and/or discuss what’s been shared in the Performance Feedback tool.

Here’s an example of the agenda for that monthly performance-focused 1:1 meeting...

Personal connection (~10 minutes)

- How is your energy level these days?

Performance feedback (~40 minutes)

- Based on feedback shared via the Performance Feedback tool, ____ was an improvement area for me. How do you think I’ve been progressing in that area?
- What feedback should we discuss further from the Performance Feedback tool?
- What about my management style can I improve?
- What feedback should we discuss further from the Performance Feedback tool?
- What about my management style can I improve?

- What aspect of my job do you think I can do better?
- Would you be open to me sharing some performance feedback and opportunities for growth for you?
- Do you mind me sharing a few small observations on what I think could be better?
- Takeaways / next steps (~10 minutes)

You can use our KYT [One-on-Ones](#) tool + template to set-up this recurring performance-focused 1:1 meeting.

Alrighty, but what about when you have to *give* feedback. How can you help your team give feedback well so they can continually improve their performance?

You'll want to read the next step...

Step 4: Give training + guidance on how to best give and receive feedback

Arguably the most important aspect of enabling your team to perform at the highest level is training your team on how to best give and receive feedback.

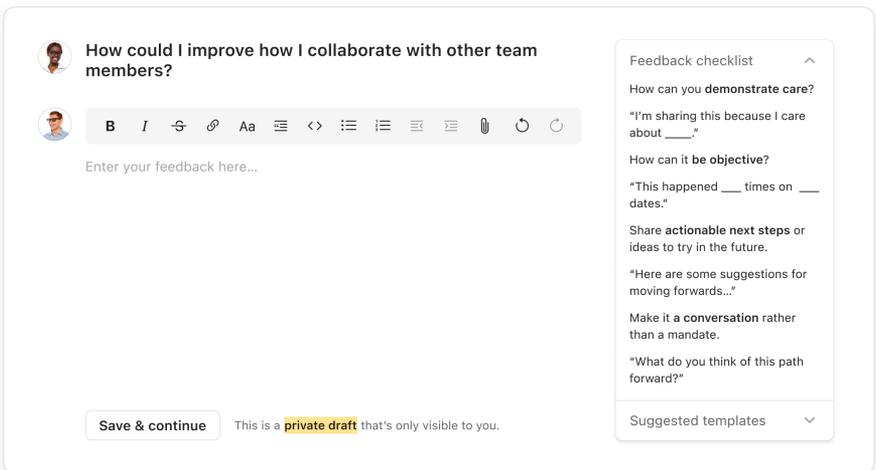
You can set up whatever processes, systems, and tools you'd like... But if there is no training + guidance on *how* to exactly give difficult feedback, then honest feedback isn't going to happen in your team — and your team's performance will stagnate.

As a result, we recommend utilizing some kind of feedback training resources to support your team so you can enable high performance.

What we've found best to work for feedback training is to give guidance to folks *in-the-moment*. That is, in-the-moment, when you need to give honest feedback to someone: What is the checklist, guide or resource that you can consult?

We built into KYT in-the-moment training and guidance as the answer to this question.

For example, in KYT, if you respond to a team member's feedback invitation, as you go to write your feedback, there is an "Assistant" inline on the right-hand side of the screen that gives you a checklist and templates for how to best give feedback:



The screenshot shows a feedback interface. On the left, there is a question: "How could I improve how I collaborate with other team members?". Below the question is a rich text editor with a toolbar containing icons for bold, italic, link, unlink, text color, list, indent, outdent, link, unlink, and refresh. Below the editor is a text input field with the placeholder "Enter your feedback here...". At the bottom left, there is a "Save & continue" button and a note: "This is a private draft that's only visible to you." On the right, there is a "Feedback checklist" panel with a collapse icon. The checklist contains the following items: "How can you demonstrate care?" with a template "I'm sharing this because I care about ___."; "How can it be objective?" with a template "This happened ___ times on ___ dates."; "Share actionable next steps or ideas to try in the future." with a template "Here are some suggestions for moving forwards..."; "Make it a conversation rather than a mandate." with a template "What do you think of this path forward?"; and "Suggested templates" with a collapse icon.

Additionally, when you receive feedback, yourself, you have the ability to have a “Receiving Feedback” checklist in-the-moment to remind yourself of what to keep in mind as you internalize the feedback:

 **Anything I've done that was particularly helpful or not helpful recently?**
Amy Rivera · Jan 18

In our last team meeting, I thought it was super helpful when sharing the financials you gave a ton of context to their significance and the possible projections, especially the most conservative. It was really useful + clarifying to get the bigger picture from your point of view of how the company is doing financially!

How do you want to receive the feedback? ?

- Accept feedback**
Accepting means that you agree with the feedback and will act on it. Use your response to explain what expectations they should have in the future.
- Acknowledge and decide how to act later**
You've read and internalised the feedback, but will follow-up with them in the future.
- Politely discard**
You heard their feedback, but you have a different perspective on it and, at least for now, are not going to act on it.

Write your response

 **B** *I*   **Aa**          

So, so glad to hear that was helpful, Amy – thank you for this affirmation! I'll try to do that more too, going forward.

[Save & review](#) This is a **draft**. You'll have a chance to review before sharing.

Receiving feedback 

To receive feedback well, ask yourself:

Did I express **appreciation** for this feedback? Example: "This perspective is very helpful to me..."

Am I resisting the urge to **judge** this feedback, even if I don't agree with it initially? Example: "I'm going to take some time to think on this..."

Am I **assuming positive intent**, rather than dismissing the feedback? Example: "I know you're looking out for me in sharing this..."

If I'm accepting the feedback, am I sharing clear next steps? Example: "Here's what I plan to do going forward differently..."

If I'm discarding the feedback, am I sharing context why? Example: "I might not choose to follow this because of ____, but I want to reiterate how helpful your feedback was in drawing my attention to this..."

[Learn more...](#)

These are just some of the built in-app training, guides, and checklists you and your team can continually learn, in-the-moment, as you use the tool.

Want to see it in action? [Request a demo](#) of our KYT [Performance Feedback](#) tool and see how the in-app training works.

Additionally, for more in-depth live training, you can partner with us here at KYT to deliver custom live training. Over the past 8 years, we've trained more than 20,000 people around feedback, teamwork, and leadership skills, and have developed a specific set of live training to help you implement our Performance Review Alternative methodology.

To inquire about custom, in-depth live training alongside our tool, you can email us at support@knowyourteam.com.

If you already have robust feedback training in your organization in place – that's fantastic! Then, you have a solid foundation for creating a culture of feedback that engenders high performance in your team — bravo.

Step 5: Build trust + safety with belonging cues

To further a culture of feedback and continued improvement, as a leader, you must model the behavior you want to be true in your team. If you want your team to be embracing a mindset of honest feedback, continual improvement, and high performance, consider: What can you say and do to *show* that?

Here are a few ideas for building trust and safety for your team to feel comfortable giving each other performance feedback:

- **Gather once a quarter as a team to share what feedback has been most meaningful for each team member.** To reinforce the idea that honest feedback is helpful for team performance, try holding an all-team meeting once a month or once a quarter where you ask each person to share feedback that was recently given to them that they found helpful. More than anything, this solidifies the “social norm” that honest feedback is helpful and uplifts the team’s performance.
 - For example: *“I’d love for us to go around and each take 1-2 minutes to share what was a piece of feedback you received recently that you found helpful, and why...”*
- **Share the most helpful piece of feedback you personally received via the KYT Performance Feedback tool.** During all-team meetings and/or in writing, share when someone gives you helpful feedback (with their permission, of course), and why you found the feedback so valuable. This demonstrates how feedback given is internalized on not landing on idle ears.
 - For example: *“I’m so grateful for [NAME] sharing a pointer with me on _____. It’s so massively helpful for me...”*
- **Share what you personally would like to improve on.** Describe a situation you wish you would’ve handled differently, or offer what your own goals are for becoming a better leader. This helps encourage

others to give you feedback in those areas, as you're showing how you're open to it.

- For example: *“Personally, in the upcoming quarter, I want to make sure I’m focused on _____ as a way for me to improve as a leader and best serve the team...”*
- **Actively take action on feedback you receive.** There is no better indicator that feedback was listened to when it's acted on — even in a small way. Consider how quickly you've implemented helpful feedback, and let the person who gave you that feedback know. Doing so shows immediate impact and will encourage your entire team to continue giving similar feedback.
 - For example: *“[NAME] had a great idea shared via the KYT Performance Feedback tool that we're going to implement. It's...”*

Our [Performance Feedback](#) tool automatically encourages these belonging cues to establish safety, once you start using it, as well.

Step 6: Initiate active, shared self reflection

As discussed in [Chapter 5](#), self-reflection is one of the most powerful means of improving team performance. Accordingly, you'll want to encourage your team to write a self-reflection at least once a month about their own performance. Ideally, this is a self-reflection that they share with the rest of the team *publicly*, in the spirit of

encouraging the rest of the team to similarly self-reflect on how they can improve.

In our Performance Review Alternative, we automatically incorporate active, shared self-reflection, so you don't have to manually initiate it with your team. We also give you excellent self-reflection prompts so you and your team are not starting from scratch. Here is an example:

What is my greatest area for growth? How am I making progress in that area?

Enter your reflection here...

Save & continue This is a **private draft** that's only visible to you.

Self-reflection reminders

Be honest with yourself.
Write about yourself as if you were writing about someone you respect – with honesty and tough love.

It's not easy.
The process can lead to valuable learnings – but also to discomfort, vulnerability, and defensiveness.

It matters.
Deliberately articulating and codifying experiences can significantly improve your performance.

Audience.
Write for yourself, but your manager will also have access to what you write here. Assume good intent from them; ideally, giving enough context, honesty, and trust, they should be the best person to guide you.

Your team is gently nudged once a month via your choice of email, Slack or Microsoft Teams, to complete a Self-Reflection and encouraged to share it with the rest of the team.

In KYT, we also give you excellent self-reflection prompts so you and your team are not starting from scratch. Alternatively, you could absolutely do this manually, if you'd like.

Here's an example of prompt(s) you could use to encourage self-reflection in your team...

What area(s) of growth would you like to focus on?

Which organizational value(s) do you feel you're best upholding? In what ways do you want to improve?

To what degree are you satisfied with how you spend your time?

Want to see how your team might use Self-Reflection? [Request a demo](#) of our KYT [Performance Feedback](#) tool.

The result: A culture of feedback + continual improvement

When using our performance review alternative, here's what you can expect to start hearing from your team...

- "I would have never given this feedback without the help of KYT..."
- "This is so helpful for me to understand what I can be doing better..."
- "Oh wow, I had no idea that was something that I should improve on..."

In sum

Our KYT recommendation is to reorient the performance review to be centered on the one thing that makes a difference: The interaction.

(Continued...)

The process, all together, looks like this:

1. Recommit to enabling honest, helpful feedback
2. Separate compensation from reviews
3. Enable regular, peer-to-peer feedback invitations
4. Give training + guidance
5. Build trust + safety with belonging cues
6. Initiate public self-reflection

If this all feels a bit manual — no worries. **The most straightforward and easeful way to implement this methodology is to use [Performance Feedback tool](#) — Know Your Team's alternative to performance reviews.**

[Request a demo today.](#)

If you have an existing performance review system that *cannot* currently be replaced but only slightly adjusted, please read [Chapter 7](#) on how to implement certain *aspects* of our methodology.

Chapter 7

How to implement aspects our KYT methodology

If you're not able to replace your existing performance review system at this moment in time, you'll want to focus on the aspects of our KYT methodology that you *can* implement.

Specifically, focus on:

1. Build trust + safety with belonging cues
2. Hold monthly performance-focused 1:1 meetings
3. Give training + guidance

A small caveat: These three items alone do not fully address the underlying problems of existing performance reviews (as shared in [Chapter 2](#)). However, until you're able to fully replace your existing traditional performance review system (as described in [Chapter 6](#)), these steps can help you start to gain progress in creating a culture of feedback.

Step 1: Build trust + safety with belonging cues

With a traditional performance review system in place, you may be swimming upstream. Your team might feel there is no outlet, no signal, no landing pad for honest helpful feedback. Consequently, it's all the more important to invest in building trust to show indicators that a culture of feedback matters in your team. Specifically, you can...

- **Be forthcoming with your own mistakes.** Showing vulnerability as a leader indicates to your team that it's acceptable to be vulnerable, too. Admitting mistakes *you* make as a leader says to your team: "We all have areas to improve on."
- **Monitor your own defensiveness when people give you feedback.** Your team is taking notes from you on how open you are to receiving feedback as a leader. If you shut feedback down, you signal to them: "I don't want to hear what you have to say."
- **Show gratitude when people give you feedback + act on it immediately.** The positive reinforcement will encourage your team to continue giving that feedback regularly, even despite your traditional performance review process being in place.

Step 2: Hold monthly performance-focused 1:1 meetings

Ideally, you would enable regular peer-to-peer feedback invitations, as described in [Chapter 6](#). When feedback is actively *invited* versus *imposed*, and asked for regularly, there is a higher likelihood that the feedback will be internalized and acted upon.

However, as a “hold over” solution, you can still hold regular performance-focused 1:1 meetings once a month. These are dedicated periods of time between you as a leader and your direct report about how you’re both feeling about your performance, and what could improve.

Here’s an example of the agenda for that monthly performance-focused 1:1 meeting...

Personal connection (~10 minutes)

- How is your energy level these days?

Performance feedback (~40 minutes)

- How are you feeling about your own performance lately? What are things you’d like to improve?
- Would you be open to me sharing some performance feedback and opportunities for growth for you?
- Do you mind me sharing a few small observations on what I think could be better?
- Here’s how I’m feeling about my performance these days + what I’d like to improve...

- What about my management style can I improve?
- What aspect of my job do you think I can do better?
- Takeaways / next steps (~10 minutes)

You can use our [KYT One-on-One tool](#) and template to set-up this recurring performance-focused 1:1 meeting.

Step 3: Give training + guidance

While you won't be able to take advantage of our [in-app built-in training](#) in KYT, you can still benefit from our training and resources to help your team give and receive feedback better.

One option is to partner with us here at KYT to deliver a custom, in-depth live series of training. Over the past 8 years, we've trained more than 20,000 people around feedback, teamwork, and leadership skills, and have developed a specific set of live training on creating a culture of feedback that is agnostic of the performance review system you have in place. To inquire about our custom trainings, email us at support@knowyourteam.com.

Alternatively, we're launching a brand new leadership training product coming in Summer 2022. [Sign-up to be alerted.](#)

Lastly, for quick, free references on giving and receiving feedback, you can consult the following:

- Watch our [Skillshare class](#) on giving and receiving feedback
- Read [Giving feedback remotely](#)
- Read [When to give feedback](#)
- Read [19 phrases to help make giving difficult feedback easier](#)
- Read [How to deliver negative feedback well](#)
- Read [Five ways to receive feedback well](#)

Chapter 8

How to get buy-in from your leadership team

You're excited and on board with giving this methodology a shot to encourage high performance in your team. But you know you might have some convincing to do with some members of your executive team.

That's natural, given that so many of us have varying personal experiences with performance reviews in our careers that influence us one way or another.

Here's what you can do to gain buy-in from your leadership team on why rethinking performance reviews is necessary:

Emphasize the problems of your existing system

Ultimately, you're not looking to change for change's sake — but to solve a real, underlying need in your organization. You'll want to focus on what these needs and problems are. Data often speaks louder than

anything, and so you may want to share statistics and anecdotes for what isn't working with your existing performance review system. For example:

__% of the team feels the current performance review system takes too long to complete.

__% of the team does not feel the current performance review system helps them improve their performance.

__% of the team would like more regular feedback on how they could be improving.

Reorient around the #1 thing your executive team cares about

Many organizations have one big hairy goal they're going after. What's yours? Shine a light on how if the organization wants to achieve that goal, how critical having a culture of feedback and continuous improvement is to reaching that goal.

Illustrate what could potentially be the end result of this new methodology

It's always hard to imagine what doesn't exist. Paint a picture for your executive team of what is possible if you have a performance review alternative that *actually* encourages honest feedback, continual improvement, and high performance. How much smoother would things run? How much more progress

would the organization make? Isn't that worth giving a try?

Show how this is something that's been working for your own team, personally

You could also [roll-out the full KYT methodology for a performance review alternative](#) in your own team as an example for what works. Sometimes seeing the evidence is the best way of convincing folks that they too should try it.

Not sure if this is enough? Feel free to email us at support@knowyourteam.com with your situation. We'd love to give even further guidance on what the best ways for showing your executive team an alternative path might be.

Closing

What'd ya think?

I'd love to hear your personal experience on rethinking performance reviews in your team.

Please drop me a line at claire@knowyourteam.com to share your own stories and insights of what's worked and what's not. I'll happily add it to this guide, which we are constantly updating.

Put these tips into practice

Based on all the knowledge we shared here, we built our Performance Feedback tool — to help you put this methodology into practice. [Request a demo today](#), and use it to create a culture of feedback and continuous improvement in your team.

A few other resources for you might find helpful:

- [Know Your Team Blog](#) — Read our pieces on leadership, management, company culture, and more.
- [The Heartbeat Newsletter](#) — Stay updated on our latest writing and research on leadership.

- [Manager Learning Path for organizations](#) — If you're looking for more in-depth, hands-on learning around leadership for all the managers in your organization, we run custom organization-wide manager training programs.
- [Global Manager Learning Path](#) — Our 1-year leadership training program gives you live training, coaching, and tools — alongside a cohort of managers from all over the world — to elevate your leadership skills.
- [Coming soon: Our leadership training product](#) — To acquire a baseline of leadership knowledge, we're launching a brand new leadership training product. [Sign-up](#) to be alerted here when we go live.

About the author

Who am I?

Howdy! My name is Claire Lew.



I'm the CEO of [Know Your Team](#), a platform that gives you the tools, training and resources to help you become a better leader. We've helped over 30,000 people in 25+ countries at companies like Airbnb and Kickstarter

improve their leadership skills and work better together through our tools and trainings.

My mission in life is to help people become happier at work. I started [Know Your Team](#) eight years ago because I felt like I couldn't speak up as a former employee — and I've dedicated my life to helping leaders become better ever since.

I speak internationally on how to create more open, honest workplace environments, and have been published in Harvard Business Review, CNBC, Inc., and Fortune, among others. I also previously served as an adjunct professor of entrepreneurship at my alma mater, Northwestern University. Say hi to me on Twitter at [@clairejlew](#).



Looking to put this into practice?
Check out **Performance Feedback** — Know Your Team's
performance review alternative.

[Request a demo today!](#)