

# Performance Management Reboot:

## New Ways to Get the Best from Employees in 2021

### Business as Usual Is a Thing of the Past

... at least for now.

Because of the pandemic, there is no management by walking around, no ad hoc meetings, no in-person town halls.

How can you keep your people and your business on track in a changing business environment?

With a comprehensive and flexible performance management plan that includes:

- Communication
- Priorities
- Proactivity
- Flexibility
- Professional development

These are the keys to getting the best from your employees in 2021.

# Make Communication Your Highest Priority

Managers must understand what's going on with their employees to help them be their best.

Many remote workers thrive in a work-from-home environment. Others are overwhelmed by family obligations or feel isolated or anxious. You won't know unless you speak with members of your team

regularly and consistently.

Frequent communication serves several purposes. It enables managers to:

- Ensure employees are engaged and productive.
- Share and reinforce goals and metrics.

- Detect small problems before they become large ones.

- Identify success strategies to share with others.

Schedule one-on-one meetings with direct reports to keep them on track and allow them to share concerns.



# Reach Out to Your Team Frequently

If you speak to employees often, your conversations become a regular part of their workweek, rather than a stress-inducing event. If an employee sees their manager's phone number on caller ID when they haven't spoken to them in weeks, they may be concerned.

**If you communicate regularly, it becomes commonplace.**

- Employees can bring up small problems before they get out of hand.
- You'll get accustomed to the tone of their voice and be better able to detect stress.
- Employees can feel in the loop rather than alone and like part of the team.

Some people thrive in a remote work situation; others struggle to feel engaged and like part of a team working toward common goals.



## Schedule Team Meetings

Small departmental or work-group meetings can be an essential part of performance management. These opportunities to share and connect remind people they are part of a team and foster healthy competition or a chance to collaborate.

## Use Shared Communication Platforms

Without planning, collaboration among remote workers can present a challenge. Consider how you can keep teams on track when in-person meetings are not an option.

## Reference

Store shared goals, team KPIs, reference materials, or any other documents you'd like employees to be able to access as needed.

## Messaging

Communicate via a messaging platform such as Slack, which can easily be used for both casual and business conversations in real time.



## Collaboration

Use a shared platform such as Google Drive or Microsoft Teams to allow employees to collaborate on documents.

## Progress Tracking

Shared documents can also be used to update project statuses or share success stories, which are also valuable to bring up in one-on-ones.

## Remain Nimble and Open-Minded

No one is an expert in managing through an epidemic. It's critical to take note when something isn't working and shift your strategy accordingly.

## Watch for Underperformers

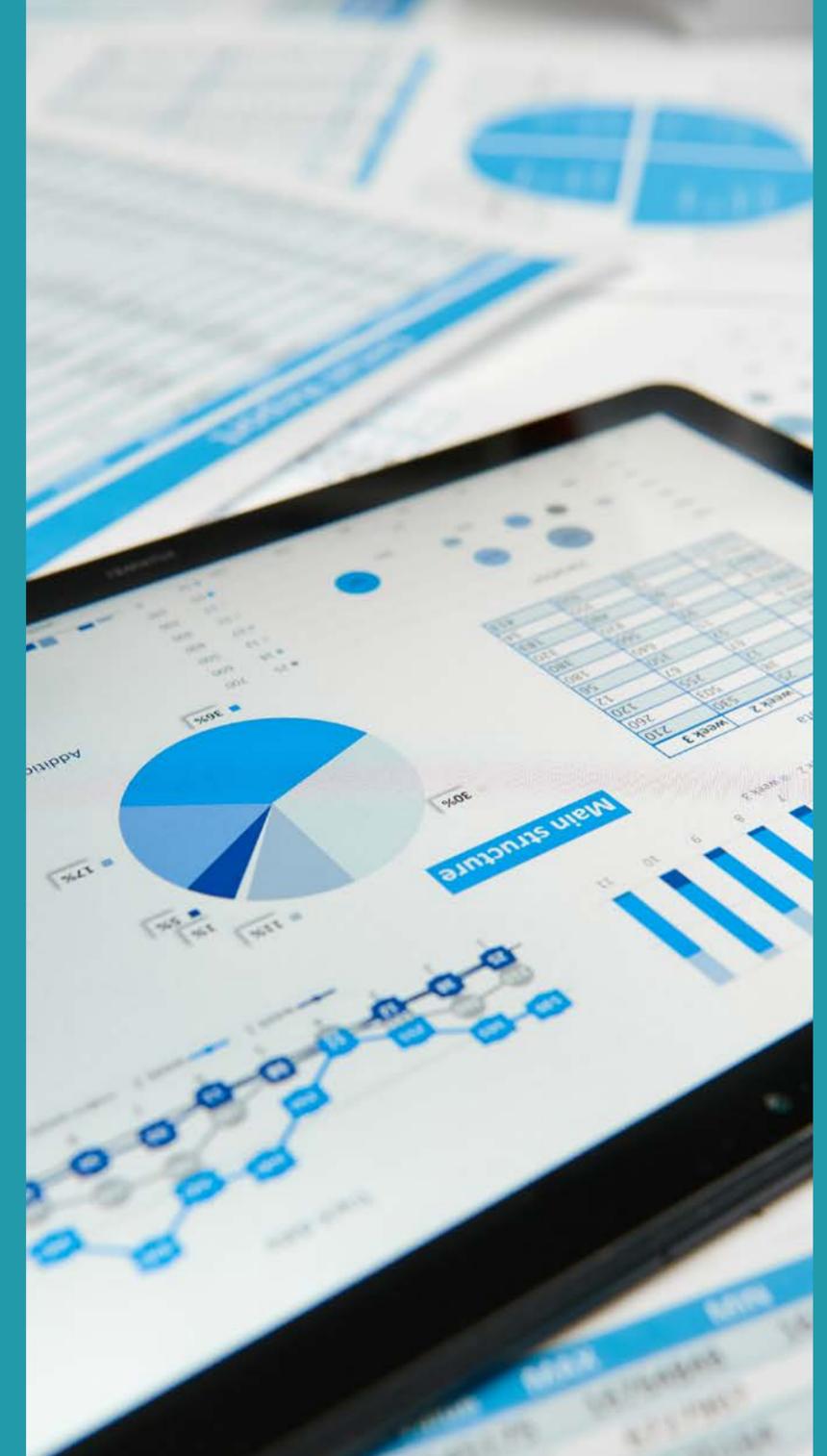
If an employee struggles because of stress, illness or family obligations,

helping them succeed can be as simple as assisting them in prioritizing work to ensure completion of must-do tasks. Your flexibility in helping valued employees make it through short-term difficulty is likely to be rewarded with loyalty, retention and engagement.

## Make Time for Overachievers

Even employees who thrive in the remote work environment can use your guidance. Give them new and interesting challenges and provide them with training materials to boost performance or prepare for promotion. They will likely welcome the opportunity to make the most of their increased productivity.

*Feedback without metrics is just a conversation.  
It can be great for morale, but not for motivation.*



## Establish (Realistic) KPIs

With business realities changing almost daily, you can't afford to wait for an annual review. Have regular forward-looking conversations to create a high-performing workplace even under changed circumstances.

## Let Go of Metrics That Don't Make Sense in the Current Environment

For example, don't hold employees to unrealistic sales quotas; instead, task them with maintaining customer relationships through regular calls and emails. While they may not immediately close sales, they can keep your company top-of-mind and build customer goodwill.

## Ask for Input When Setting KPIs

Employees who help to shape their own weekly or quarterly goals will be more invested in achieving them. You can adjust their self-driven metrics to mesh with your expectations, reaching company objectives without overtaxing employees who may already be stretched thin.

## Be Prepared to Adjust Expectations

There is too much unknown about what the business landscape will look like over the coming year to commit to annual plans. Improve performance and reduce frustration by focusing on quarterly, monthly or weekly objectives. Talk to employees about what is working for them and what is not.

*“According to LinkedIn, 90% of professionals say they would stay at a company that invested in their growth longer.”*

# Performance Management is Still Vital

When companies first became aware of the COVID-19 pandemic, most went into crisis management mode. This approach was fine at the time. But now that we know the business climate has shifted for an indefinite period, new strategies must be developed that will allow your business to thrive, not just survive.

**74%**

of employees receive a performance review once a year or less often.

**21%**

of employees strongly agree pay and incentives motivate them to achieve goals.

**14%**

of employees strongly agree that performance reviews inspire them to improve.



# Rethink Performance Management

Many companies found the annual review was becoming obsolete even before the pandemic. Business moves too fast now to wait until the end of the year to provide feedback and set goals. The focus tends to be on checklist items rather than professional development.

Performance management tools and best practices have changed dramatically this year — some companies have even suspended annual reviews. With an eye on 2021, how should you evolve your approach to ensure peak performance from employees?

## Annual Review

- Tends to focus on recent actions
- Backward-looking
- Mistakes can continue uncorrected for months
- Focused on checklist items rather than professional development

## Ongoing Feedback

- Forward-looking
- Mistakes can be corrected quickly
- Easier to adapt to changing goals and priorities
- Employees are encouraged and motivated



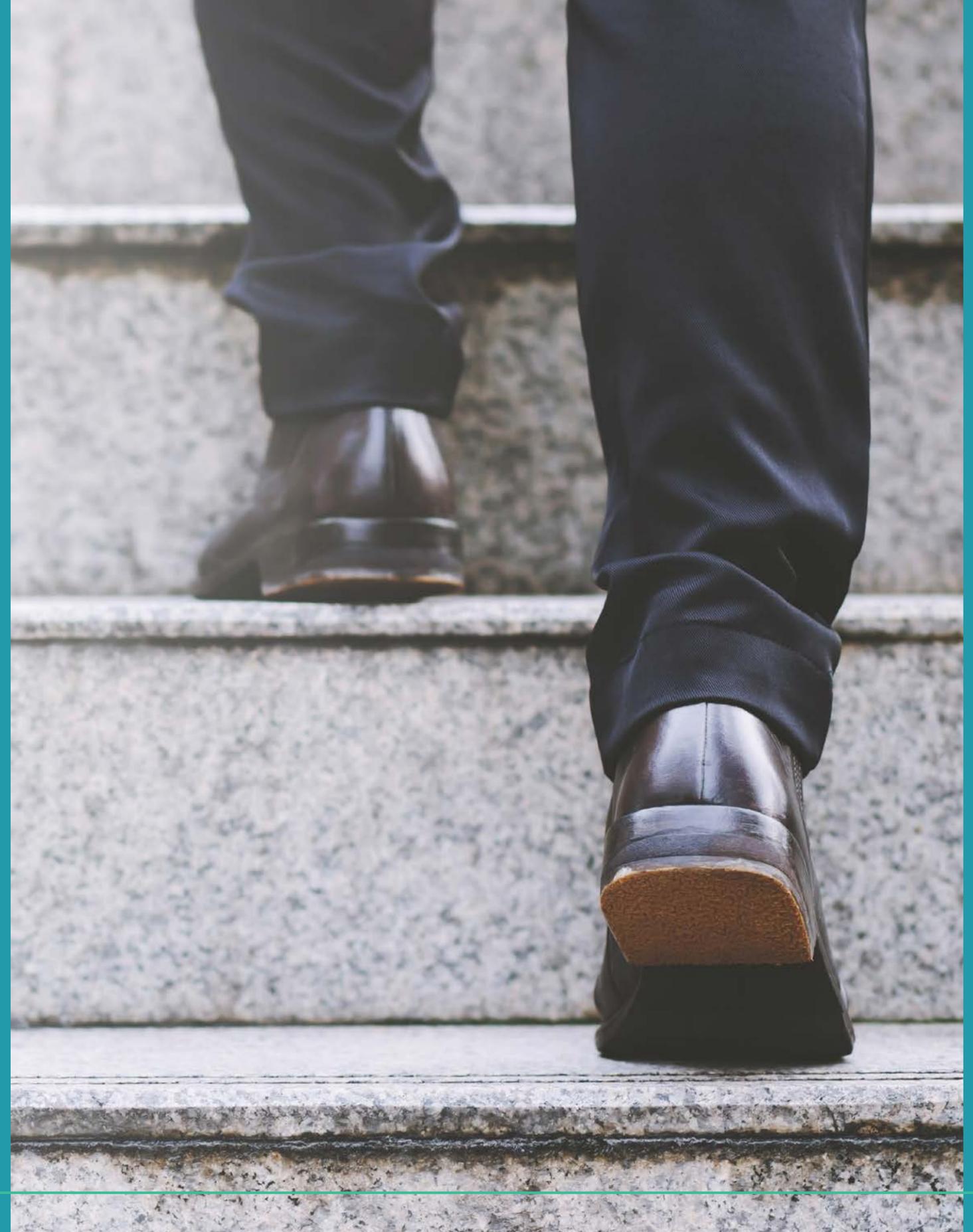
## Plan to Develop Employees, Not Just Maintain Status Quo

It can be tempting to avoid performance issues entirely by eliminating reviews, but this is no solution. Some companies found annual reviews provided little value.

Reviews tend to look backward rather than forward and can be demotivating. Often, items brought up in an annual review were either older and resolved months before or so recently, there was no time to rectify the issue.

## Replace Feedback With “Feedforward”

Feedforward doesn't dwell on past mistakes; instead, it provides a framework for improved future behavior. It doesn't focus on correcting what's been done but on enhancing future performance.



## Don't Leave Accountability Behind

Ultimately, individuals are responsible for their performance.

Whether employees are working from home, on-site with precautions, or a hybrid of the two, they must achieve objectives to advance their careers and meet company metrics.

Ask people who are productive and hitting their milestones to share their success stories.

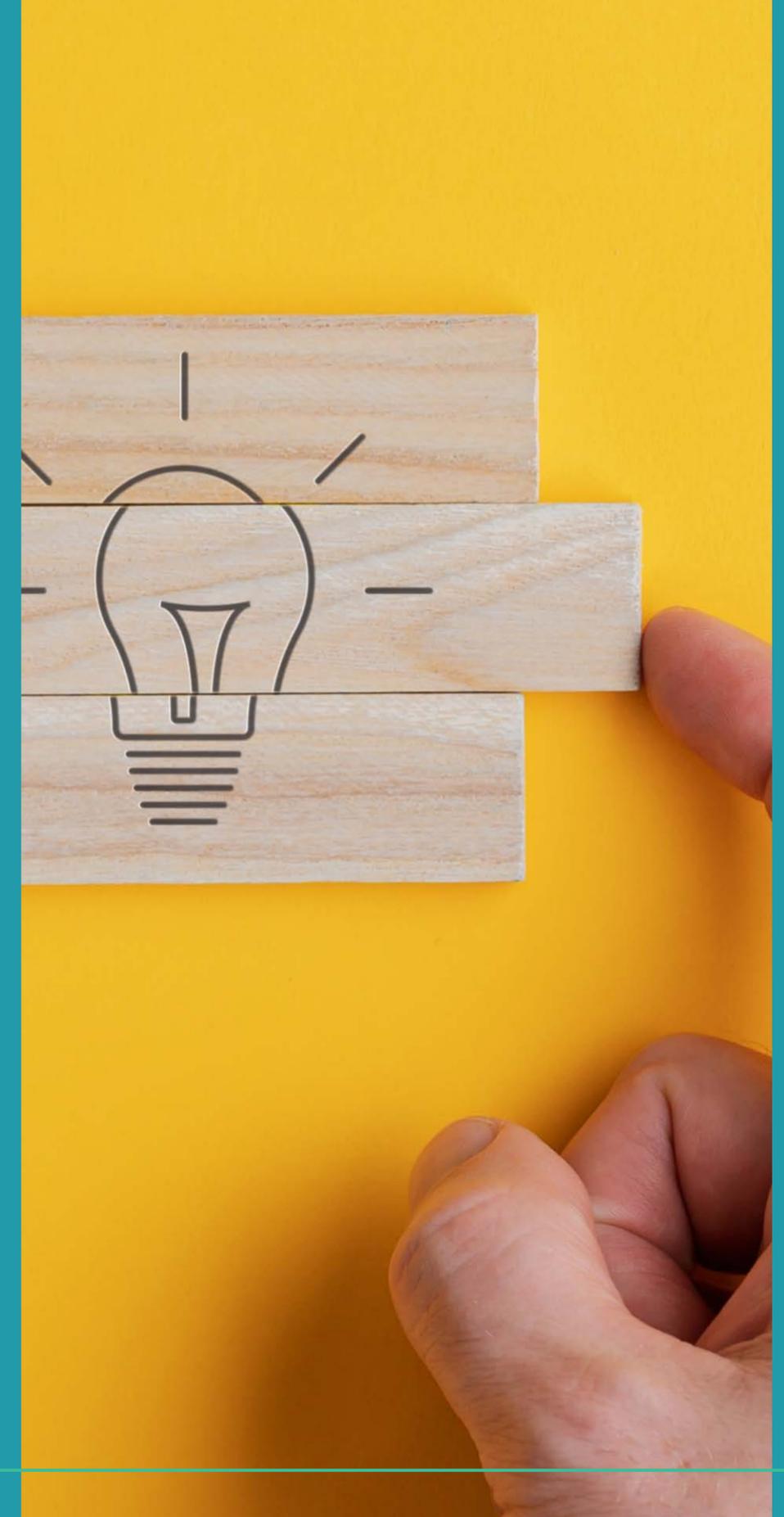
## Lacking the Structure of a Fixed Workplace, Goals Are Even More Vital

Employees may not have a commute or a desk to sit at, but they have a list of items that get them closer to their professional goals.

## Control What You Can; Let Go of What You Can't

The way we work has changed – maybe indefinitely. The need to adapt doesn't mean we should give up on the idea of fostering excellence. Instead, we must assess the current landscape and create strategies to help employees make the most of their talents.

Learning and employee development should not be neglected even during a pandemic. It boosts engagement and retention and is a valuable part of a high-performing workplace.



## Sources:

1. <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/organizational-and-employee-development/pages/how-are-companies-handling-performance-reviews-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic.aspx>
2. <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/215927/performance-management.aspx>
3. <https://hrdailyadvisor.blr.com/2020/08/04/why-performance-conversations-during-a-pandemic-are-important-for-driving-growth/>
4. <https://www.td.org/professional-partner-content/performance-management-during-a-pandemic-setting-goals-amid-constant-change>
5. <https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/rethinking-performance-management-for-postpandemic-success/>
6. <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/318029/performance-management-evolves-survive-covid.aspx>
7. <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/215390/gallup-performance-management-ongoing-conversations.aspx>
8. <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/employee-relations/humanity-into-hr/pages/-why-companies-should-suspend-performance-reviews-during-this-crisis.aspx>