

# Do you praise poor performers too much?

If you dread administering performance reviews, you may sugarcoat your appraisals by telling employees they're doing "great" when they need to improve. Dishing out undeserved praise can backfire.

What's worse, inflating someone's performance can hurt morale. Recipients may expend little effort, knowing that you're reluctant to critique them.

By giving honest, thorough appraisals, you can avoid these traps:

1. **Resentment.** When staffers who go the extra mile to deliver superior work realize that you compliment everyone equally, they may become embittered and conclude, "Why should I try so hard when my peers get praised for their mediocre performance?"
2. **Slacking off.** Employees may throttle back their commitment if they figure it's all the same to you. Eventually, their half-hearted effort can undermine your unit's results and negatively influence others who lower their own performance bar.
3. **Personnel headaches.** Maintaining a paper trail on every employee affords you more flexibility in navigating delicate personnel issues. If you decide to discipline or terminate someone, for example, you reduce your legal liability by citing previous documented discussions that highlighted specific performance-related concerns.

To avoid these traps, set clear performance criteria and rate everyone consistently based on relevant, easy-to-understand success factors. Administer thoughtful, well-prepared annual appraisals, and build upon these formal reviews by providing substantive, ongoing feedback.

— Adapted from "[The 10 Elements of Positive Performance Management](#)," John Mattone.

**Online resource:** Access a sample performance policy [here](#).