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Reviewing performance

Dear Jill,

I am new in my management role and developing my strategy for performance reviews. We have a form that we use but I would appreciate tips for what needs to be covered in this conversation with staff.

- N

Dear N,

Most performance standards use four major criteria:

- 1) Skills: What specific skills are needed to do this job?
- 2) Knowledge: What information, training, and experience are needed to do this job?
- 3) Effort: What tasks and activities should be completed, how, and on what timeline?
- 4) Results: What is needed to be achieved? What happens when results are not achieved and what can be done so mistakes are not repeated?

Many employees dread employee performance reviews because they don't know what to expect. One way to decrease their anxiety is to make them part of the process. Send them an outline and a blank form ahead of time. Managers sometimes ask the employee to fill out the form as a self-evaluation.

Schedule two sessions with the employee. In the first session the employee does most of the talking.

Let the employee know that the self-

evaluation will be considered in the final performance evaluation but the ratings may not necessarily be the same. Ideally, the employee will e-mail you the self-evaluation, which then becomes an editable document for the manager to start from. On the morning of the second scheduled session, give your completed evaluation to the employee and set a time that same day to discuss it, answer questions, clarify, etc. The best performance reviews are a two-way dialogue vs. a monologue by the manager.

Here are some topics you will want to cover along with and including the form:

- 1) Strategic Goals and Measurement: What are the organization and department goals, and how does the employee's skills and competencies support these goals? For instance, in an IT support department, internal customer service is probably a high priority; how is that measured? What specific actions has the staff member done to support these goals? What are the strengths or challenges for this employee as they relate to these goals? Where are skill gaps, and what

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At Work With: Ria Sim, Event planner

By JoAnna Rodriguez

A TYPICAL day for Ria Sim would be enough to run most people ragged. By 1:30 a.m. the event planner, who also owns a flower shop, is often heading to the San Francisco flower market getting what she needs for the day's events and she doesn't stop working until she has completed everything on her list. "Sometimes I don't sleep," she says. "Everything has to be perfect before I'll call it a day." Her seemingly boundless energy makes running two businesses and taking care of her family look easy, but it's her exacting standards and creativity that have made her such a success. She recently talked about her multi-faceted career as well as her eye for detail, crafting handmade party favors and thinking outside the box.

How did you get your start in event planning?

It really started with my kids' parties. I loved choosing a theme and planning every little thing for their birthday parties. It got to the point where moms wanted to come to the parties just so they could see what was going to be in the goody bags.

What sorts of things would you create?

One year I had Pokemon T-shirts for everyone with their names on them and made little paper-mache Pokemon balls. For another party I made these beautiful cone-shaped candy holders. I had hand-stamped the paper for the cones and sewed crepe paper around them. I had boys and this was as fru-fru as I could get. If I had had girls I would have gone absolutely crazy.

How long were you planning events before you started your business?

I worked for 10 years volunteer-

ing for community events before I started eventPRO Management. By the time I started my business people were familiar with my work. They knew what I could do and knew the quality of my work. I have very high standards and won't promise something to someone unless I know I can do it perfectly.

How does that impact your business?

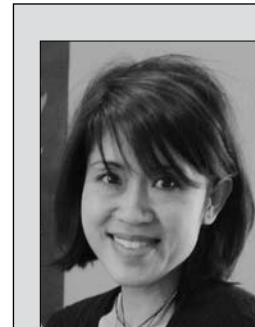
My level of service is different and it means I don't have quotas. It's not the number of clients I have, it's about the quality of my work. I put my heart and soul into something and don't count the hours it takes to get something done.

Being meticulous also meant that when it came to flowers I wanted exactly what I envisioned. I started going to the San Francisco flower market at 1:30 or 2 a.m. to get what I needed for an event and doing arrangements myself. Before I knew it people were calling and asking who my florist was. When I told them I did



PHOTO BY JIM CHAPMAN/STAFF

RIA SIM plans events down to the last leaf of detail in the floral decorations and gives focused attention to every project, from food to table linens to party favors.



Ria Sim

Job title:
Event planner

Place of employment:
eventPRO Management

Years on the job: Five

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PHOTOS BY JIM CHAPMAN/STAFF

WHETHER planning a wedding luncheon, a corporate event or a fund-raiser, Ria Sim likes to use unusual items as decorations, including vegetables, a variety of fabrics and materials and different kinds of pots or vases. She currently operates Twigss upstairs in Father Nature's Shed in Danville.

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them myself they would ask if I took orders so I ended up creating [the flower shop] Twigss Studio Danville.

Where do you get your ideas?

I'm always looking around me for ideas, whether I'm on vacation or at the grocery store, and I like to transform average things into something spectacular. For example, I had a client who wanted fruits and vegetables as a theme so I went to the farmer's market for inspiration. I dressed this long table that seats 50 with chocolate brown linen and lined the table with ornamental cabbages and pumpkins. For the arrangements, I incorporated long-stem carrots and parsley. I also used Chinese pears in vases with candles. I even used potatoes. It's amazing how everything has a second life.

What kinds of events do you plan?

Private parties, corporate golf outings, charity functions, weddings. We do every kind of event.

Do you pay attention to trends?

Knowing color trends is important. I buy everything from home décor magazines to Vogue and Elle so I know what's in.

Do you worry about someone copying your style?

People ask me that all the time because my work is so different. I tell them, "That was yesterday's work. Tomorrow I'll do something new." The way I see it, event planners are like chefs. We can all have the same ingredients but what sets us apart is what we do with those ingredients. You have to know how to use them. If you just copy things then you're doing something that other people have seen. You have to do something new and create your own look and style. Use other people's work as a tool to open your mind to get your creative juices going. I love teaching people how to do that.

So you aren't afraid to share your ideas?

No. In fact, I'm planning on teaching some classes this spring on things like creating a tablescape for an Easter event. I'd also like to touch on Fourth of July ideas and give brides ideas for wedding season.

I want to help people see the beauty in things and hope my work is inspiring. I really didn't have someone I was able to get inspiration from and think people can be more successful if someone gives them the proper tools.

What skills are essential to succeed at your job?

You need to be creative, organized, detail-oriented and really have a passion for what you do. You need to have excellent people and communication skills and good etiquette because you'll be working in a lot of different environments with many personality types.

You also need to know how to control your emotions so you are calm on the day of the event — that sets the tone. Problem-solving skills are also important and you need to be able to anticipate possible outcomes and have backup plans.

How much could someone hope to make in event planning?

When you're first in the business you're often in debt. But it's worth it in the long run because people will come to that event and say, "I want to hire her." The products speak for themselves and that is what generates the buzz. Your biggest investment is your product. Once you've established yourself, what you can earn is limitless.

Where could someone work as an event planner?

You can work as an event coordi-

nator for a country club or major hotel like the Four Seasons. A lot of the larger corporations have event planners on staff to set up conferences. You could also work for another event planner or be self-employed.

How would you recommend someone get involved in event planning?

If you want to try this, the first step is to be an intern. Work at a good hotel as an assistant, work at a country club, apprentice yourself to an event planner. You have to see the grind behind the final product to know if this kind of work is for you. People often see something and think, "Oh, I could do that," but they don't know everything that's involved. Event planning is a lot of work and it takes a special person to want to do everything that it requires.

What's your favorite part of your job?

Making people feel good and knowing I did a good job. Sometimes I see women gasp at arrangements I've made and that is always so rewarding. You can't buy that gratifying feeling. That's why I love my job.

For more information on eventPRO Management, visit www.eventpromanagement.com or call 925-855-9816.

ASK JILL

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- can be done in the upcoming year to alleviate them? Keep this conversation open. Let the employee consider and offer ideas. Be prepared to discuss training, mentoring or new projects that will develop skills.
- 2) Roles and Responsibilities: Review the job description together to ensure consistent and realistic expectations and that it still accurately describes the current job. Most jobs should have five to six main duties. If the individual has more than this, then burnout may result. Is your staff spending the right time on the right things?
 - 3) Future Projects and Objectives: What are the performance targets? What are your recommendations for the most efficient way to get there? How often will you meet to ensure regular updates, progress reports, and feedback with your employee?
 - 4) Constructive Feedback: In an open-ended way discuss what may have been better or different this past year. Give constructive feedback. For instance, "I was disappointed in how this turned out..." would be better said as, "How did you think ___ turned out? Moving forward, how about handling it ...?"
 - 5) Achievements: Make sure to discuss what the employee accomplished since the last review. Highlight and praise your employee. There should be no surprises in a performance review. If you are meeting minimally on a quarterly basis, then employees know what is expected and how to get there. Set them up for success and your department will realize success.

Dear Readers,

Last week's column, "25 Ways to Make Training Stick," actually had only 22 tips due to space considerations. The last three tips to help make training stick — after the training — are:

1. Send follow up-evaluations two months after the training to ask how they are applying the new information.
2. Remind managers to reward and praise participants who are practicing new behaviors.
3. Have managers and participants work with the new training to integrate into performance plans. "What gets measured gets done."

Jill McGillen is president of NEXT TURN Consulting and Training. Send questions to askjill@nextturnconsulting.com.