Assessments & Reviews: A Managerial Laundry List
a collaborative series of thoughts from Peter Heeringa, Nicki Pretzer, Andi Cheney

Management self assessment:

- **_What is a manager?_** The biggest different between managers and direct staff is that of function. Managers focus on quality control, directing workflow, and maintaining organizational goals. Because the *function* is different, the necessary *skills* are also different. We all have elements we manage in our day-to-day. For our purposes, managers are managers of people or a larger process or function. They may have no direct reports, but they are responsible for delegating to their peers, volunteers, etc.
    - If you have an exceptionally skilled worker and you want to show them you value them, be very cautious about considering them for a management position. Think of other ways to reward your hardworking staff, with financial bonuses, seniority in project work, or other intangibles. It's not necessarily that you don't want to consider skilled workers for management positions - but it is important to 1) give them the tools for success as they transition and 2) ensuring that it is something that they're interested in the new responsibilities. Still good on the other ways.
    - There has been a debate about leadership vs management and there are many descriptions/definitions. One that I have found helpful is provided by Sloane and Drath in 2003 in the periodical Leadership in Action. They describe leadership as relationship. They connected relationship building to retention and retention to the bottom line of an organization. Hence making leadership and relationship building a very important area of focus for leaders in an industry that has a higher rate of attrition. Nonprofit theatre organizations in the U.S. find it difficult to compete for talented employees and the 2013 average voluntary turnover rate was 14% in this industry, which is significantly higher than the 1.9% reported for the private (nonfarm) sector for the same year.
- **The core competencies for Management (from Korn Ferry):**
    - **Ensuring Accountability**
    - **Developing Talent**
    - **Driving Engagement**
    - **Building Effective Teams**
    - **Giving Tough Feedback**
- How successful were you in helping your employees establish and achieve their measurable goals?
    - Did you understand and support their goals?
    - Did you assist them in addressing barriers to achieve those goals?
    - Did you hold them accountable to their success metrics?
- Data shows that self assessments are pretty dang flawed. Managers are the worst at assessing themselves, second only to their direct reporters. Bosses are in the best position to assess. Self assessment isn't totally flawed - it just should be one part of the picture. According to KF research Direct Reports rate their managers the highest, followed by the self-rater, and the boss tends to be the most accurate rater ***In terms of success as measured by promotability
- One tool to assess managerial success is to periodically poll the staff throughout the year with questions rating the manager's level of success with the core competencies.

Performance reviews:

- Who knows the most about the employee's performance and is in the best position to give feedback? The boss.
- The first several rounds of performance reviews implemented in any organization are likely to be skewed higher than they will average out to be over time. Why? Because the rapport is not

developed, people are nervous to give honest feedback, and managers want to ensure the experience of the review is a positive one.

- How do you make evaluation a routine? Theatre companies are generally quite good at evaluating work at the end of a production thru post-mortems. Using that model as a base, when are the natural moments for a post-mortem style evaluation at your organization (e.g. at the end of a major grant cycle, a season, or a fiscal year)?
- If you are an Executive Director, who should be assessing you? Consider a Board or other major stakeholders. It's important to also gather feedback from the staff - but they aren't the be all end all.
- For the BEST results, if you have a ton of money, hire an outside firm of consultants to interview your staff and assess individual and organizational performance and suggest areas of growth. For the best results if you do not have a ton of money, have a task force determine the criteria you want to measure, find an outside assessor, and implement a staff wide survey.
  - No money and no idea who would assess? Look for another organization in the same boat and partner to be each other's assessor. There are natural confidentiality concerns here - one of the advantages of an external consultant.

Don't Panic:

- You don't need to reinvent a wheel or create a whole curricula from thin air. Your objectives are already written in your mission, vision, values, and in your grants and employee contracts. Also look to recent initiatives.
- With your objectives clear, you should be able to at least evaluate "did we achieve this objective, yes or no, why or why not?"

Feedback:

- Creating a candid environment is critical for good management. Tactics that can help to aid in this candidness include an agreed upon frame of reference for hard deadlines, clearly defined metrics for success, and honest analysis that holds employees accountable for failure.
- **How to give hard feedback? JUST DO IT.** It's a manager's responsibility to hold everyone accountable to the work. If you are a manager, and you cannot give hard feedback, you are a bad manager. Most managers aren't good at feedback and can still be decent managers. Great managers are able to have the hard conversations early before things grow into too much pain.
  - Negative feedback should not come as a surprise in a performance review. Issues should be addressed as they arise. Many studies have shown that employees prefer open and frequent communication. This is combination with clear expectations can assist in setting up a work relationship/environment for success.
  - Difficult feedback should almost always occur in a one-on-one situation. Criticising employees in front of others will just make you look like a jerk. It is important to have sensitivity in how you deliver tough feedback. Approaching conversations with an eye towards development is very different than trying to fix something wrong or point fingers.
  - Constructive feedback has been proven more effective than negative feedback. Assisting in problem solving and including employees in the process is more effective than taking a negative approach. Negative feedback has been connected to a decrease in performance and attitude and attrition.

- ○ There used to be a theory that sandwiching negative feedback with two positive items was they way to approach reviews. Recently, this has been questioned as employees are becoming more savvy and this approach can come across as dishonest.
- Asking peers and bosses for negative feedback can not only help you do your job better, it can improve their opinion of your work. *as long as you are making strides to improve yourself.* Asking for negative feedback and then sitting on it can create a sense that you don't actually value feedback or don't do anything with it - it could shut down additional feedback in the future.

Coaching/Development:
- Who is in charge of coaching? Ideally whoever is tasked with organizational development and/or whoever determines staff wages, which may be an HR department or an Executive Director. We are all good candidates for coaching - being a coach gives one a chance to work on empathy, developing others, etc.
- Managers are not necessarily coaches, but it is important for managers to learn coaching skills such as being inquisitive, driving engagement, seeking buy-in, developing existing talent, providing candid feedback, and understanding individual needs and developing the rapport to support them.
- *A note on rapport - do not underestimate it.*
  - ○ Having good rapport with staff will help a lot in times that difficult feedback must be given, and it directly correlates to morale. If you struggle to build rapport with your employees, ask yourself why that is. Are you distracted by deadlines? Do you consistently go straight to your office and close the door without greeting anyone? Are you disinterested in their lives? Are you negative, antisocial, or flaky? There is a whole world of tricks and games that can help you change the habits that prevent you from developing rapport.
  - ○ If you are in a new work environment and/or developing rapport with new staff, those coaching skills are critical. Be inquisitive, walk the walk, show that you value work at all levels, practice your decent social skills, and admit when you don't know something- and find a way to learn it and get back to people.

360 Review:
- A 360 Review is a holistic view of an employee by gathering feedback from an employee's manager, peers and direct reports, customers, and other groups. They are extremely useful for forward-thinking staff development. Due to their anonymous nature, many of the power dynamics are mitigated.
- Data shows that 360 Reviews should not be tied to raises/promotions, because results will skew higher than they otherwise would.
- Data shows that 360 Reviews should not be used as the only performance review, because the anonymity can also be perceived as lack of managerial courage or avoidance of the difficult conversations. The 360 is great for staff *development* but not the best for performance feedback.
- The other aspect of this, is that employees are given an opportunity to express their opinions about themselves, the company, their manager, specific situations etc. This allows the employee a voice as well as others they work with/report to.