



The manager's **quick guide to smarter performance conversations**



Introduction

Performance management isn't just about filling forms or handing down ratings. It's about creating a culture where employees own their growth and managers act as coaches.

Lucy Adams

Former BBC HR Director and now CEO of Disruptive HR, says:

"Annual objectives, rigid feedback cycles, and measuring performance can often miss the mark in today's dynamic work environment."

This guide shows managers how to move away from rigid ratings and towards ongoing, employee-driven conversations.



1. Why ratings don't work

- Ratings are subjective and prone to bias.
- They create fear, not motivation.
- Story example: a company forced managers to share out low ratings evenly, undermining the process.

Lucy explains the flaw clearly:

"Judging people and giving them a number for a year's worth of work isn't an effective mechanism for measuring performance."

Quick win

Replace ratings with open feedback questions:
"What's one thing I should keep doing? What's one thing I could do differently?"

**And keep a record for this using
Breathe's performance management feature**



2. Employee-owned performance

- Individuals own their performance - managers can't "make" them perform.
- The manager's role is to create space and support ownership.

As Lucy says:

"It's time to move away from performance management as being something that is done to you, to something that the individual owns and drives."

Quick win

Encourage your team to ask for feedback from at least two colleagues each quarter and make a log of this as part of an employee's performance and growth cycle.



3. The manager's role as coach

- Managers help employees interpret feedback and connect it to goals.
- Coaching turns feedback into development.

Lucy reflects on her own experience:

"One of the big tasks often put on the manager's shoulders are the dreaded annual appraisals... it's a pointless exercise. Feedback needs to be in the moment."

Quick win

In 1:1s, ask: "Where do you want to grow in the next 6 months? How can I support you?"

Watch Breathe's performance management webinar with Lucy Adams or check out the blog

4. Building a growth culture

- Feedback becomes continuous, not annual.
- Employees feel empowered, motivated, and responsible for their own development.
- Managers focus on coaching, context, and support.

Lucy adds:

"It's time to get rid of bureaucracy, get rid of the annual cycle, get rid of the paperwork, get rid of the ratings and instead, focus on human interactions. That's where performance improvement comes from."

Quick win

Add "feedback reflection" as a standing agenda item in monthly team meetings.

Final Thoughts

When employees own their own performance and managers step into a coaching role, everyone wins. This isn't about abandoning accountability - it's about making performance real, human, and growth-focused.

Lucy summarises it perfectly:

"Once you've got a clear purpose to your performance management, you'll be able to embrace flexibility, feedback and continuous improvement, unleashing your business and people's full potential."

See how Breathe supports performance conversations



[Breathe Performance Management](#)