

Eddie, The Freshman Year

Mr. Frazier's Performance Review

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Seated outside Mr. Crum's office near the end of the school year, Mr. Frazier awaits his annual performance review. This past year has been a very good one for Mr. Frazier. The track team had an undefeated season and, in several track meets, the team took first, second, and third place in all the events. Mr. Frazier is one of the most-liked teachers in the school. And, in physical education class, Mr. Frazier not only prepares the students physically for sports, but mentally as well.

Mr. Crum calls Mr. Frazier into his office fifteen minutes past his appointment time, and tells Mr. Frazier, "have a seat." Mr. Frazier could have figured that out himself, as he was not expecting to stand during his performance review. Taking a seat, Mr. Frazier watches as Mr. Crum fumbles through a few papers, making himself appear more important than he really is.

Mr. Crum opens the meeting, asking Mr. Frazier, "so, tell me. How do you think you've done over this past year?" Reviewing his accomplishments, Mr. Frazier reports, "really well, if you ask me. The track team had an undefeated season. In a few regular season meets, the team swept every event. We've dominated both State invitational meets, walking away with a good number of medals. And, next season, the track team is looking even better." Mr. Crum stares out into space, already knowing what Mr. Frazier is espousing. Under Mr. Frazier's coaching, the track team was unstoppable this past year.

Moving on to his accomplishments in academics, Mr. Frazier continues, “in physical education class, I believe I’ve instilled in the students the motivation to follow their passion and to attack every challenge they’ll face in their life with no fear. And, that would be not only in sports, but in academics and employment as well. I’ve also motivated several students who were non athletic to take an interest in certain sports that I’ve noticed they excel at. One, in particular, was a sophomore, Raymond McDowell, who is now on the wrestling team, and had an awesome season. Another was Luis Pena, who is one of the best soccer players in our school. He thought he’d never make the soccer team because all the other soccer players were a lot bigger and stronger than he was. I encouraged him to try out anyway, and now he’s one of our star players. And, there are a few other examples, too.” Not sounding too impressed with Mr. Frazier’s self assessment, Mr. Crum interrupts, telling Mr. Frazier, “yeah, yeah. We’ll get to that in a minute.”

Mr. Crum hands Mr. Frazier a copy of his official performance review. Mr. Frazier reviews the appraisal of his performance, and his heart sinks in his chest. Following an uncomfortable moment of silence, Mr. Frazier asks Mr. Crum, “I don’t understand this. How does my overall review fall into the category ‘far below expectations’? I thought I had a great year.” Mr. Crum explains, “that was your own assessment of your performance. I don’t necessarily agree with your assessment.”

As Mr. Crum is speaking, the words Mr. Frazier hears sound like they have traveled through a long tunnel, and go in one ear and out the other. Mr. Frazier further reviews his performance assessment, becoming more depressed when he discovers the primary reason why he was downrated. Mr. Frazier interrupts Mr. Crum’s diatribe, asking, “what’s this comment about gross deviations from the State’s physical education curriculum?” Mr. Crum replies, “exactly that. You have not been following the curriculum closely enough. For that, I had to rate you as ‘far below expectations’.” Mr. Frazier exclaims, “what? I was one of the three contributors who wrote the State’s

physical education curriculum!” Mr. Crum bluntly replies, “well, maybe you should take some time this Summer and review the curriculum you claim to have written.”

Wanting an explanation, Mr. Frazier asks, “what part of the curriculum have I not been following?” Mr. Crum answers, “all of it, especially when it comes to track and field. Track and field is not supposed to be half the syllabus. Every time I look outside, you have the students running around the track.” Mr. Frazier replies, “I beg to differ. I do not, and I repeat, do not always have students running around the track.” Not immediately addressing Mr. Frazier’s concerns, Mr. Crum continues, “and, for the record, the performance of the track team has nothing to do with your performance review. You get paid a stipend to coach track. And, that’s it.”

Reviewing his notes and laying out some evidence, Mr. Crum boldly informs Mr. Frazier, “mid September, during gym class, Edward Bogenskaya, Mark Svoboda, and Axel Braden were racing on the track while the rest of the class was playing football. You had your attention focused on the three track athletes, completely ignoring the rest of the class.” Mr. Crum then drops the bomb, “I have at least a dozen more examples. Would you like to hear them?” Realizing that he will get absolutely nowhere with Mr. Crum, Mr. Frazier replies, “no. That won’t be necessary.”

Not wanting to stay around for the rest of his review, Mr. Frazier asks Mr. Crum, “are we done here?” Mr. Crum replies, “no. I’m just getting started.” Listening as Mr. Crum derates Mr. Frazier’s performance, the track coach sits back, waiting for the principal to finish what sounds more like a tirade than a professional meeting. During Mr. Crum’s pontification, Mr. Frazier contemplates leaving his position as a physical education instructor and returning to his prior position as a trainer for an NFL football team. At least, in the NFL, Mr. Frazier’s efforts were greatly appreciated.

Mr. Crum concludes, “Mr. Frazier, I suggest you conform and adhere to the State’s physical education curriculum. You have all Summer to review the curriculum,

which I strongly suggest you do. As it stands, you are one step away from being put on probation. This year, an official warning will be placed in your file. And, because of your poor performance this past year, I am unable to give you a cost of living adjustment. Do you have any questions?" Mr. Frazier replies, "no." Mr. Crum announces, "good. We're done here." Mr. Frazier stands up and walks out, clearly not happy with his performance review this year.

The following day during lunch, Mr. Zunde perceives that Mr. Frazier is upset about something. Curious as to what the problem is, Mr. Zunde asks, "is something bothering you, George?" Mr. Frazier replies, "Crum gave me a real shitty performance review. I'm now thinking I should return to the NFL." Mr. Zunde asks, "may I see your review?" Mr. Frazier replies, "sure," and hands to Mr. Zunde Mr. Crum's assessment of one of the best physical education instructors in the State.

Mr. Zunde reviews the assessment form, and tells Mr. Frazier, "this is total garbage, George. If I were you, I would take this directly to Dr. Brooks." Mr. Frazier asks, "what is she going to do?" Mr. Zunde replies, "for one, she can override all this nonsense. And, two, it will put Crum on notice that he is being watched." Mr. Frazier asks, "I wonder if she'll meet with me." Mr. Zunde assures Mr. Crum, "she will. I'm sure of it." Holding up Mr. Frazier's performance review, Mr. Zunde explains, "this is exactly why Dr. Brooks hired me as the district's athletic director. It's just another chapter in the ongoing John Davies saga. Who knows what Crum has up his sleeve this time. And, besides, George, you significantly contributed to that curriculum. No one knows the curriculum better than you." Mr. Frazier agrees, stating, "I put a lot of work into that curriculum. Maybe I should meet with her." Abruptly ending the discussion, the bell rings, signifying that Mr. Zunde and Mr. Frazier have to get to class.

Mr. Frazier never did make the appointment to meet with Dr. Brooks, the superintendent of schools. He was planning to do that sometime over the Summer when he had more time. However, during finals week, Mr. Frazier

receives an intra office memo, stating that Dr. Brooks has called a private meeting with him. Mr. Frazier wonders what the meeting arranged by Dr. Brooks will be about. But, he suspects the meeting has something to do with the unfavorable review he received. Truth be told, Mr. Frazier is sincerely hoping that he does not get fired.

The first week of Summer break, Mr. Frazier sits outside Dr. Brooks' office, hoping to make his case against his unfair review. Knowing he will likely have limited time to speak with the superintendent, Mr. Frazier has gone over again and again in his head what he would like to convey to Dr. Brooks in his defense of what he considers a very unjust review. Quite nervous about the meeting, Mr. Frazier tries to remain calm by rehearsing his case in his mind.

The secretary walks out into the waiting area, telling Mr. Frazier, "Dr. Brooks will see you now, sir." Mr. Frazier stands up, and is escorted to the superintendent's private office. Dr. Brooks greets Mr. Frazier, and tells him, "please have a seat, sir, and please help yourself to a glass of water if you would like." Mr. Frazier passes on the water for now, and replies, "thank you."

Dr. Brooks opens the meeting, telling Mr. Frazier, "good morning. Thank you for taking the time out of your schedule to meet with me this morning. On behalf of the entire school district, I would like to thank you again for your contribution to the State's physical education curriculum. Your efforts in representing the district in a positive light have not gone unnoticed." Mr. Frazier is quite shocked at the difference between Mr. Crum's demeanor and that of Dr. Brooks. Mr. Frazier is particularly impressed that Dr. Brooks does not seem to be in a rush and speaks very pleasantly. But, Mr. Frazier is still in the dark regarding what today's meeting is about.

Dr. Brooks continues, "I, personally, was quite impressed with the performance of the Northside High School track team this past year. Congratulations on having another undefeated season. And, I understand from Gerhard that, next year, the team's performance is

expected to be even better." Attempting to use proper English, Mr. Frazier nervously replies, "I believe the team will be stronger next year. We had a good number of freshmen go to State this year. Next year, it's looking even better for us." Dr. Brooks mentions, "I've taken notice of a few of the athletes. In particular, Edward Bogenskaya and Mark Svoboda seem to be excellent sprinters. And, Axel Braden is phenomenal at the 440-yard dash." Quite surprised that Dr. Brooks even knows the names of the student athletes, Mr. Frazier replies, "these guys are among the best I've ever seen. And, they're only freshmen." Still very nervous, Mr. Frazier is still in the dark regarding what this meeting is about. The school superintendent does not typically call a track coach into their office to inform them the track team is doing well.

Getting down to business, Dr. Brooks asks Mr. Frazier, "I understand you had some concerns regarding your performance review this year. Am I correct?" Mr. Frazier's heart rate increases a bit, and replies, "yes. For the record, I believe my review was very unfair." Dr. Brooks bluntly informs Mr. Frazier, "so do I. So, I've thrown it in the trash can." Mr. Frazier, just as shocked as if Jimmy O'Brien were to beat Eddie in a sprint, replies, "you've thrown it in the trash can?" Dr. Brooks replies, "yes, I have. I, personally, have reviewed your performance over this past year." Dr. Brooks then hands Mr. Frazier his revised performance assessment in which the overall rating is "greatly exceeds expectations". Hearing the news, Mr. Frazier immediately feels as if a great weight has been lifted from his shoulders.

Dr. Brooks elaborates, "in lieu of the disgraceful performance review you've received from Maurice Crum, I've decided to give you an 8 percent cost of living adjustment, which represents the level of 'far exceeds expectations'. In addition, you will receive a promotion to the next level, which carries along with it a 15 percent salary increase on top of the cost of living adjustment. I do hope that the revised arrangement better meets your expectations." Quite flustered and not exactly knowing how to respond, Mr. Frazier replies, "thank you. Thank you very much." Dr. Brooks also informs Mr. Frazier, "the

administration has taken note of the increased attendance at our home track meets. I, for one, have attended several of the meets during this past year."

Dr. Brooks then orates, "it has come to my attention that several of our administrators do not perceive the value in our school's athletic programs. Many students excel at academics, and will have many excellent opportunities to further their education when they graduate from high school. Athletics, as you probably are aware, is the only avenue by which some of our students will ever get into college. That reason, among a few others, is why we must keep our athletic program strong. And, I might add, college athletics often paves the way to professional sports." Mr. Frazier agrees, telling Dr. Brooks, "I understand completely. An athletic scholarship is how I was able to attend college."

Dr. Brooks continues, "Gary Mitchell, the distance runner who had an impressive first season with the high school, is quite the exception. He's a straight A student, yet performs very well on the track, and is one of our better cross country runners. Not every athlete can be like Gary, excelling at both sports and academics. The rest of the student athletes are counting on coaches like you to develop their abilities to the highest level, thereby paving the way to a better future. I just want to reinforce that your expertise is needed by these athletes, and highly valued by our district." Quite surprised at Dr. Brooks commendation, Mr. Frazier replies, "thank you. Thank you very much." Dr. Brooks then tells Mr. Frazier, "and, please do not let Maurice bother you. Gerhard will keep him under control." That was, by far, the best news that Mr. Frazier has heard all year.

Dr. Brooks and Mr. Frazier have an informal talk about the outlook of next year's sports teams. Mr. Frazier is grateful that his disgraceful review got overturned. Receiving a promotion and a raise, Mr. Frazier is glad to hear that his efforts are noticed and appreciated. Now even more motivated to win, Mr. Frazier looks forward to next year's winning season.

As Mr. Frazier is getting ready to leave, he notices that Mr. Crum is seated outside the superintendent's office. Just like Mr. Frazier was, Mr. Crum is at a loss to understand why Dr. Brooks wants to meet with him. Mr. Crum is fairly certain that good news is coming his way. Unfortunately, the news waiting for Mr. Crum is not so good. For the next half hour or so, Mr. Crum will be explaining to Dr. Brooks why the three winning-most coaches at the high school received unfavorable reviews this past year. As Mr. Frazier walks by, Mr. Frazier and Mr. Crum exchange no words.