

BARRYMORE UNIVERSITY: DELIVERING A MIXED PERFORMANCE REVIEW

Twelve months ago, Ritu Rao – the Director of Academic Operations at Barrymore University – hired Nikhil Krishna as a staff assistant. At the time, Nikhil had just graduated from the well-regarded university with a bachelor's degree in Economics with highest honors, all while concurrently leading the university's debate society. Although Ritu didn't know Nikhil personally during his time as a student, a professor who had taught Nikhil referred to him as a "brilliant problem-solver" who was knowledgeable in a wide range of subjects and activities.

Overall, Ritu was generally pleased with Nikhil's work to date and viewed him as an ideal administrative hire in many ways. Not only did he have a strong knowledge of the school's administrative environment and its students' needs given his previous time as an undergraduate of the university, but he was also articulate and a clear communicator – traits that previous assistants had lacked. Moreover, Nikhil demonstrated his ability to work independently with little need of supervision and with an impressive knack for highlighting more efficient ways to accomplish certain tasks.

However, there were a few issues that bothered Ritu about Nikhil's work style. For one, Nikhil generally failed to maintain a professional appearance in the office – preferring instead the ripped jeans, t-shirts, and sneakers of his college days. His hygiene was acceptable, Ritu thought, for he didn't physically appear disheveled, yet his attire was surely inconsistent with the "business casual" norm set by others. To be fair, she thought, the university did not set an official dress standard. Still, she figured it was an unnecessary distraction in the office that demonstrated a lack of professionalism.

In addition, Nikhil held unconventional and inconsistent work hours that were hard to predict. Whereas Academic Operations opened for support to students at 8:30am and closed at 5:30pm, during which time the vast majority of employees were in attendance, Nikhil occasionally arrived after 11am and stayed past 7pm – often leaving for two hours during the middle of the day. At other times Nikhil would enter the office at 7am and leave prior to 4pm. Ritu hesitated to address Nikhil's schedule since his quality of work was always high and university policy only dictated an expected total number of hours rather than a mandatory schedule. However, Ritu believed it was disruptive to the office's workflow and set the wrong tone for other staffmembers.

Lastly, Ritu thought Nikhil could be overly curt and insensitive with peers. Colleagues – especially older ones – often consulted Nikhil and sought his advice on certain technical issues. While Nikhil was often quick to help and to provide suggestions, his tendency to describe such tasks as “a piece of cake” or comment that “even a baby could do this” was off-putting and often left those he helped feeling bruised and insulted.

While these criticisms didn't directly relate to the performance of Nikhil's core job responsibilities, they were nonetheless troubling and distressing for Ritu and had the potential to disrupt the team if left unchecked. In preparing for her regular annual review with Nikhil, she wondered how she could communicate such feedback in a way that wasn't misunderstood by him, especially since she had yet to mention any of these concerns during Nikhil's first year. After all, she would hate for this handful of relatively minor issues to overshadow the positive feedback she was eager to provide.