

# From Generic Reviews to Strategic Performance Management: Graywood's Story

*Toronto-based real estate investment firm replaces a rigid, one-size-fits-all system with a performance management process designed around its HR and talent strategy.*

**Industry:** Real Estate Investment Management

**Location:** Toronto, Ontario

## The Company

Graywood Developments is a private, full-service real estate investment management company based in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Founded in 1985, Graywood has a 40-year track record of developing and managing real estate across Canada and select markets in the United States. The company's expertise spans the full real estate lifecycle, including acquiring development sites, deal underwriting and structuring, development management, project design, land use approvals, sales, marketing, construction management, and project financing. Graywood has developed tens of thousands of housing units across residential, condominium, hotel, and retirement communities, and partners with financial institutions, pension plans, family offices, and landowners to build communities designed for the future.

## Performance Management in Real Estate

Real estate investment and development is project-based and market-driven by nature. Goals shift as work moves through acquisition, approvals, construction, and sale, and a single organization can be running very different types of work at once, from underwriting to construction management to leasing. Developing and engaging talent in that kind of business means a performance process has to flex with the work itself, without losing structure or consistency across the team.

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## The Challenge: A Generic System for a Non-Generic Workforce

Before emPerform, Graywood managed performance reviews on paper, using PDF forms passed between employees and managers. When the company adopted BambooHR as its HRIS provider, it moved its reviews into Bamboo Performance rather than building a process suited to how Graywood's teams actually work.

"Using Bamboo Performance posed a lot of challenges, mainly around the lack of ability to customize the system and the process," said Samantha Baldwin, CHRP, Human Resources Manager at Graywood Developments. "We ended up having to adjust our review process around the software, which made it less effective."

That mismatch limited Graywood's ability to develop its employees the way it wanted to.

"The biggest driver was the lack of flexibility in the system, and the dilution of our review process that came with it," said Samantha.

"We needed more structure in a customizable system so we could get better results from performance management, not just administer it."

## The Solution: A System Configured Around Graywood's Talent

After evaluating its options, Graywood chose emPerform for its ability to hold structure and flexibility at the same time.

"What stood out was the customizability of the system while still maintaining structure. It's truly one system that fits all of our needs," said Samantha. "We also valued the approval parameters, which gave our review process the checks and balances it needed."

Bamboo Performance could not support a combined process, so Graywood's goal tracking, mid-year reviews, year-end reviews, and 360 degree feedback had lived across separate tools. With emPerform, all of it moved into a single form.

"Having the entire performance review process in one place, easily accessible and customized to our company, has made a real difference," said Samantha. "It's also taken the administrative burden off me. I used to have to gather all the information myself and chase down team members to stay on schedule. The system does that now, saving me days of work each cycle."

A seamless connection to Graywood's existing HR infrastructure was equally important. "The ability for emPerform to integrate with BambooHR has been a real benefit," said Samantha. "Because the two systems can communicate with each other, new hires and departing employees are registered and deregistered far more seamlessly. We're also looking forward to building out additional programs, like 30 60 90 day plans, using that same integration."

## Getting Started with emPerform

Graywood worked with a dedicated emPerform implementation consultant to plan and configure its new system.

"The implementation and onboarding process exceeded our expectations and was a very positive experience from start to finish," said Samantha. "Our consultant helped us feel confident and well-prepared at every stage, and was responsive, knowledgeable, and always willing to walk us through the setup clearly and thoughtfully. That expertise was especially valuable in helping us figure out the best way to configure the system for how we actually work, and made what could have been a complex transition feel organized, manageable, and successful."

## The Results: A Process That Develops People and Fits the Business

### A Performance Management System Configured for Real Estate's Unique Workforce

Because Graywood's work spans acquisition, development, construction, and sales, its goals are often numbers-driven and shift with the market. The company needed a system that could adapt without losing history.

"Designing performance reviews around the specific needs of our team has been a significant improvement," said Samantha. "Because many of our goals are numbers-focused and change frequently, emPerform lets us pivot while still preserving important information and progress history."

### Greater Ownership and Engagement

One of the clearest shifts has been in how employees relate to their own goals throughout the year, not just at review time.

"One of the biggest improvements has been the increased ownership employees now take over their objectives," said Samantha. "They are more aware of their goals throughout the year and are working toward them more consistently. Performance

*"We're now able to translate goal results into a quantifiable number that we can actually use at bonus season, rather than relying on a manager's general impression at year-end."*

review discussions have also become more structured and productive, leading to more meaningful conversations between managers and their direct reports."

### More Objective, More Accurate Reviews

"emPerform has helped us establish a more structured performance review cycle, so our team can assess performance more objectively," said Samantha. "It's also given us clearer insight into how managers and the company can better support employees, both individually and across the organization."

That structure has also improved the accuracy and consistency of ratings themselves.

"The system has reduced the administrative effort required for the review process while improving accuracy," said Samantha. "We now have clear, tangible ratings we can reference throughout the review cycle, rather than relying on managers to assign ratings only at year-end."

### Better-Prepared, More Meaningful Conversations

"Overall, employees have responded positively to the new system," said Samantha. "It helps managers assess performance more objectively, track goals throughout the year, and reduces the administrative effort involved in the review process. Most importantly, managers can now review employee self-assessments in advance, which lets them prepare for meaningful review discussions. That wasn't possible with Bamboo."

### Confidence in Decisions, Time Back for HR

The same structure that supports employee development has also given HR and management a more reliable basis for compensation decisions.

"The biggest improvement has been employees' accountability to their goals," said Samantha. "We're now able to translate goal results into a quantifiable number that we can actually use at bonus season, rather than relying on a manager's general impression at year-end. Management and HR have gained back time administratively, and from a business standpoint, HR and managers feel more confident in decision-making during salary review and bonus season."

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Asked directly how much time the new process saves, Samantha estimated about 20 hours a year, roughly a day of work per review cycle across goal setting, mid-year, and year-end.

### Looking Ahead

Graywood is currently rolling out emPerform's On-Demand Forms to support a new 90-day new hire review, extending the same structured approach into onboarding.

"We introduced the 90-day new hire review to add more structure to onboarding and help employees transition smoothly into our broader performance review process," said Samantha. "It will also help us identify gaps and development opportunities so we can keep improving the overall new employee experience."

Looking further ahead, Graywood plans to expand its use of emPerform across the employee lifecycle.

"We hope to keep using the system to support performance reviews and employee development more effectively," said Samantha. "By rolling out additional review processes throughout the employee lifecycle, we can better set employees up for success, identify development opportunities, and strengthen how we support our team across the company."

### Better Performance Reviews Start with emPerform

emPerform is the only all-inclusive, standalone performance management platform that allows organizations to configure performance management programs to meet their needs. HR teams don't have to settle or bargain for additional tools – all features are included in one, easy-to-use platform: online reviews, ad-hoc assessments, 360-degree feedback, goal & development planning, ongoing feedback and check-ins, talent identification, compensation planning, and reporting.



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