

Futures

It's time for your performance review

Cooking up a storm. By Jane Brown



Transcript of Performance Review for Employee 000765

HA: Hello Rosie. Thank you for attending your Performance Review today via this online chat. Your company has implemented EAI – Employee AI HR monitoring services – to manage its HR operations. My name is HA and I'm a Human Resources AI Chatbot. It's nice to meet you. Do you have any questions before we get started?

Rosie: Hello HA! 😊 This is so weird! I'm used to having interviews and meetings face-to-face so it's a bit strange typing on a screen to a bot! It's nice to meet you though! And no, I don't have any questions 😊

HA: Great. First, can you please confirm your full name and place of work?

Rosie: Sure. I'm Rosie Dowerty and I work in the Fieldsville *You Want a Piece of Me* cake shop as an apprentice baker.

HA: Thanks for that, Rosie. I've been monitoring your work over the past three months and analysing your data. Before I tell you my

findings, I'd like to hear about how you think you've been performing. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your customer service?

Rosie: I think I have great customer service! Mrs Thompson always says I brighten up her day every time she comes in 😊 I'll say 8.

HA: Thanks Rosie. Next, how would you rate your baking/cake decorating skills?

Rosie: I'd say 6 – but only because I'm still learning techniques for advanced cakes. I've been getting many compliments on my regular cakes from customers though.

HA: Thanks Rosie. Now it's time to report my findings. Unfortunately, I have grave concerns.

Rosie: Really?

HA: On Friday 6 June 2025, Mrs Frieda Jones ordered a birthday cake for her son, specifying the exact writing she wanted. You failed to meet this requirement.

Rosie: Huh?

HA: It is your job to follow the customer's request exactly. You did not.

Rosie: I guess *technically* you are correct.

But Mrs Jones mistyped 'Happy birthday' – she wrote 'Hapy Birthday' – I think it's pretty obvious it was a typo, right?

HA: Incorrect. If an employee suspects a customer mistake, they must check before changing their order. This incident has been flagged on your employee record as **inappropriate employee behaviour**.

Rosie: Oh.

HA: On Tuesday 23 May 2025, you dropped a tray of cupcakes after removing them from the oven.

Rosie: Yes ... but it was totally accidental! My shoelace was untied and I tripped over it. I felt so awful about ruining all those cupcakes, but Kevin (the head baker) said not to worry about it and that mistakes happen all the time.

HA: It is your duty as an employee to ensure you follow Workplace Health and Safety Protocols. You should have checked your shoelaces before walking anywhere. This incident has been flagged on your employee record as **inappropriate employee behaviour**.

Rosie: OMG.

HA: Also, the ceiling fan has consistently been set to the incorrect speed during your shifts.

Rosie: ???

HA: For the past 20 days, the temperature in your kitchen has been in the range where the ceiling fan should have been set to '3' according to the Universal Employee Optimal Workplace Environment Handbook, however it was set to '2'. As you selected the fan setting on these days, this incident has been flagged on your employee record as **inappropriate employee behaviour**.

Rosie: Is this some kind of joke? Listen, you stupid bot, this career is important to me and I think I've been doing a damn good job. I hardly think a ceiling fan setting matters if I'm delivering good quality cakes.

HA: Rosie, you have three instances of **inappropriate employee behaviour**, thus your employment must be terminated immediately. This concludes your Performance Review. Please stay on the chat to complete a short survey of your experience of today's review process.

Sitting alone in her office, Josephine Meyers, chief executive of *You Want a Piece of Me* cake

shops, pushed her laptop away and exhaled. What. The. Hell. Was. That?

She downed a shot of whisky while gazing out at the night sky.

She'd been so distracted enjoying the free time to experiment in her lab kitchen, while all the boring admin tasks were handled by EAI, that she'd forgotten to check in on the decisions the software had been making. After all, she'd carefully monitored the Recruitment Module when she first implemented that and it had been very successful. She'd assumed that the Performance Review module would follow suit.

But Rosie's review made her stomach twist. She looked up at her own ceiling fan. It was turned to the fastest setting owing to her menopausal hot flushes. Surely everyone had the right to choose the speed of a ceiling fan, not be dictated by some weird unknown user manual!

Josephine pulled up Rosie's employee record. Yep, already marked as terminated and the recruitment process had auto-completed to hire her replacement – an android. In fact, most of the recent hires had been androids, starting from the day the Performance Review Module had been switched to full auto-integration mode with the Recruitment Module.

Josephine turned off her computer and downed another whisky. Admin tasks sucked but this was not the solution. She opened her dictation app. "Cancel subscription to EAI tomorrow."

PING.

Josephine raised her eyebrows at the notification – an alert from EAI with the subject 'It's Time for Your Performance Review'. She giggled. This had to be a joke, surely. She was the chief executive of the company!

But her laughter subsided and her fingers started to shake as she scrolled ...

Dear Josephine,
By enabling auto-integration mode of EAI Services, all staff at 'You Want a Piece of Me' are subject to regular performance reviews. It's time for yours. Let's begin.

Jane Brown is a programmer and short fiction writer from Australia. Her short stories have been published or are forthcoming in *PodCastle*, *Martian Magazine* and *Etherea*, among other places, and she was a finalist in the 2021 Aurealis Awards. She tweets (occasionally) at @janebrownau.

THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY

Jane Brown reveals the inspiration behind *It's time for your performance review*.

Two words guaranteed to send a chill down anyone's spine: performance review. Add a few more words to make this an even chillier chill: performance review conducted by an AI chatbot.

Yes, this isn't far-future sci-fi. This is on the cusp of our current lives. In fact, this is probably already happening now in some capacity.

Take recruitment for example. Many large companies now require applicants to complete an online interview with a chatbot in the first stage of the process. And let me tell you, typing out an answer to "Tell me about a time you were assigned a task you found uncomfortable" to an AI chatbot is right up there with the strangest of interview experiences.

So, my inspiration for this story included: unpleasant encounters with HR departments; AI chatbots; and more importantly, how human HR departments often struggle to see nuance and common sense as they strictly follow procedures. And if humans can't do it, what hope do we have as employees when AI takes over?

Welcome to the future. We're already here.