

Getting the most from appraisals

– from both sides of the desk



*I know it's your appraisal tomorrow!
Getting friendly now won't help!*

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What can be done to make appraisals more worthwhile for everyone involved?

Does your organisation have one of those annual 'occasions' that few look forward to: the annual appraisal or performance review? How do you look forward to it? I wonder how people talk about it before and after?

Are appraisals worth doing? If done properly – yes. If done poorly – no!!!

Why have appraisals? When conducted properly they can achieve a number of benefits for all parties. The organisation, the manager and the appraisee can:

- ◆ Establish current levels of performance and benchmark across departments or functions;

- ◆ Identify ways of improving performance, individually and collectively;
- ◆ Set clear goals for the future;
- ◆ Assess potential and desire for development;
- ◆ Establish the appropriate means of motivation;
- ◆ Improve communication throughout

Some of the typical perceived problems that lead to poor appraisals are:

- ◆ It is an annual process;
- ◆ Nothing has happened with the outcome of the last one;
- ◆ There is no on-going feedback or review of progress;
- ◆ Things can change in between,

whether it is the manager or the job!

- ◆ The process is not taken seriously from the top;
- ◆ The organisational culture views the whole process as a chore to be endured;
- ◆ Insufficient preparation time or effort;
- ◆ The 'recency' effect where only the previous 6-8 weeks are reviewed;
- ◆ Too much focus on the negatives or problems of the year;
- ◆ It is too subjective and too much is based on opinion;
- ◆ It is too time consuming and interferes with day-to-day work;
- ◆ Appraisals are just part of the salary negotiation.

When you look at the benefits that can be achieved and compare these with the reasons why appraisals often fail to deliver, you can see that a lot of this is due to the attitude of the organisation and the line managers, from the top down.

Don't store-up problems

Think about what can happen when appraisals are handled in a constructive manner. They allow the organisation and individuals to:

- ◆ Learn from the past to improve the future;
- ◆ Build on successes and strengths;
- ◆ Recognise individuals' strengths and abilities;
- ◆ Identify areas to develop skills and knowledge;
- ◆ Value individual contribution;
- ◆ Improve working relationships through clear communication

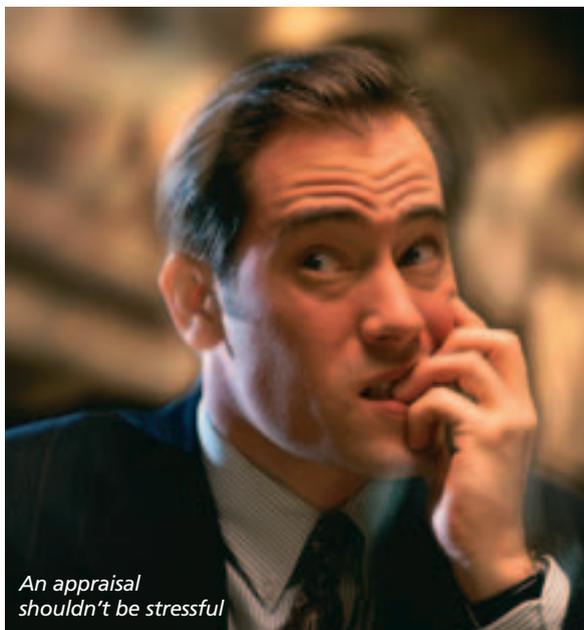
This does not mean that managers should avoid difficult issues or things they are not happy with. However, there should be no surprises. Feedback on performance should be given at the time and not stored up for the appraisal! As a manager, if you have concerns, deal with them. Most people want to be given feedback on their performance regularly (and that does not mean annually!), even if it is to be told they have to improve.

One challenge in many organisations is to use the current system effectively. Too many people get caught up in worrying about the paperwork, whether designing a new set or using the existing. I recall working with one client in developing a good and thorough process, only to be questioned by directors from their Scandinavian partner about why we were going to so much trouble. They held up a blank sheet of paper and explained that was all they needed for a productive appraisal. They are right.

The reality is that a productive appraisal owes more to the quality of the communication between the people involved than to the paperwork.

Should appraisals involve salary reviews?

This is a quandary with no straightforward answer. When they do, there is a risk that the amount of the pay rise becomes the absolute focus of the discussion and can even evolve into a negotiation. If they don't, how objective is the salary award when it is given? My own view is that the salary review and appraisal can be linked, yet held very separately. There is no reason for not holding the appraisal, setting some goals and even specifying some behavioural change



An appraisal shouldn't be stressful

and then using this as a part of the salary discussion. Although there is a risk in having the appraisal and salary combined, it can work, regardless of the gap. After all, shouldn't salary and raises reflect performance rather than just opinion? If appraisals are conducted well and constructively, there should be a fit between the two.

Everyone involved has to take their share of responsibility for making appraisals work. While the tips below will not guarantee success, they will help you to get more from the process, whatever your role.

Finally, there should be a sense of agreement about what has happened, what will happen and how. To reinforce the effectiveness, avoid making it just an annual event. Set on-going reviews to monitor progress towards the goals, to support any training or development, and to improve communication between bosses and teams.

An idea for all is to keep some notes throughout the year of successes and any particular challenges or events you want to recall later. It will help to reduce some of the subjectivity of poor appraisals and also makes sure things are remembered throughout the year!

Appraisals or reviews can work – and be of benefit to the organisation, the managers and the teams, provided they are thought of as something that is positive and constructive. Make time to do them properly, otherwise they will be a waste of time for all involved!

If you are the 'appraiser'

1. Make the time to prepare properly.
2. Set a time for the review – and stick to it! Do not move it around. What message does that send out? Allow anything from 1 – 2 hours.
3. Choose a place where you can have the privacy for a proper, open meeting with no interruptions. Turn off mobile phones.
4. Have a short meeting with the interviewee a few days before and outline what you want them to do before the meeting and during it.
5. Look at last year's review and identify what progress has been made.
6. Think about the good things the employee has achieved and done – do not just look for the negatives.
7. Be specific with the points you want to discuss and review – with evidence not just opinion
8. Set an agenda or structure for the meeting and stick to it.
9. Make sure they do a lot of the talking; it is **their** review not yours! Also, **listen** to what they say and build on it.
10. Remember to give feedback on performance or behaviour, not personality!
11. Note where job changes might have impacted on achievement of the goals from last year and identify successes.
12. Set and agree clear, smart goals, both short and medium term.

If you are being reviewed or appraised

1. Remember to 'own' the process. You have a responsibility to make it work for you, it is not just down to your boss!
2. Make time to prepare by reviewing what you have done and how even if there is no formal self-assessment process.
3. Obtain a copy of the previous review from HR or your boss.
4. If your role or responsibilities have changed since the previous appraisal, identify the goals you achieved up until the change and those after.
5. Make notes of the key points you want to mention.
6. Be honest in your self-assessment about what you could have improved upon.
7. Be specific about the things you have done well.
8. Think about what you want for the short, medium and long-term. What support, training or development would you like?
9. What might be sensible areas to set goals for the future? Be willing to suggest these to your boss.
10. Ask for clear and specific feedback.
11. If you would like your boss to manage you differently, use this as a time to ask, giving reasons about why it would benefit both of you!
12. Ensure you are clear about what the boss thinks and why – and whether it fits with your own self-assessment. If there is a difference, explore why this is the case. Work to reach agreement.



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