



Think of it as a communication tool to keep you on track

The Dreaded Performance Review

FOR MANY EMPLOYEES, the mere mention of an impending performance review can strike fear into their hearts and drive them from the field. But why? Is it the fear of the unknown? Of confrontation? Of being suddenly told to pack their bags and move along?

In general, both employees and employers have become dysfunctional about reviews, forgetting that performance management is really an ongoing communication tool, says Chris Obst, principal of Jump Management Coaching. “In a good performance review, there’s not going to be a shock to either party. Just relax and treat it as an open dialogue.”

If you’re expecting your first review with a particular company or manager, drop by his or her office a few days in advance to find out what will be covered and if there’s anything you should have prepared, says Obst. “Be an active participant. Arriving prepared makes the review much more fruitful, and it’s not something to avoid if you know what to expect and what the goals are for the conversation.”

Some companies tie salary discussions and performance reviews together, while others specifically keep them separate. If you’re not sure about your company’s policy, Obst suggests asking if it will be an appropriate time to review your salary. If it’s not, find out when salary increases can be discussed, and ask what achievements you need to accomplish to earn a raise.

Regardless of whether salary talks are on the table, don’t be afraid to speak up about

your accomplishments. Sharon McMahon, vice-president of human resources for **Assiniboine Credit Union** in Winnipeg, Manitoba, recommends employees jot down their achievements and accolades in a “brag book” throughout the year so they’ll have examples to mention when it’s review time. The purpose isn’t so much to brag, says McMahon, but to participate in the dialogue and two-way communication of the review.

Obst agrees employees need to advocate for themselves, though there is a fine line between recognizing one’s own accomplishments and obnoxious crowing. He suggests emphasizing achievements that align with the company’s goals, such as meeting certain sales targets or managing the leadership on a group project to show you’re a team player, making the singing of your own praises a part of the natural flow of the conversation. Highlighting new challenges you’ve taken on and goals you’ve achieved – particularly as they relate to the feedback you received in your last review – also demonstrate your willingness to learn and grow in your role.

And as awkward as bringing up your own achievements may be, talking about your downfalls can be even more uncomfortable. But sweeping them under the carpet may be the worst thing you can do. Just saying, ‘everything’s fine and I’m doing great’ – particularly when that is not true, shows an employee isn’t tuned in to the impact he or she has on the company.

But, what if you know your performance has been weak in a particular area? “I think

it’s a great idea to raise it. It shows initiative and awareness, as well as a commitment to continuous learning,” says McMahon. “If the employee is feeling it, chances are the manager is observing it. And if the manager hasn’t had the chance to observe it, it helps the manager to home in on how to support that person. Because at the end of the day, you want to be successful.”

Accepting constructive criticism can be uncomfortable, but the key to a successful and productive review is the attitude with which you approach it. “We need to change our perspective on ‘feedback,’” says McMahon. “Instead of interpreting it as negative, look at it as a gift and an opportunity for self-reflection. It shows someone values you, and is honest enough to provide you with feedback that is going to help you be successful.” However, if you feel the criticism is unwarranted, avoid getting defensive. Instead, ask for clarification and examples. “Take the stance of wanting to understand where the feedback is coming from, as opposed to refuting it.”

On the other hand, an absence of feedback isn’t useful communication either. “If your manager has nothing but nice things to say, it’s okay to push a little for some constructive feedback,” says Obst. “Ask: ‘What else do you want to see from me? Where do you want to see me focusing and growing?’ That helps you get engaged and it shows you’re interested in becoming stronger and better at what you do.” **E**

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