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### HOW DID YOU RATE MY PERFORMANCE

**Be prepared and a yearly appraisal is your chance to shine and have your say, writes Elaine Larkin**

The lead-up to the Academy Awards is a nail-biting time for nominees as their performances are reviewed and compared critically.

Actors may fret as they have no control over the process and agonize over what the verdict will be for the most outstanding performances this year.

This is one aspect of an acting career that bears some resemblance to the career of the stereotypical nine-to-five white-collar career.

In fact, professionals in regular jobs have it much easier. They can choose to manage how an annual performance review runs, and of course, they have an audience of just one, the manager, and not the billions who watch it all on television.

Despite having it relatively easy, employees bestowed with the chance to sit down with their line manager once a year and have their say often do not use the opportunity to their best advantage.

The performance review is a final opportunity for an individual to discuss their work and their development within the company, explains Kate Quinlan, an occupational psychologist, who specialises in management development and has years of experience in the area of performance reviews. It is not an interrogation by the employer.

“It has huge employee asset. A lot of people see it as something they have to do. As a result, sometimes people see it as a passive experience for the employee. It is not at all and should not be. It is not effective if it is passive”, said Quinlan.

“The biggest thing that can go wrong is when employees don’t know the benefit for themselves, when they don’t see the opportunities.”

So rather than just sitting down, twiddling their thumbs and waiting for their manager to comment on how fantastic and brilliant they are, what should an employee do at an annual review? Quinlan suggests employees should take ownership of the process. “It is their opportunity to state clearly their expectations.”

This means preparation is very important, just as one might get ready for a job interview. **“People invest a lot of time preparing for job interviews. A performance review is as important as that process”, said Adrienne O’Hare, the managing director of to Be Training and Development. “I wouldn’t leave it to chance and I wouldn’t give up control of it.”**

**O’Hare stresses it is critical that the employee and line manager engage in conversation about an individual’s performance and any development needs they might have, and, crucially, what support they may need from their manager. “It is about creating a clear line of sight from the top down in the organisation.”**

As employees are usually notified in advance that their appraisal is approaching, they have no excuse for being surprised or unprepared for a date with their manager. However, an anticipated performance review can be overlooked or forgotten as unfortunately not all companies are progressive enough to implement them formally.

**O'Hare suggests employees should knock on their manager's door: "It gives a really good message about your desire to improve, your desire to do the right things and do a good job. It speaks volumes about you, the employee, if you take interest and care enough."**

Often when using standard appraisal forms, a manager will review the previous year's work and what goals and objectives have been achieved. Employees will be asked how they believe their performance went.

Quinlan advises that employees should prepare for the meeting by having thought about what their achievements have been, what their future challenges may be and what they see as their own development needs.

**O'Hare recommends employees back up what they have to say with evidence. "They should have examples of any objectives they haven't achieved and give explanations for them." It is also important for each employee to know what they like about the job and to be confident as to what their on-the-job strengths are.**

**"Be honest about any areas you think you need to improve, or where you might need some training and development and give some evidence on why this is important", adds O'Hare.**

**It is important, she reiterates, that the employee is the one with plenty of examples of their performance during the year, should they be faced with an unprofessional and unprepared manager.**

Employees should be talking 60-70% of the time and come out as if they have conducted a good interview.

"It is a formal opportunity for open and clear discussion", said Quinlan. "The participants sit down as two individuals and discuss what has been delivered and what has been really done well."

Appraisals, she adds, are more about going forward than backwards and should be seen from both sides as an adult-to-adult conversation. "It is important that both understand why it is taking place", she said.

A performance overview is part of an organisations overall performance management system, which is used to see how employees are fitting in and matching the employee and the organisations objectives.

**It is about praise and constructive feedback, says O'Hare, "The key emphasis on appraisal is praise, it's about you [the employee] getting positive or constructive feedback on how you are performing."**

There are other forms of review that do not solely rely on the views of a manager.

It could be said that 360-degree feedback is more like the Oscars, as it involves collecting perceptions of an employee's performance and workplace behaviours from colleagues at various levels in the organisation.

The technique is mainly used for employee development, leadership development, and /or career planning purposes.

Dr Alma McCarthy, a lecturer in the department of management, NUI Galway, whose recently completed PhD focused on 360-degree feedback, admits that some organisations have started using it for appraisal.

"Colleagues' assessments are used as an input into personnel decision-making such as promotion, succession planning, pay and bonus, and/or task assignment", she explained. When 360-degree feedback is used for performance appraisal, it is more challenging than using it purely for developmental purposes, she says.

One of the oft-cited advantages of 360 is in the use of multiple raters. It is argued this makes it more objective in some cases than having just one manager evaluate and rate performance. However, research indicates that they are less accurate when used this way.

“How honest would you be in rating a peer’s performance if you both might be competing with them for promotion in the near future” asked McCarthy? Potential problems can be addressed with proper training for both the recipients and the raters.

Once all involved are ware of how it should be properly conducted, concludes McCarthy, the system can work.

It can also be advantageous for the employee, especially where there is a clash of personalities with a manger. “Then the 360 can redress what might be an unfavourable assessment,” McCarthy said.

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