



TenStep Supplemental Paper

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Performance Appraisal Blues

A performance appraisal can be good or bad, depending on the employee. The appraisal, in theory, is designed to provide an orderly way for an employee's superior to interact with him, usually on an annual basis, to tell him what the company thinks about his job performance and how to improve it by pointing out key positives and negatives about his on-the-job performance over the past year.

Its primary mission is to give feedback to help employees strengthen their capabilities so that they can be more productive members of the organization, and in the process receive additional compensation or responsibility.

The review is used to convey both satisfaction with an employee's job performance (leading, hopefully, to a raise) and dissatisfaction (which could be the precursor to a demotion or even a termination).

To grow with an organization when an employee has received a less-than-sterling review, he has to learn to separate the "learning" areas from the "hurting" parts of the message (i.e. the personal or work related negatives). For the employee, the bottom line of a performance appraisal is often of a fairly short range.

Most employees come out of an appraisal that is critical of their performance understandably upset or angry. One important thing to remember is that the employee is still at the company (not applying for a job) so there's a lot they can do before resigning themselves to being terminated or being forced to leave.

Five keys to help employees to cope with and overcome a bad appraisal

- Employees should go in with a list of accomplishments that they have accumulated over the past year. They will be surprised at how much they have accomplished.
- They should go into the review assuming there will be some negatives, and think of the meeting as a way to learn what specific issues they have to work on to get to that next step. It's the boss' job to let the employees know about areas where they can improve, so the employee should try not to be offended. The employees' goal is to convince the supervisor, in a positive manner, that they are willing to make that commitment.
- Before going into a review, employees should separate a page into two columns. The first should be headed "Specific Areas of Strength"; the second, "Specific Areas of Improvement." It's very important that they hear both the good and the bad comments, because they will never improve, to their boss' satisfaction, if they deny, in their anger, that there are any areas needing improvement.
- Employees should ask for clarification and specific examples if they hear generalizations or don't understand what the problem is. But they should try hard not to be too argumentative.



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- Employees should find out how their boss might solve these issues, and ask for another review in 30 days to address these specific issues, to see if headway is being made.

Employees should remember that if they spend their time being hurt by or defensive about what is said, and not learning about what they can do to change their boss' perception, they are doing themselves a disservice.

What they should try to accomplish is to leave the meeting with a good idea of what they can do to improve their boss' perception of them, before the next appraisal. The employees should also create an image of a thoughtful employee who is willing to change and able to modify behavior.

Good jobs are hard to come by, and if employees like their job, this approach will help to give them a fighting chance to assess and correct areas that their supervisor feels may have been overlooked, without allowing personal feelings to dominate.