

How to Get a Glowing Performance Review

Not many of us get through the year without being tasked with supplying input for our annual performance review¹. It doesn't have to be as traumatic as you think. Through the years, I have found that it can be relatively painless if you prepare for it and handle it properly. Here's how I survive and thrive.

What have you been doing for the past year?

This simple question can strike fear in the hearts of even the most hard-working and conscientious employees. But, it's that time again. You've put it off as long as you can. Your boss wants to know what to include in your performance review. So, what *have* you been doing for the past year? Chances are, you are the only one who knows about each of your projects and accomplishments. If left to your boss to provide the input, will your review include a thorough list of your accomplishments? Probably not. When the boss is worried about writing the other twelve reviews she's responsible for, she may not remember the spectacular job you did on that giant project three months ago. Remind her.

Disappointed in what your boss includes in your review?

Although I received favorable reviews when I left it up to my boss, I have discovered that I get even better reviews by drafting the initial document myself. Seems like a no brainer. Most of us already provide a majority of the material that eventually becomes our final review. I save us both the time and trouble of reviewing several iterations by creating what I think is a good final draft. Then my manager perfects it. Keep in mind, the final product is only as good as the material provided to create it.

Afraid you'll get another mediocre review?

Any supervisor or manager assigned the task of writing performance reviews will probably tell you it isn't the most rewarding aspect of their job. Many managers are responsible for writing reviews for each of the employees in their group. How much time and effort will your manager have and put into yours when the time comes? Take the initiative and make your review reflect what you really do. If you supply boilerplate data and a mediocre description of your performance, that will become your final review. Make yourself stand apart from the rest. This can be especially important to employees who are given merit raises. Provide your manager the material she needs to write a review that you feel captures your true performance.

How do I consistently get good reviews?

I write them. Not because my boss doesn't want to do it, but because if I do it, she doesn't have to. I know what a great employee I am. I write a glowing review and she modifies, adds to, or tones down my version. She may not keep everything I write, but it's easier for her to remove whatever she doesn't want than it is for her to try coming up with all the good things I've done throughout the year. You are your own best advocate.

¹If your manager doesn't ask for input, take the initiative to provide the input when you know your review is being completed. If you don't receive an annual review, take the initiative to suggest that you'd like to have one. If you need guidance or help in generating your own performance review . . . ?? (will fill in website or other resources here)

Nobody knows what you do better than you know what you do. You know and can say the most wonderful things about yourself. Your performance is magnificent. Your clients are consistently pleased with your work. Your winning attitude helps people over the rough spots. Your drive keeps everyone running on the project. You successfully complete multiple simultaneous projects. You are capable of juggling even the most difficult clients with skill and tact. You're creative, efficient, effective, motivated, professional, energetic. Use descriptive and strong language to sell yourself and make your point. Just remember, you're responsible to be truthful and live up to what you write or it won't fly next year.

Where Do You Begin?

Take a look at last year's review. If you don't like what you see, rewrite it. If you like what you see, use it. No sense recreating the wheel. Modify what exists. Add all those wonderful things you've been doing for the past year. Nobody knows what you've done better than you know what you've done. Those of us who are fortunate enough to have access to a PC have the added bonus of being able to write our reviews on line (often in the company-supplied forms). How much easier could it be?

Ask a trusted friend, spouse, and/or co-worker to review your first draft. Each one can provide a different perspective, all which are vital to your overall performance. They can be objective about your performance. A co-worker might recommend that you include routine tasks you consider insignificant because you don't recognize the impact they have on your overall performance. A spouse might remind you about all the extra responsibilities you willingly took on this year. A friend might recall the difficult staff member you were able to motivate during an important project. It's all part of who you are and how you perform on the job. Remember, anything your manager deems insignificant or over the top can be removed.

What are your goals?

Nobody knows what you want to do better than you know what you want to do. What do you aspire to do or be? Draft a list of obtainable goals or objectives relevant to your current (or desired) position. Self-inflicted goals are our inspiration. Goals motivate us — especially when we see them in black and white. Like it or not, we are judged by what we accomplish, or worse, what we don't accomplish. Without goals or objectives, there is little that a manager can use to measure your progress. Be specific when outlining your goals. Name some specific classes you'd like to attend or request an assignment that you know will be a challenge. Make sure you do the research before you make vague requests. Knowing what you will gain and how you will be able to apply the results when doing your job shows that you truly are interested in enhancing your skills and capabilities. Take the initiative to set and consistently meet your own goals.

Blow, Gabriel, Blow?

Are you the first one to arrive and the last one to leave? You spend long hours when required, you're available and dedicated to your clients, you always go above and beyond typical expectations. Is your boss aware of it? Now is your chance to let her know. Don't continue to be the un- or under-appreciated employee. Provide specific examples

and the documentation to back up your claims. I keep a private file of my accomplishments and a list of noteworthy tasks I've performed to help me draft a credible performance review. Using vague phrases and unsupported statistics just won't cut it.

Blow your own horn. That's right. If you, like me, are uncomfortable singing your own praises in public gatherings, this is your time to make up for lost opportunities. To make certain that I don't forget anything of importance, I refer to my "Gabriel" file. It includes all of the internal and external memos, e-mail messages, and handwritten notes of thanks I've received for jobs well done. When I receive a voice message, I type it out (verbatim) and include it in my file. I track the number of monetary rewards, lunch invitations, and gifts received as thanks for my continued support. I also keep a list of seminars and classes I attend throughout the year and describe how they have enhanced and improved my performance. I include them all. No matter how insignificant I feel they might be. I've come to the conclusion that if I don't think I'm worthy of praise, no one else will. Do yourself a favor and write that review.

I often tell my two young sons, 'Nobody cares about your stuff as much as you care about your stuff.' New words to live by.

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