



Influence your evaluation process

“Control your own destiny or someone else will.” – Jack Welch

Remember, you own your career and everything that happens to it. Yes, the performance review cycle often presents special challenges and no, you can't gain total control and you can't mandate everything in your review. But you can take some important steps calculated to boost your results.

Before the meeting

Consider clues

A heightened sense of awareness board member priorities, values, and concerns is always valuable on many levels, but assessing them in the context your performance evaluation is particularly important. Prepare your self-evaluation assessments and reports with them in mind. Demonstrating your awareness and attributing significance to them conveys respect and can enhance trust and confidence.

Prepare and organize

Often achievements made early in a year fade or become overshadowed by new issues. To refresh your board's collective memory take time to craft a summary of your major accomplishments. Start by listing the year's goals and objectives and your progress toward meeting each of them. Then be sure to add achievement highlights that were not formally specified. Be forthright and accurate, but also be fair to yourself. Avoid appearing to make excuses; instead, offer objective analyses which include unforeseen conditions and new information. If board members are completing individual assessments of your performance and/or goal achievement prior to the formal evaluation meeting, you may wish to distribute this information with the evaluation form.

During the meeting

Take control

Avoid finding yourself in a defensive mode by doing your best to manage the focus and flow of the meeting. If leading the meeting is an option, take it. Beginning with your own assessment of your achievements gives you the opportunity to describe a comprehensive picture, complete with acknowledgements of any shortcomings and your plans to deal with them. This is very important because if others point them out first, your response can automatically appear defensive.

Be realistic and accept criticism

One of the important aspects of managing your evaluation is accepting criticism graciously. Remember, one person's concept of a high rating or an excellent evaluation is frequently very different from that of another. Further, there are many people in our world who subscribe to the "no person is perfect" philosophy and believe they have an obligation to identify areas of improvement regardless of the level of performance of the evaluatee. It is very important to be ready to graciously and calmly accept criticism and sincerely ask for clarifications. Studiously avoid appearing defensive. Remember, later you will have time to analyze comments and carefully decide next steps. Also remember that in the long term it is to your benefit to know what your board members see as your strengths and weaknesses

During and after the meeting

Clarify and record

Given that an evaluation is normally an annual event, don't forget that next year will come quickly. Too often recommendations or expectations are casually tossed out during spirited discussions but lost as the conversation moves on. One speaker may think his or her comment or idea was recognized and others may have varying interpretations of a suggestion or directive. It is very important that directives, goals, objectives or other expectations are fully clarified and developed and then recorded and validated by all concerned. Be sure all members have a copy of the document so that you are all on the same page. This will reduce the possibility of misunderstandings and mixed expectations that can negatively impact your next evaluation.

At the end of the meeting

Take the opportunity to demonstrate leadership

Establish your commitment to leadership by making clear that the evaluation is simply a moment to pause and reflect on achievements and improvement needs before continuing the move forward. Have a simple but cogent list of significant next steps that will build on accomplishments to date. Take care to be sure these reflect your board's philosophy and priorities. To acknowledge the importance of board member affirmation, you might point out that this is a preliminary draft and that you'll be soliciting board input individually or collectively at a later date.

Conclude the meeting

Show respect and appreciation

Thank your board members for their time and careful consideration. Even if you are still stinging from some remarks, focus on letting them know you value their commendations and recommendations and conveying your commitment to continuously improving as you and they move forward together. No matter how wonderful or disappointing the review, presenting oneself as a well-mannered professional always pays dividends.