

Winning at Performance Reviews

You've worked hard all year and are about to have your annual performance review. You know you deserve a good raise and feel you should receive your full bonus, but you know your boss will be constrained by the corporate budgets. How do you increase your chances of getting a fair outcome? Here are ten tips.

- 1. Understand that the game doesn't start the night before the review meeting.** You need to start playing the game at the beginning of the relevant year. Don't leave it until the last minute to try and put together the case for why you deserve to be top of the tree.
- 2. Agree on SMART goals at the beginning of the year.** Make sure you and your boss agree on specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound goals early in the year. Take the initiative on doing this so things don't drag on without clarity of your role and responsibilities. You must ensure that your key performance measures are clear, fair and sensible.
- 3. Do great work (and let people know about it).** You need to produce great work on a consistent basis. Apply yourself to your tasks to the best of your ability every day. Don't settle for second best. Keep pushing yourself to deliver on your potential. If you don't deliver your best work you can't expect to be rewarded as if you have. And don't be shy about letting people know what you've done. Everyone's busy, and in the absence of a bit of self promotion, they might not even notice your brilliance.
- 4. Provide Weekly Reports to your boss.** Provide short weekly reports (less than a page) that set out the key wins and the major challenges you've faced during the week. This will ensure your boss is kept aware of what's going on with a minimum of fuss. It also provides you with a great record to remind you of what you have been doing.
- 5. Provide Monthly Reports to your boss.** Provide slightly more detailed monthly reports (no longer than 2 pages) that are linked to your agreed work plan and key performance indicators (KPIs). Again, make sure you spell out your key wins and the major challenges. You should also set out what your key focus will be for the following month. These reports will provide you with a great record of your achievements during the year.
- 6. Listen carefully.** During the year and during the performance review, listen carefully to what your boss has to say and demonstrate that you have done so. Bosses like it when their team members take the time to genuinely listen to what they have to say and treat them with respect. Whatever you do, don't cut your boss off or talk over the top of them. This never goes down well.
- 7. Ask questions.** Listening carefully gives you the right to ask questions. Make sure you seek clarification when you don't understand something. Gently and politely

challenge your boss on their reasoning or approach where you think it is appropriate to do so. When done respectfully, this earns big points.

8. **Welcome criticism, but don't be afraid to push back.** Part of the role of your boss is to provide you with feedback, both positive and negative. Whatever you do, don't get defensive when you get the inevitable negative feedback. Take it on the chin and accept that there is probably some basis for the observation. But if you do think it is a little unfair, don't be afraid to politely push back. Thank them for the feedback and acknowledge that you can understand how they have formed that view. Then gently explain why the situation has arisen and why you acted in the way you did or made the decision in question. Often your boss will not have appreciated the complexity of the situation or seen the world from your perspective.
9. **Prepare thoroughly for the Review Meeting.** Don't walk into your performance review thinking you can ad lib your way through. Take the time to put together a comprehensive summary of your achievements for the year against your agreed KPIs. Then send your boss a copy of this document 3-5 days prior to the meeting. Not only will this reinforce what a good operator you are, it will give your boss the chance to actually reflect prior to the meeting on what a great job you have done during the year.
10. **Relax, be respectful and stay confident.** At the meeting itself it's important to be relaxed and confident. Your preparation and great work during the year will mean that you will have every right to feel this way. Remember to succinctly highlight your achievements and welcome any criticism as an opportunity to develop further or improve on the situation in question. Finally, don't be afraid to respectfully push back when you feel you have a right to do so. If you don't, you'll always regret it.

Mark Rosenberg is a leadership strategist and executive coach with Balanced Curve, www.balancedcurve.com.