

You are totally responsible for you

It is a great mistake to think that anyone is as interested in your career as you are. Once you are past first-line management, you have to work out where you want to go and how to get there. Use the annual appraisal to get your boss's agreement to what you want to do.



Give your boss an easy time.

Even if you have a very open relationship with your boss the annual appraisal is vital to your career plan. Do the preparation and preferably do it better than your boss. No one is as dedicated to your career as you. No one is as good as you at knowing what skills you need. Help your boss along by working all that out before the appraisal interview.

Get yourself ready and in the right frame of mind by asking yourself these questions:

- What value have you added to your job?
- Where is it that you would like to go?
- What do you need to do to get there?
- Why should your boss support these plans? What's in it for her?

Here's an idea for you...

Lots of managers like to broadcast the fact that they don't really take the appraisal system seriously, that they have done no prep and that the whole thing will be over in twenty minutes. Encourage this thinking, agree that it's a ritual and that only the salary review has any significance. And then go home and do the preparation assiduously.

Answering these questions before an appraisal interview will mean that you will make the most productive use of this great opportunity to talk about yourself. Remember, this is your career, not your organisation's. Take ownership of that career and impress your boss with your motivation and determination. If you've got a clear idea of your career strategy you'll be much more impressive than an employee who agrees to whatever is suggested and has no proposals of his or her own. More or less writing your own appraisal should make life easier for your boss as well.

SELL THEM ON YOUR IDEAS FOR YOUR CAREER

While your career is your own, remember also that you are a team player in an organisation with its own aims and strategies. It is an entity in its own right and this must be reflected in the way you express yourself during an appraisal interview. That is why the question 'why should your boss support these plans?' is so important. You need to be able to prove that you are a valuable asset to the organisation and that if it invests in you, you will become even more valuable. Start from the very top. What words can you use that link your activities with the fundamental vision or mission of the organisation you work for? Then come down through the division and eventually to your boss.

Another key thing to remember at appraisal time is that the person interviewing you is not an unidentifiable member of the corporate zoo; she is in fact a person with her own ambitions and career plans. Be sensitive to this. Do not alienate your boss by appearing to be more ambitious, more clued up, more prepared to succeed than her (even if it's true). What you are trying to do is to get your boss to adopt your plan, which you present subtly and sensitively, because she can see how it is going to make her look good. You do not need to ram this down her throat; she can work it out.

A little flattery can go along way. If you're feeling particularly outrageous, you could even suggest that one day you hope to attain the giddy heights of responsibility that your boss has (although this one takes a firm jaw, a straight face and a very sincere stance to get away with it).

You may already have a job purpose statement or job description agreed with your employer. If not, the appraisal is a splendid opportunity to define your own. If you already have a job purpose statement, expand on it to ensure that your future career aspirations are as easy as possible to achieve.

Some managers are genuinely hated round the organisation. There can be a huge benefit in including them among the people you want to go to work for. See IDEA 16, Try working for a nineteenth-century mill owner.

Try another idea...

'Always take every opportunity offered to receive training. Give careful thought to your training needs before any appraisal interview.'

GEORGE PAUL, Chairman, Norwich Union

Defining idea...

How did
it go?

Q I did the preparation thoroughly, went in and showed it. My boss said I was being too inflexible, that I had prejudged the result of the interview and that she had some ideas for me as well. How do I recover?

A Yes, you have a boss who prepares carefully as well. You probably hit her with too many ideas and surprises at once. It's not easy, but having decided the route you want to take, you needed to help her to feel that actually it was all her idea. The situation you are in now means that you are going to have to take her suggestions very seriously at least for the present. Next time talk to her during the two to three weeks before your career discussion. Suggest some possibilities, leak one or two aspirations, and thank and congratulate her when she comes to a conclusion that suits you.

Q I wrote my job description and it went down well with my boss. It does mean that a number of people in the team need to change how they work with me. How do I tell them about that without getting up their noses?

A Don't. Get your boss to do it. In fact, encourage your boss to launch the new way of doing things as though it was all his idea. That way any unhappiness in the team will be aimed at him.

Q Appraisal, what appraisal? What do you do if the organisation has no formal appraisal system?

A Pretend it does. Organise regular meetings with your boss and make sure you discuss your performance and your career at them. Hey, if you keep away from the dreaded 'appraisal' word you could be the only person in the organisation using such meetings to their advantage.