10 ways to get the most out of your appraisal

Performance appraisals are like a rite of passage in the world of work. As employees, we're often involved in them whether we like it or not. But how often do you think about how to get the most out of them? Here are 10 tips for doing just that:

1. **Acknowledge that it's necessary**
   Feedback is the best way of ascertaining whether we're getting better at what we do and providing us with clear objectives for the future to help us progress our careers.

2. **Think about context**
   You need to think about how good your manager is at this type of process. How are appraisals conducted in your department? Is it a dull, routine activity that people shy away from or is it more vibrant? They are an opportunity for you to explore where you want to go, alongside understanding what the options may be. You get to gather evidence about your past performance and think about what you want in the future.

3. **Assess your attitude towards your job**
   An appraisal gives you many opportunities to plan what you want to do next in your work, so grasp those opportunities with both hands. Don't go through your appraisal just for the sake of it. Consider what the value of the process is to you. Is it something that you look forward to or is it the complete opposite? If you're serious about your current role, you need to make the most of it. If not, then it's a good time to consider whether the role is right for you.

4. **Make a wish list**
   What do you want from your appraisal? A possible road map of your future career? Maybe you're looking to build your confidence or get a sense of your future in the University and any training you might want to do. You might want to ask what opportunities to learn and develop are there going to be in the future.

5. **Make sure it happens**
   The Clinical School asks you to have an annual appraisal. If you're due your appraisal, but don't get it, you may have to insist. Speak face-to-face with your appraiser (usually, but not always, your line manager) and explain why you feel it's important and agree a time to have the discussion. If you still aren't offered an appraisal talk to the HR team.

6. **Prepare**
   Preparing for the appraisal is vital. Gather together relevant information – particularly anything that meets your objectives – and source evidence to show you're doing your job successfully. If you're doing lots of different tasks or projects, make a record of them all. Be really clear about what you want out of the discussion. If you want to cover particular things, let your manager know beforehand and agree how long the discussion is likely to last. If you have a lot to cover, you could suggest two sessions rather than one long meeting. Type up your proposed agenda with suggestions for timings so that you spend the right proportion of time on what matters.
   Be really specific about details so that when you're in the appraisal meeting, you can say, "In June, I did X, Y and Z..." At the meeting, take along examples and you could also bring feedback from someone you've worked with about what you've contributed.
   Also make sure you write down what you think your career development needs are, as a starting point for discussion.
7. Follow up
Notes should be written on your appraisal both by you and your manager. These are not just a record; they should be actively used during the year to ensure your key targets are met.

8. Consider your future
At or after your appraisal, set out a plan and get it signed off by your manager. Map out your future at the organisation – even if your manager isn’t actively involved in this.
Keep your manager in the loop, though. For example, you could tell your manager that following discussions in your appraisal, you plan on doing certain aspects of your work differently, or taking on new responsibilities, and will report back with the results.

9. Be persistent
If your manager doesn't stick to promises made during the appraisal, you may well need to follow up with him/her again. Your manager is busy and you may be one of many going through this process, so you need to take responsibility and make sure you get what you need. Managers are often busy, but good managers always find time for their people and for their career development. If you are worried that your manager is not giving you any support or is treating you unfairly, raise the issue again, and if necessary take your concerns to a more senior level.

10. Get feedback regularly
Your work life never stays static, so it's important to make sure your feedback is regular, and not confined to the formal appraisal process. If you need feedback more regularly, ask if you can arrange regular feedback sessions such as 1:1s. You could ask other people, such as your colleagues, senior managers, or mentor.

Adapted by Vicky Smallbone from material by Simon North founder of Position Ignition and the Career Ignition Club

More information about the Clinical School’s Appraisal Scheme, including forms, can be found here.

The University offers an online training course: Effective Staff Review and Development: Online which can help both appraiser and appraisee to get the most out of the appraisal process.