

# Assess Your Assessment

Good or bad, now that the review process is over, plan your strategy accordingly. It's time to read the appraisal letter yet again. This time, between the lines



:: Neha Dewan & Sunanda Poduwal

**A**fter an appraisal cycle, the office becomes bipolar. There are two distinct groups: the haves and the have-nots. Or the happy and the disgruntled. Whispered voices fill office aisles and new allegiances are formed based on the annual rating ritual.

Aditya Rajput, project manager with Wipro, is part of the unhappy gang. The 30-year-old executive feels his appraisal was botched by a biased supervisor. Assessed favourably for the last three cycles, he says his manager's obvious prejudice towards people from the South worked against him. For now, he's feeling cheated. Such reactions are common in the month after the appraisal cycle. Team leaders and supervisors become super-villains or super-heroes. Company practices are lauded or lambasted. After a few weeks, the chatter dies down. And life goes on as usual.

Don't discuss the appraisal with your colleagues. They can only offer emotional support

But this is not how it should be. This is the time for an objective analysis of your assessment. You must sit with your manager and discuss the implications of your evaluation. If you have bagged a big raise or a promotion, you need to chart the course for the next year. If you think the company has been unfair, compare notes to understand why there was a

mismatch in judgement. Here are a few tips to help you with the post-mortem:

## If the News is Bad...

There is more that you can do apart from accusing your boss of being unfair. Many companies have grievance handling mechanisms to address such complaints. "Even if there is no formal mechanism, employees can approach the boss' boss," says NS Rajan, partner and global leader (people and organisation), Ernst & Young. You can also take the HR route and meet your line HR manager.

What do you say in such meetings? First, ask the super-boss to decode your rating. In which areas have you not met expectations? At times there is a mismatch between perception and actual work. If so, approach your supervisor armed with data about your work.

Once you understand the areas where you need to work harder, seek help to make a detailed road map for the year to come. Break up your goals for each quarter to assess progress. Remember, bosses like to know that you are interested in improving your performance.

One caveat: follow protocol. Fix up a formal time mentioning that you need to discuss and clarify expectations. Give the manager time to prepare for the conversation. "Be polite and don't get worked up," says Manish Kumar, head, human resources, Kotak Securities.

Also, desist from comparing your evaluation with that of other team members. End the meeting on a positive note but with clarity on

what you expect from your manager and what the company expects of you. Jappreet Sethi, vice-president (human resources), Jones Lang LaSalle India, has another tip: "Don't talk a lot about the appraisal with your colleagues. They can only offer emotional support."

## If the News is Good...

By all means pop the bubbly. You worked hard for a year and it's time to reap the dividends. But don't sit on your laurels. "Employees with a positive appraisal must discuss the way forward with their supervisor," says Sanjay Gupta, global head of HR, EXL Service.

Sethi advises that you write a note of appreciation to your manager or the HR. Then get down to business. If you have been promoted, now is the time to discuss what the new role means. Will it involve more executive functions or different projects? Will people report to you?

Those who received a hefty pay hike must find out how to improve work further. What should you aim for this year? Are there new responsibilities?

Most importantly, follow up on the strategies that you build during these tête-à-têtes. Review your performance and targets every quarter. Offices are dynamic and it may happen that your goals need to be realigned. "The employee should continue to upgrade skills. This requires being connected with latest theories and industry practices," says Sethi. So whether you are happy or sad, don't stop working hard.

(Some names changed on request)

## After the Appraisal

### Do...

**Try and understand.** There could be a gap between company's expectations & your performance. If you aren't satisfied with the assessment, fix up a meeting with the boss

**Focus on yourself.** Don't bother with how others have done. Comparisons & resultant envy is inevitable but dwelling on it is counter-productive

**Rejoice.** But remember what was good this year might not be good enough next year. Don't sit on your laurels

**Take on more responsibility.** It's essential to stand out in the crowd. Make sure your extra work is noticed. Discuss your new responsibilities with the manager and keep him in the loop about your projects

### Don't...

**Get worked up.** It will not serve any purpose. Instead, it might spoil matters by making you bitter and maybe even lead to a hasty decision

**Discuss with co-workers.** They may give emotional support but can't be of any real help. Instead, approach your boss

**Take the matter to super boss immediately.** A single assessment is not a barometer to assess whether the organisation is being fair with you. But if the nagging feeling persists, approach higher authorities

**Wait for feedback.** The company may not come up with processes for faster feedback. Approach your supervisor for feedback on your own

**Share your increment numbers.** Leaking of these numbers is not viewed favourably by a professional organisation