

# How to prepare for your job appraisal?

As we approach the end of calendar year 2006 and the last quarter of this financial year, the pressures must be running high in corporate circles to catch up with your sales and other business objectives. Performance is directly related to your career prospects and hence the anxiety as to what will happen in the next appraisal. While you need to do everything possible in your commitment and efforts to achieve your objectives, by focusing and preparing well for your appraisal, you can increase your prospects in the organization.

An appraisal process has several benefits to the employee as well as to the organization. With globalization, competition is increasing and organizations are getting more professional, making an appraisal process mandatory. Appraisal process is an integral part of overall Performance Management System and other components are, Planning for Performance; Managing Performance and Rewarding Performance.

In this series on career guidance, we will see how an employee can prepare for a job appraisal and effectively present his case. The frequency of a formal appraisal process depends on each organization and can be at monthly, quarterly, half yearly or yearly frequency. However, most commonly used frequency is yearly.

## **1. Objective of appraisal**

All appraisal processes attempts to objectively assess an employee's performance vis-à-vis corporate objectives, individual objectives and performance of team or peer groups. The appraisal process is directly related to an organization's promotion and compensation policy as well as the organizational objectives and hence the importance of this subject. The appraisal process also evaluates the skill sets of an employee for current and future positions. Therefore this has direct implications for training requirements too.

## **2. Insider perspective**

Being part of the process for over 25 years, I find the inner perspective of corporate on the appraisal has many dimensions. Often the conflicts are very apparent with the desire to compensate adequately and competitively with the need to keep human resources cost in check. And there will be pressures and counter pressures functionally across the organization. In general organizations will be willing to raise its human resources cost upto the level of increase in its revenue and not beyond. In the final analysis, the overall funds available for appraisal decisions will be predetermined and the appraisal process enables the allocation.

## **3. Appraisal - an opportunity**

From an employee's perspective, appraisal process presents a unique opportunity to discuss performance and related issues as well as current and future prospects. If you understand and prepare, you can present your case well. So, instead of sweating and fretting with the thought of the appraisal, relax and start preparing well.

## 4. Methods of appraisal

The most common methods of appraisal are:

- a. **Appraisal by superior:** The most traditional and conventional method, is still used by many organizations.
- b. **Self/Superior appraisal:** This is a slightly advanced method where the appraisee and appraiser both evaluate independently but discuss and agree mutually. The freedom to an appraiser is greater and communication is more open in this method.
- c. **360°:** This is a highly advanced method where subordinates, peer groups and superior, appraise every employee, apart from the employee himself. To implement this method objectively, an organization and its employees have to go through a period of intense training and consultations. Also, the organization and the employees need to be mature in handling this appraisal.

While every method of appraisal has its merits and demerits, irrespective of the method, the need to prepare well, is mandatory from an employees perspective.

## 5. Preparation

- a. **Appraisal documentation:** Have a look at the evaluation forms irrespective of the appraisal process. This will make you understand the evaluation factors and process better and is the first step in your preparation.
- b. **Review objective:** Look at your quantitative and qualitative business objectives [in short the objectives set or your key result areas- KRA's] for the year. Focus for a while on the circumstances under which these objectives were set and the assumptions made. Often wrong assumptions lead to variations in performance. For example, if you assumed that your industry will grow by 15% PA and your objectives were set accordingly at let's say 20% and if the industry grew slower or faster, would affect your performance and the appraisal process.
- c. **Review performance:** Review your individual performance against objectives set, performance of your peer groups, and the overall organization. In the event of your performance being lower than the set objectives, you have to evaluate if your performance is above atleast your peer groups.
- d. **Determine factors/reasons for variation:** Generally there are variations in performance as related to the objectives. Analyze, identify and classify these reasons or factors into:
  - i. **External:** External factors over which you had no control and perhaps even your organization.
  - ii. **Internal:** Internal factors over which you had no control but your organization had control.

- iii. **Individual:** Factors which are purely related to YOU. It could be your lack of commitment, focus or efforts or whatever. This is something very important for every employee to analyze and identify. Because only this can change dramatically your performance.
- e. Corrective steps
  - i. **External:** Obviously, you have no control over external factors. However, given the current situation, make reasonable assumptions.
  - ii. **Internal:** Feel free and give suggestions for improvement in systems, policies, processes or whatever. This is your chance to evaluate your organization and offer constructive and objective suggestions.
  - iii. **Personal:** You have to decide on an action plan for yourself, which should include increased efforts, commitment and process improvements. A good way to begin would be to identify factors for success of your co employees.
- f. Make notes: Irrespective of the depth of your preparation, you cannot afford to depend on your memory. One unexpected question in the appraisal meeting can make you forget all your preparations. So, do make detailed notes on all your preparations. This will look professional too.

## 6. The appraisal meeting

- a. The feelers: Much before the appraisal process actually begins and during the process in the organization, there are feelers within the organization. It could be from your HR, superiors or co employees [or the cronies of the superiors] who have gone through the process. It's important to be in the loop as organizational politics is not uncommon.
- b. Take the initiative: In the appraisal meeting with your immediate superior or superiors, it may be a good idea to take the initiative and break the ice. Briefly you can talk about how the organization has fared during the year and compliment the collective efforts. It's also good to mention that you have been looking forward for this meeting so that an objective appraisal can be done and look at improvement plans. This would instantaneously place you in a very positive domain, irrespective of your performance.
- c. Be confident: Your confidence irrespective of your performance is the key. Your confidence level is at a natural high, if you have done really well. However, your confidence should be equally high, even if your performance is not upto the expected levels, simply because you have already analyzed, identified and classified the reasons for variations. And often, there are reasons which are beyond your individual control. And for reasons attributable to yourself, you have an action plan made and ready for discussion.
- d. Look professional: Do remember that it's always good to dress for your next position. In other words, dress just like your superiors. Increasingly, grooming is gaining importance and hence you must invest adequately and dress smart.

Also be a professional. Listen carefully, look eye to eye with the superiors and make notes of questions raised and refer your notes as often as you require.

- e. Types of appraisers: Some untrained superiors might be extremely aggressive and look at this as an opportunity to pounce on you. While no organization would support such behavior, it may be a fact of life. Fear nothing, as you have prepared well logically. Aggressive appraisers can easily be handled by facts, figures and logics. However, it may be more difficult to handle objective and knowledgeable appraisers, who are well informed and prepared as well as you. In such cases, the appraisal process takes the format of an ideal situation and extremely productive from an organization's perspective. Agree to act wherever constructive suggestions are given and present your views fearlessly and confidently.
- f. Typical questions: Generally, superiors are fond of asking a few open ended questions to assess various factors. Some of these could be:
  - i. How do you assess your performance? [on a scale of 1 to 5]
  - ii. How do you compare your performance this year as compared to last year? [or your peer groups etc]
  - iii. What have been your significant contributions to the organization?
  - iv. What are your strengths and weaknesses?
  - v. What are your suggestions for improvement in the organization?
  - vi. Do you feel satisfied in your current job profile?
  - vii. What are the reasons for various manpower related problems such as high turnover, inability to attract and retain talent, etc?
  - viii. Your feedback related to other organizational issues.

Be open, frank and balanced in expressing yourself. However, where you have to communicate certain negative factors or reasons, communicate them tactfully.

- g. Clear all doubts: As an employee, you will have doubts and clarifications. This would be a good forum for you to raise and clear them.
- h. Discuss career prospects / job profile / financial benefits: Place financial benefits in the background and instead focus more on career prospects. Do remember that financial benefits accrue naturally with career progress. However, if you are in financial difficulties and or personal problems, inform the superiors and where the attitude is very human, you can request how the organization can help you overcome the problems. Suggest ways and means to make more contributions from yourself to the organization. Inform your career plans and ambitions and that you are looking forward to pursue them through the organization.
- i. Course of action: At the end of the appraisal process, there has to be clarity about what actions you need to take to improve your performance. Simultaneously, look at training requirements to upgrade your skills and decide the plan of action for you and the organization.

## **7. Conclusion**

A good appraisal process has to end equally well. You must sincerely thank your superiors for their time, support and suggestions for future. Do assure that you will sincerely try to implement everything that was discussed and that you look forward to the organization reciprocating from their side.

Every organization lays a lot of emphasis on retaining employees as a high turnover is unhealthy. An employee should also work for a reasonable time with an organization, understand the industry and improve skill sets and cope with the needs of the organization. An effective appraisal process is therefore a key to the success of the individual and the organization.