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Bounce

BACK

How To Bounce Back From A Negative Performance Review

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Bounce Back

How to bounce back from a negative performance review.

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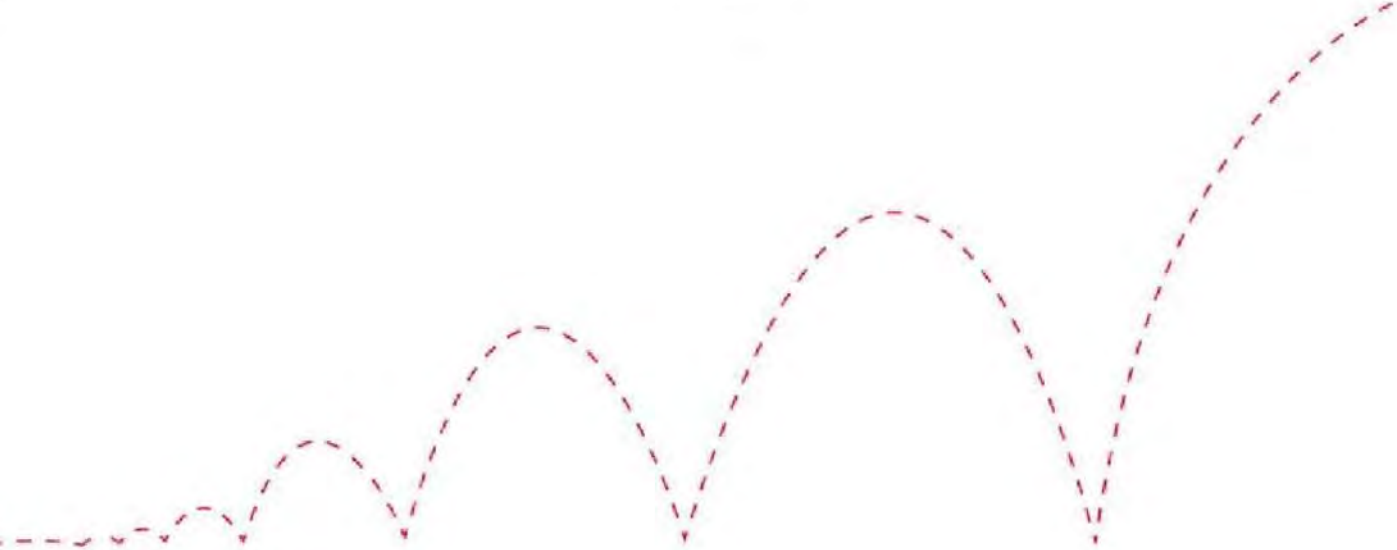
Many of us have received negative feedback as part of a performance review and we may have responded poorly. Whether it was one small comment for improvement in the midst of an overwhelmingly positive review or if it was a devastatingly awful review, your response can mean the difference between an opportunity for growth or an expedited trip to the unemployment office. Ultimately your response is within your control, even if you feel like it is all up to management.

So what do you do if you are faced with negative feedback during a performance review?

The first thing you need to do is silence that all-too-human impulse to immediately launch into a defense of your actions. There are a number of reasons to wait in your response. It will allow you to gather your thoughts, step back emotionally and respond more calmly. In addition, a pause gives you a moment to reflect on the veracity of the statement. The truth of the matter is that most negative feedback has a kernel of truth in it, even if much of it is blown out of proportion. Finally this pause allows you to consider how best to mitigate the damage of this review and how to respond in such a way that you turn this conversation into a potential learning experience and career growth.

How long do you wait? Well it depends on the type of criticism. Let's look at some examples...

"You are always late to work." Well, is it true? Are you late pretty regularly? This is criticism that can be looked at objectively. If the answer is yes, then acknowledge the criticism and consider what can be done differently. Can you arrive on time? If so, state that you apologize for the inconvenience and that you will make a greater effort to ensure that you arrive on time in the future. If it has gone beyond that point, offer to provide a report indicating your arrival times each week. If, however, circumstances are going to prevent you from arriving on time in the future, acknowledge that fact up front and see if there are other options, such as changing your start time, working later to offset the late time, sharing desk



coverage with someone else, etc. In other words, look for mutually beneficial solutions that acknowledge, “yes this is a problem and I recognize that it is a problem. How can we work together to solve this situation in a way that will work for both of us?”

“Your attitude stinks.” This is a tough one. Why? Because of course it is entirely subjective. When you are faced with subjective criticism, especially personal criticism, it’s especially important to have time to evaluate the comment. The easiest way to do this is to very calmly state “I see. Can you please provide some examples of what you have observed, so I have a better idea of what you mean?”

If they can’t provide examples this highlights the flaw in their comment and will make them defensive. Your goal should not be to start an argument but to be able to come to a mutual understanding of the comment and then discuss what needs to happen next.

Responding With Dignity

If they can provide examples, listen to them carefully and acknowledge the feelings and perceptions of the other person. Very often, “truth” is not what actually happened. “Truth” is what the other person perceived to have happened. If your boss thinks you are cold and unfriendly, it doesn’t matter that you think you are professional. This is not one of those situations where you nurse your pride in wounded silence. You need to take this opportunity to learn and adapt to your boss’ style. After hearing your boss out, ask for an example of how you could have responded differently that would have been more appropriate. The key to this type of criticism is to try to set up some objective criteria (i.e. we want you to say hello to people when they greet you in the morning) for judging instead of the subjective

(you’re grumpy).

At this point in the review, you have several options. Most companies require that an employee sign the review, which verifies that they received it, but does not necessarily indicate that they agree with the review. What many employees don’t realize is that they have the right to add a comment expressing their disagreement with the performance review, possibly adding a note of explanation and providing some justification to offset the criticism.

Performance Review Plan

Try to work with your manager on a performance improvement plan that will meet both of your needs. Your best approach is to respond in a professional manner, accepting responsibility where necessary, without going out of your way to make yourself look bad.

A performance review that suggests improvement would be a prime opportunity to request training. If your boss indicates that you make too many mistakes when sending out correspondence for instance, you could respond defensively and insult his skills as a manager; however, this would certainly not be the best way to get him to work with you to resolve the situation. Instead consider stating, “Thank you for that feedback. I can understand how frustrating it is when correspondence goes out with errors. This is an area where I would like to improve. I think it would be helpful if I attended a training class to brush up on my proofreading skills. Shall I research the local options that are available?”

This response acknowledges the boss’ statement of improvement needed, accepts responsibility without unnecessarily dwelling on your flaws, indicates your desire to respond positively, and provides a solution that will benefit both you and the company.

When you start to practice this technique of stepping back to evaluate the actual comment made, acknowledging the way your manager feels about the issue, expressing your desire to improve and suggesting ways to do so, you build a partnership with your boss that can enhance your working relationship.

Sometimes the strain in a relationship comes down to trust. Perhaps you have made a mistake (whether within

your control or not) and your manager no longer completely trusts that you will be able to do the task as desired. It's critical to address that issue forthrightly. Acknowledge the errors that were made in a professional manner and then advise what you plan to do differently going forward. You may ask for a weekly update meeting where you can give your boss brief verbal updates on status. The key is to approach this subject as a team member who wants to ensure that your boss is pleased with the final outcome and that you will do what is necessary to ensure it happens correctly.

There may come a point where you recognize that things simply aren't working. No matter how many update meetings are held or reports issued or training received, for whatever reason, you and your boss simply don't click. It's not necessarily a reflection upon either of you.

One of the best possible scenarios is to transfer within the company to where your talents are better suited. Andrea Turner, CPS/CAP of Motorola took advantage of her performance review response area to note that she and her boss did not appear to be a compatible team and she thought it would be best for both if she would be allowed to search for another position within the company. Her manager agreed. She went on to other positions within the company and has found managers that, as she puts it, "have given her the

excellent reviews that she knew she was capable of, provided her with job satisfaction and fulfilled professional growth."

As a worst case scenario, it may be necessary to move outside the company in order to find the type of position that is best suited to your strengths and talents. If you choose that course of action, be sure not to burn any bridges behind you. Don't badmouth that employer in interviews at any time (present or future). You never know when that boss might leave the company and you might want to return or when your former boss might go work for your new company or when you might need a reference. It's far better for your career development if you leave with your head held high and on a positive note.

Every performance review, whether positive or negative, gives you an opportunity for professional growth and improvement, if you seek out that silver lining and are willing to learn a new life lesson.

About the author:

Marie Herman, CIWD, ATM-S, MCAS operates a successful business, MRH Enterprises (www.mrhenterprises.com), whose services include teaching computer and cooking classes live and via the internet, writing articles, and conducting workshops and speaking engagements. She can be reached at isap@mrhenterprises.com

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