

# Surviving a Bad Performance Review

By Chris Palmer and Matthew Lucas

Performance reviews can either be treated as a necessary evil, something you just have to suffer through at your job every year, or as an opportunity to touch base with reality and identify the weak spots in your work. Maybe this year your review wasn't all that glowing, and you feel demoralized after your faults have been brought up for discussion. But you don't have to respond defensively or let it eat at you. Here are some questions you can ask yourself that may help you turn a bad performance review into a positive opportunity:

## 1. What's the purpose of a performance review?

Remember that you're not being reviewed just to make you feel better about yourself. The purpose of the review is to make sure everyone is working at the level they should. Sometimes this means hearing bad news. If you understand this and try to remain as objective as you can, you'll be ready to accept bad news and turn it into positive action.

## 2. What's the emotion in the room?

There are two sets of emotions you should be concerned with during your performance review: your own and your manager's. Try to keep from getting defensive or angry. It won't be productive and will just make the situation worse. Instead, pay attention to what your manager's emotions are. Are they delivering bad news with optimism and genuine caring for your welfare? Or is your manager in a pessimistic mood reflecting negative, fed-up, or even rancorous feelings? This can tell you a lot about how much your boss expects of you, and whether he is angling to eventually fire you, or whether he sincerely wants to nurture and mentor you so you can become a star performer.

## 3. What are some specific examples?

Be sure to ask your manager for specific examples of the areas in which they feel you can improve. Examining your own performance broadly after hearing some general feedback may not be enough for you to make an effort to change. Sometimes you may know exactly what you're doing that led to the negative feedback, but not always. Make sure you understand exactly what needs to change or you'll only be setting yourself for another bad review.

## 4. What can I do next?

Thank your manager for taking the time to review your performance, then really examine his or her comments. Suggest a follow-up meeting to go over the comments if you don't understand them or how to change. Develop an action plan with your manager. This will show them that you are engaged and ready to improve.

Above all, walk out of your performance review with the purpose of setting new goals. Everyone has room for improvement, and sometimes it takes a bit of a reality check to jumpstart your effort. A bad performance review doesn't have to be such a downer. Set goals to be a better employee and turn negative feedback into an opportunity!

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