

Self-Evaluations: The Key To Career Development

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After the end of the fiscal year, many companies ask employees to complete self-evaluations. These self-evaluations are then reviewed by the employee's manager and, often times, included in the employee's annual performance appraisal and personnel file in HR.

While many people scoff at this process and don't take it seriously, it can actually be a great opportunity to increase communication between you and your boss and improve your career development. Just like with most things in life, the more effort you put into your self-evaluation, the more you'll get out of the entire performance appraisal process.

This year, try taking a new approach with an invigorated attitude:

Carve out "me" time to contemplate your career. Sure, you could write your self-evaluation sitting at your desk at work. But if you're like me, you'll likely get interrupted many times, making it almost impossible to focus.

Instead, try sitting down with a cup of coffee (everything's easier with coffee) outside of work, such as on a weekend morning when you're energetic and clear-minded. Your career and personal development is well worth the effort, so don't skimp on the amount of time you allow yourself to write your self-evaluation.

Honestly consider your strengths and weaknesses. Brainstorm a list of your strengths and the tasks or skills you enjoy the most. Feeling good? Then take a few deep breaths, let go of your ego and emotions, and take an honest look at areas where you could improve.

Improvement areas might include time management skills, speaking in front of groups, leading projects or even improving processes. Consider feedback you've received from others during the year and think about any areas where you've struggled or felt you could have done better.

Think about where you'd like to be in five years. Define your career aspirations. What's the next job or promotion you'd like?

Research what it will take to be successful. Once you know where you'd like to be in five years, go find out what it will take to be successful in that position. What knowledge, skills, education and experience are necessary?

Determine your gaps and create a career development plan. Analyze and determine any gaps between where you are now and where you want to be. Do you need any additional training or education? Are there any other skills you'll need to acquire? Write these down, as these will become the actions within your career development plan.

Brainstorm the support you'd like from your boss. During 2014, how would you like your boss to help you with your career development efforts? Do you want him or her to provide you with opportunities to lead challenging projects, to improve broken processes, to hone your public speaking skills or to pay for a class on time management?

Within your self-evaluation, include your strengths, weaknesses, career aspirations, gap analysis, career development actions for 2014 and the type of support you'd prefer from your manager. Then use all of this information to have a meaningful discussion with your boss during the annual performance evaluation process. After it's over, you'll be glad you spent the time and put in the effort, I promise.

