

ON THE JOB**Lobbying for Your Bonus**

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Every autumn, managers nationwide decide whom to reward with merit raises and bonuses, and what it will take for employees to earn pay increases in the coming year.

This means employees need to start lobbying managers now. Remind the boss of this year's accomplishments, and emphasize all the ways you've "exceeded expectations," to use performance-evaluation lingo. Just as important, make time to understand -- and maybe try to shape -- your boss's expectations for next year.

Compensation is increasingly being linked to performance, as companies try to control costs without alienating top performers. For instance, employees who "far exceeded expectations" will get an average merit increase of 5.6% this year, while employees who did not meet expectations will get a raise of just 0.4%, according to Watson Wyatt Worldwide's 2007/2008 Global Strategic Rewards Report.

Complicating matters, many companies are upping their performance expectations, so it's harder to stay on track.

Know the Goals

In this compensation environment, employees need to be vigilant about finding out what the company wants from them -- so they're not disappointed with a lackluster rating at their year-end review.

First, "meet with the manager and learn about the company's strategy," says Lisa Quast, author of "Your Career, Your Way." You can use that information to draft personal goals that are in line with the boss's and the company's plans. Communicating that agenda shows managers that you're proactive and on board with the year's strategy, and it limits the odds the boss will saddle you with a raft of unrealistic expectations.

Ideally, you and your manager will agree on a set of goals that are quantifiable and not open to debate at the end of the year. The goals should then be put in writing. If that doesn't occur as part of the year-end review, you could volunteer to draft an addendum to the review, or send a follow-up email to the boss that lists the goals and asks for confirmation. Once the boss

approves the list, print out and save the emails for next year's review.

Still on Track?

You should also plan to check in periodically to ensure you're still on track, since plans have a way of changing. During the year-end review, ask your manager how you can follow up, whether it's a monthly chat or a weekly email. Then, make it happen.

Also, during the year, keep track of your accomplishments. Print out complimentary emails or the PowerPoint presentation you gave at the end of a particularly important project. Tangible reminders of your work do the best job of jogging the boss's memory when negotiating.

One thing to keep in mind: It's possible your boss is under pressure to squeeze more out of you than you think is reasonable. If you seem to be facing impossible goals, don't react with aggression. Explain why you think the goals are out of line, and then ask how you might achieve them, says Roberta Rosen, a career coach in San Francisco.

This shows that you're willing to try -- and it can be a good reality check for a manager who hasn't thought through the work involved in, say, increasing sales 50%.