

How to conduct Alarmingly Alluring Appraisals

Reminding Ourselves

We moved house last autumn, from a modern property to an old one. From a small perfectly formed and groomed garden to a ramshackle, sprawling and very established plot. One of my first jobs in our new home was to dig a trench from our house to the shed, about 20 metres away, so an electrician could lay some electrical cable safely underground. Now I haven't dug a trench like that since I was a student earning money during the holidays and our old garden never really tested my physical skills.

So I took some advice, from our new neighbour, who's a builder. "Use a spade, not a shovel. Bend your legs, not your back. Use a wheelbarrow not legwork. Measure it out with string, don't guess", were his words of wisdom. And it worked. I knew all these things, but it was good to be reminded.

The annual appraisal. You haven't done one since last January. You might want some tips, just to remind you. I've broken it down into three bite-sized chunks. Preparing the appraisal, conducting the appraisal and following up the appraisal.

Preparing the Appraisal

Some useful preparation tips for you. Firstly, some obvious, but often neglected steps. Allow sufficient time for both you and the appraisee to prepare – about two weeks should be sufficient. Do not try to deal with more than two people in any one day; you will need at least two hours per interview if you are to write up the appraisal whilst it is fresh in your mind.

Some where neutral where you will not be interrupted. Set the room up so that you can work together to agree objectives and targets. Finally, make sure that both you and the appraisee have access to all the relevant documents.



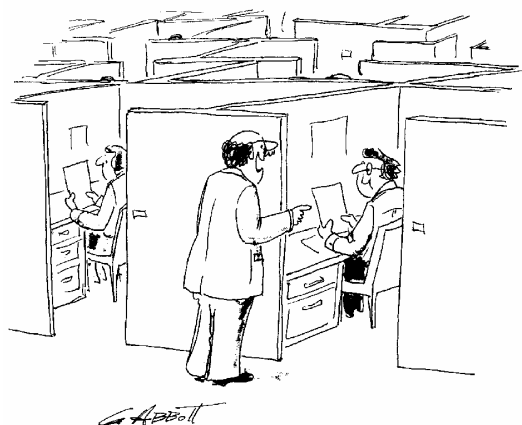
*"I AM NOT LAZY. I'M JUST
AMBITION-CHALLENGED."*

These tips are pretty much common sense. What is often missed out by busy managers, is the most important individual appraisal preparation. In order to simplify this stage of the process, it has been broken into three main headings – review, agree objectives and targets and Personal Development Planning (PDP). This approach can also be used as a basis for the structure of the interview itself.

Review

Define your objectives for each interview. In other words, be certain in your own mind as to the outcomes that you want for each appraisee. Read all the relevant documentation carefully.

Review the appraisee's performance against the objectives that were agreed previously. Decide how you are going to give feedback on areas of particularly good performance or effort, and how you want to deal with any shortfalls. It is most useful to focus on facts and on behaviours, and not on opinions and personality. Try to anticipate the appraisee's probable reactions and decide how you will respond.



*"BRILLIANT JOB ON THE ROBERTS' PROPOSAL, WILCOX!
I'M PROMOTING YOU TWO CUBICLES."*

Agree Objectives and Targets

Review your own personal objectives, and determine how these might relate to those of the people that you will be appraising. Wherever possible the appraisee's' objectives and targets should directly support those agreed for yourself and your team.

Determine the appraisee's key objectives for the next review period. Focus on those which are the most important, i.e. where you expect a special effort, but bear in mind all the on - going objectives and other good practices which will also need to be considered.

Try to achieve a balance between all the objectives for each individual, remember they should be challenging but achievable with effort and commitment. Also bear in mind, at this stage, that there will almost certainly be a degree of negotiation at the interview stage before agreement is finally reached. If possible, establish measures for each objective. This is not easy and there will be times when you have to resort to qualitative measures rather than quantitative ones.

Once again try to put yourself in the appraisee's position in order to anticipate his or her reaction. As mentioned there could be a degree of negotiation during the interview, and if you can identify where the appraisee is coming from, you are that much better prepared.

If there is a potential development need, consider how it can best be met and supported within the review period, and do not promise anything unless you are sure that it can be delivered. Failure to meet agreed actions will undermine the credibility of the whole process.

Remember that any one who has recently completed a training course will need time and support to consolidate and practice the new skills, techniques and knowledge, and this needs to be properly planned

Personal Development Plans

There are two key issues to be considered here:

1. Are there any training needs to enhance the appraisee's competence in his or current work, or which will be needed to achieve the objectives for the coming year?
2. Are there any long-term training and development needs, which will lead to individual growth?

Preparation – a summary

Careful preparation is an essential part of good appraisal. Try to bear in mind that time spent early on to ensure that your team works effectively to achieve its objectives will pay dividends later.

Another benefit from detailed preparation is that it minimises the number of times that you might have to react to a point unexpectedly raised by the appraisee. All too often issues raised in this way can result in hurried decisions that may be regretted later.

Conducting the Appraisal

Again, we'll use the same headings as before – review, agree objectives and targets and Personal Development Planning (PDP).

Review

Remember that your aim is to find out as much as you can about the appraisee and his or her performance and needs; ideally you should be listening about 75% of the time. We've all heard of the two ears and one mouth equation, but it really is so true.



A good place to start is to review the preceding year (or agreed period). Ask open questions to determine how the appraisee feels about his or her performance during that time.

Control the direction of the appraisee's comments by the use of probing questions (What, When, Why, Who, Where and How) using pauses if necessary to allow him or her time for thought. A further very useful technique is to summarise, reflect or test your understanding. As well as allowing you to control the discussion and ensure that you have understood the appraisee, it also shows that you have been listening actively.

Once the appraisee has completed his or her comments on the years work, you are in a position to provide constructive feedback. Focus on both successes and areas for improvement, and emphasise the need to learn from all the experience that has been gained.

Encourage the appraisee to generate his or her own approaches, initiatives or solutions to these issues. They may not be the way you would have suggested, but if you can say "yes"

it's a good idea to do so. In this way the appraisee owns the solution, and will therefore be much more committed to it than if it were to be imposed.

Be prepared to receive feedback about yourself constructively, as mentioned the focus should be on fact and behaviour; the whole idea of the appraisal is that it should be a joint problem solving approach to improve performance.

Reference to the current objectives, together with the levels of success that have been achieved, can for a useful lead into the next part of the interview, setting targets and objectives for the next review period.

Setting targets and objectives

Explore, with the appraisee, the objectives for the next year. Try to achieve agreement on a reasonable balance that will be challenging, but achievable.

Remember, the appraisee's objectives must actively support those of the company, and hence your own. Focus on what and why, and leave the how up to the appraisee. However there may be actions needed on your behalf to ensure that the appropriate support and training are available at the right time.

At all stages of the interview, keep checking back to agree on what has been agreed, and make brief note to ensure it's not forgotten.

Focus on the three to five key objectives where you consider that the appraisee should focus his or her main efforts. These will be in addition to ongoing targets and the maintenance of appropriate levels of excellence in the work not specified within these key targets.

Agree review points, or interim targets, for each of the objectives, and make sure that the appraisee is aware of any limits, constraints, resource issues and appraisee when necessary, and agree the sort of issues on which you would wish to be consulted.

Finally agree the measures that will be used to monitor progress, and to determine whether an objective is not fixed absolutely, and that it is possible to amend them to take account of varying circumstances.



"EDWARD, OUT THERE ARE PEOPLE WITH MONEY BURNING HOLES IN THEIR POCKETS. YOUR JOB IS TO FIND THEM."

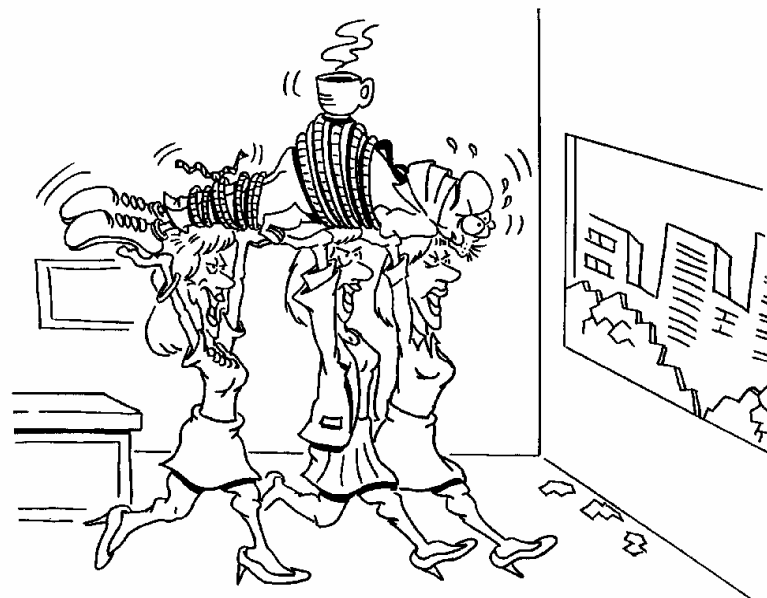
Personal Development Plans

Once again an open, two way discussion is the best approach here. Try to determine from the appraisee what his or her real needs and aspirations are, again using the two criteria discussed in the preparation section; job needs and individual development needs. You may need to clarify what is practical and what is appropriate within the review period; only promise what can be delivered.

Be prepared to consider the widest possible range of options to help in the development of your team's people. Traditionally appraisals have resulted in a list of names being put forward for a range of courses, which can often miss the real needs of individuals.

For many attendance on the right courses can be invaluable, but for others alternative approaches should be considered. Possibilities include coaching (using everyday situations as a basis for development), projects, job rotation, distance learning, shadowing a senior member of staff, or even training others in specialist areas. Sometimes a mix of several approaches is suitable.

Try to establish an outline programme for the training and development initiatives with the appraisee. For it to be effective it is vital that the appraisee's are given time and support to practice and hone the new skills and techniques, and to consolidate them into their normal working practices. This will require time and patience, but unless it is done the full benefits of the training will never be realised.



RALPH REALIZES TOO LATE TO SAY, "PLEASE," INSTEAD OF, "FETCH ME A CUP OF COFFEE."

Following up the appraisal

Once the interview is complete, the appraiser should complete the Review Form, based on the draft copies that were prepared by both parties, plus the additional information gleaned from the interview. A copy of this form, once approved, should then go to the appraisee, providing him or her the opportunity to check that the content is in line with the discussions, and acceptable.

The review sheet will probably contain a number of actions and targets, all of which should have dates for either initiatives and/ or completion. It is recommended that this form is used as a working document, and that any actions, discussion, reviews or other initiatives are recorded and kept with the appraisal file to provide a complete record.

Once you have completed all your appraisals it can be useful to check if there are any common training or development needs across the team. In addition it might be valuable to discuss this with your colleagues, if there are similar needs elsewhere within the Company it may be possible to reduce the costs through a group initiative.

Summary

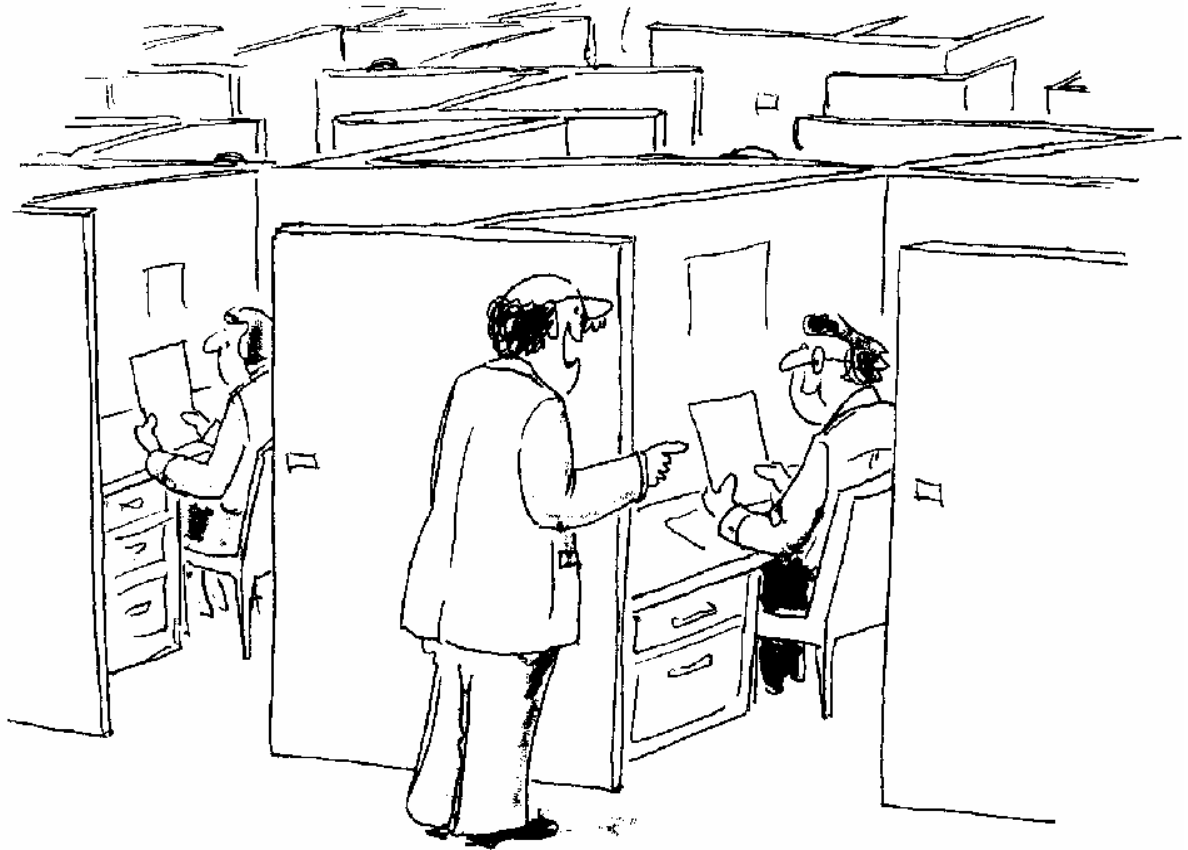
As I stare out to my new garden, I can already see a dozen jobs to be done. Weeding the beds, clearing out the rubble in the hedges, pollarding the trees, cutting the hedges...the list goes on. I'll tell you, I'll be getting plenty of practise in my physical skills, so the next time I need to dig a trench – it'll be like falling off a log. Appraisals, the annual one, will be like falling off a log, if you practise every month. Hold regular one to ones with your team members, talk about their goals, their successes and learnings regularly, and you will never dread the annual appraisal.

The Cartoons – for Scanning

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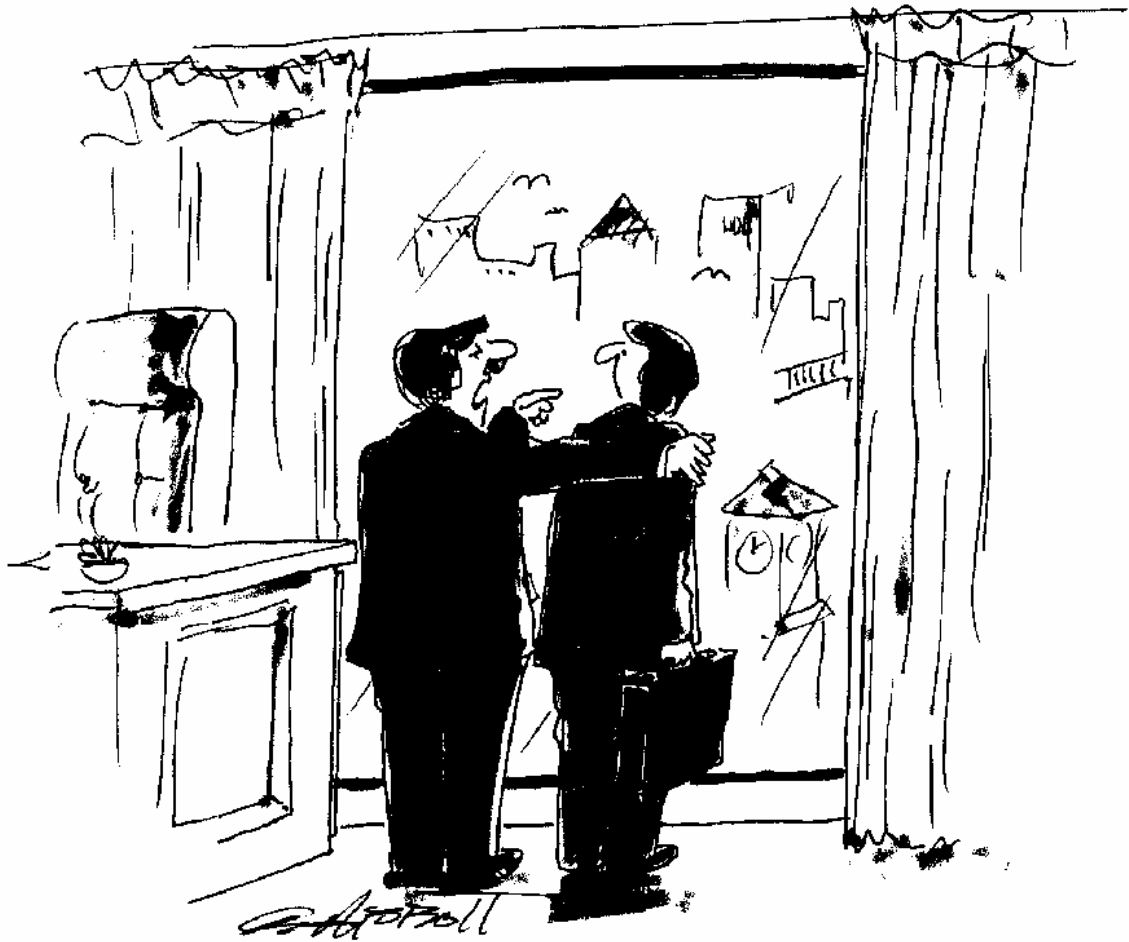
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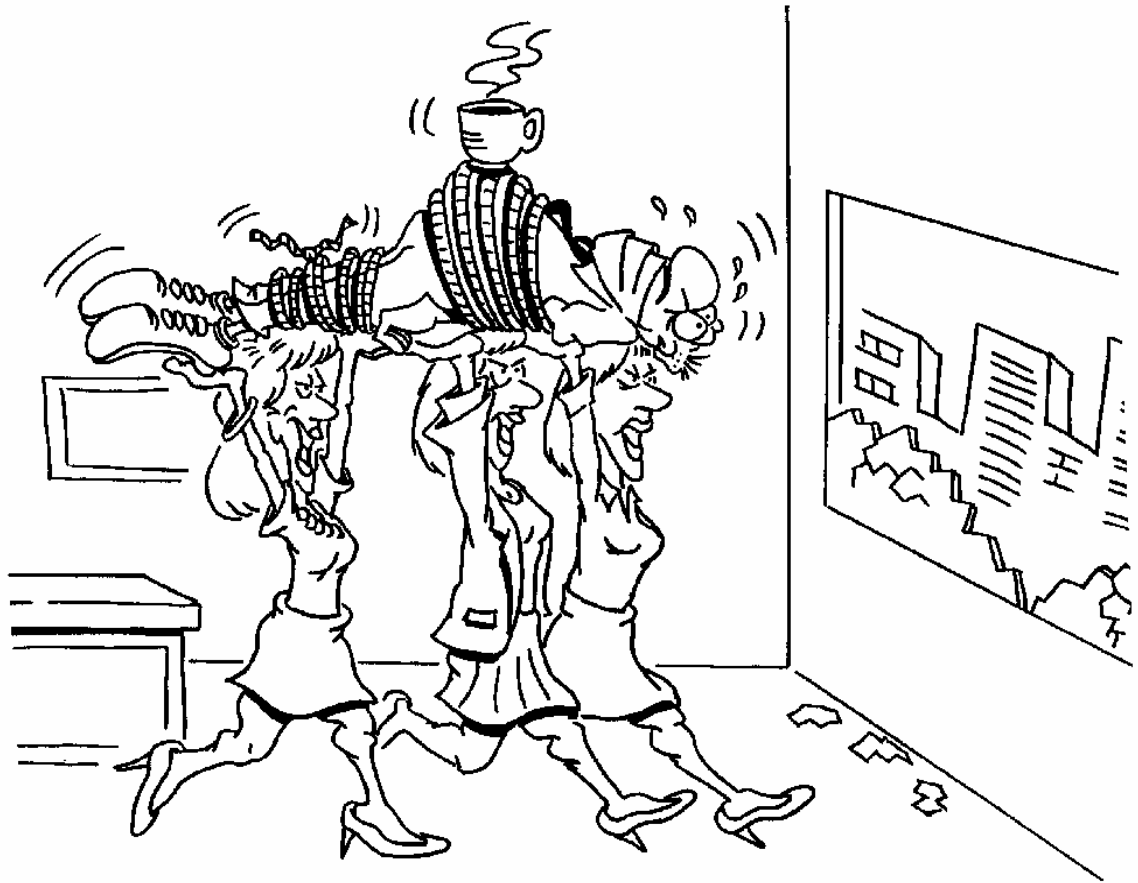
G. Abbott

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