

Preparing for performance conversations (appraisals and all that jazz)

This used to be my bread and butter - everything from the strategy to the process of how a big corporate managed the 'talent lifecycle'. It's a fancy way of saying 'appraisal process.'. So I'll be honest, there's so much about these approaches that are broken, and I'll never be a fan of contrived and poorly timed performance conversations. **HOWEVER**. I do believe in taking as much control over these conversations and experiences as possible, so here are my thoughts, insights and top tips for how to prepare for the conversation!

First up: nothing should be a surprise.

What I mean by that is that your line manager (or whoever is reviewing with you) should not be bringing new news to this conversation. Now, that to an extent is out of your control. However, what I'd recommend doing a couple of weeks out is dropping them a note or asking face to face (if you can) that says something along the lines of 'review is coming up, anything I need a heads up on or anything you want to particularly talk about?' It's not fail safe, but hopefully gives their conscience a nudge to say 'don't catch me off guard'



Results, deliverables, performance indicators...whatever you want to call them, the stuff that gets measured!

These are obviously the non-negotiables. It's what most reporting is done on, possibly how pay rises are determined and some solid foundations in an ordinarily subjective world. Get clear on what you've delivered it, but don't miss an opportunity to elaborate.

What's the story that sits behind that result? What did they mean to you / how did you actually achieve them / what created the challenges / what have you picked up along the way?

Remember it's meant to be a conversation, not a tick box exercise.



Let your strengths shine through...

Sure, your skills, competencies and deliverables are all mega important but so are your strengths. You know those marvelous things that energise you, keep your focus and attention and generally make you feel good? They get to co-exist with the more 'learnt' skills. Bring out when you've felt at your best, where you think you add the most value and what you love doing. It's a really important part of the conversation that is often over looked - it's time to buck the trend!

Handling challenges and failures

Let's not beat around the bush - sometimes things don't go to plan. and sometimes they go really really wrong. Hopefully they're dealt with in the moment but there's always a chance that they rear their head again in an annual review(or similar). Some things to keep in mind:

- Nobody, but **NOBODY** is perfect
- Mistakes and failures are learning opportunities. Yes they can hurt, can cause immense negative stress and depending on your job - could be an actual life or death situation. But there's always an end and you might have picked up a lesson or two - it's ok to talk about them and what you'd do differently next time.
- They don't define you - what you do after them plays a significant role though.
- Don't try to distract or avoid the conversation - own it in whatever way you can.

When you don't agree with what's been said... I'm all for picking your battles, so don't head down conflict lane if you don't want to. However, you can absolutely challenge what someone has said if you don't agree with it. Some points to reflect before you do:

- What is opinion and what is fact here?
- What is going to be the most helpful thing for me right now?
- What impact is this observation / piece of feedback having?

You could say things like 'my experience was a bit different to that' or 'I need to share my perspective here' if you want a gentle way into the conversation.

You can ask for clarity: 'can you go over that' or 'what specifically were you seeing there?' are great questions to work through wooly comments

There should be a future focus to the conversation - agree next steps and actions.

It's a great time to talk about future moves and areas of interest. If there's a particular team or business area you want to learn more about, get it lined up!

Where and when you have the conversation is important - a quiet spot and not when you're feeling hungry!

Gathering feedback

This varies in importance for many of us. It might be an automatic cultural thing with your employer - appraisal window coming up, your inbox gets flooded with requests. For others, it's not as binary and can take on different forms and throughout the year. Here are some of my tips to get the most from feedback requests:

- **Be specific.** Going in with a general 'can I have some feedback' or my personal favourite (read: hated) is the 'can you give me some L(likes) C(concerns) and S(suggestions). Nope, nopety nope. Find the thing you're working and ask about that. So let's say you're working on how you engage stakeholders - ask your stakeholders how you're doing, what they love about your approach and what could make it even better.
- **Keep it timely.** This might be a horse bolting stable door type suggestion, but I'm giving it to you for future learns. Don't wait until your performance review to get feedback! End of a project? Boom. Just done a presentation? Find out what went well.
- **Include your own voice.** Your rich tapestry of feedback that I'm sure you're gathering, can include YOUR thoughts too. The stuff you're great at, where you want to put more focus and things you want to do more of in the future.
- **Don't ask for the sake of it.** Please don't go around asking every person you've ever walked past in the the coffee queue for their 'thoughts'. You don't need them. Keep the list small and relevant - that person you worked on a project with three years ago doesn't know you now!