



## Time to rev up; Find the path to a winning job evaluation

By Joanne Cleaver Special to the Tribune

Earning a good job evaluation can be a never-ending journey. Here's a road guide to avoiding potholes, dead ends and cul-de-sacs on your way to a top rating in your job evaluation.

As soon as your boss says it's evaluation time, start gathering evidence of how you've helped your employer.

Review key projects and pinpoint how they helped your employer. Show how you reduced costs, increased sales or improved the company, advises Paul Benson, managing principal in the Chicago office of Right Management Consultants, an organizational and career consulting firm.

"Find the numbers that jump off the page that give you the true meaning of what the impact of your accomplishment is," he said. If you are part of a team, define your role and give specifics about your accomplishments.

What? You haven't kept track of what you have accomplished? Go back through your calendar to reconstruct a schedule of key deadlines and how you met them. If you can't remember, get the dates, schedules, meeting minutes and other documents from co-workers. Call former team members and say, "I'm following up on that project from last year. I'd like to take just a few minutes to talk through how it impacted your department," Benson advised.

Then write brief synopses of each project and specify your role.

Write out your accomplishments in a boss-friendly format. Grab a copy of last year's review or job description, so you can match your successes with your job requirements, company mission or boss' priorities. Then draft a summary of your professional accomplishments. Keep your summary to one page and start with an overview statement that provides a quick

look at what you did and the benefit you delivered to your employer.

Include a bullet point for each achievement, describing how they impacted the company. The more concrete your examples, the better.

"Focus on how you have built on prior skills and make sure you have examples for every item you put down," said Paul Glen, a management consultant with C2 Consulting. "That helps you accurately calibrate how you think you are doing with how the rest of the world thinks you are doing."

If you've changed gears in your job since your last evaluation and last year's goals no longer make sense, don't sweat it. Maybe you didn't do what you set out to do—but odds are, you successfully did something else. List what you did do in your professional accomplishments summary but write a paragraph that explains why the original goals were shelved and why you took on different responsibilities. Explain the shift in "we" terms to underscore the change was part of a companywide strategy.

You'll need to come up with some answers if you didn't meet a goal and really don't have a good reason why. Usually, you only get to have this conversation with your boss once. Explain why you didn't accomplish the goal, in detail. "The wrong answer is, 'I don't know why that didn't happen,'" Benson said. Lay out the facts alongside evidence that you already are addressing the problems, with positive results. Be prepared to prove it.

Once you're finished, resist the temptation to e-mail it to your boss before your evaluation. This only gives him or her the chance to think up ways to disagree with some of your points.

If you want a raise, know in advance how much you will ask for and what you'll settle for. Expect to compromise. And know what you're worth. Do research to find out



what others in your region are being paid; if your salary is less, you have grounds to ask for a raise. If you're want other perks--job flexibility, more vacation or special training--build your case for why it's in line with the company's goals and norms.

Then practice for your sit-down review with your boss as you would a job interview. Talk over your accomplishments with a friend or family member and try to anticipate your boss' questions or concerns.

On the day that you meet with your boss, choose an outfit that is a notch or two nicer than every-day wear at your place of work but not an obvious "interview suit."

When meeting with your boss, make your case and stick to the facts, Glen urges. Provide evidence for why you think you are a valuable employee, using your professional accomplishments summary as a guide.

If your boss brings up problem areas, introduce tasks that you have done well and explain how you are applying those skills to the problem areas. Use your boss' criticism to bridge to your plan to improve. "Yes, I could be better at handling overload work, and that is why I have replaced the daily team meeting with a group e-mail update."

Stay professional and avoid getting emotional, even if your evaluation doesn't go as planned. For example, if your boss doesn't quarrel with the facts of your accomplishments but dismisses them as "not good enough," you may not be able to please him, no matter how well you perform.

"Speak to it, make the business case, don't show bitterness and move on," Benson said. "If your boss doesn't recognize your accomplishments, at least you have a good start on your resume."

Work with your boss in creating your goals for the coming 12 months.

Once you're back at your desk, write a follow-up memo summarizing the main points covered in the evaluation and send it to your boss. Recap your accomplishments so your boss can refer to it when discussing your promotion or raise with her own boss, and remind your boss of the top priorities you agreed on and any deadlines.

If you didn't get a raise or your boss is unhappy with your performance, start preparing now for next year's review. Set up interim goals and sharpen your skills in the next 12 months. Apply your boss' suggestions and document your accomplishments. That'll help avoid a bumpy road next year.

Do's and don'ts to get a raise

DO:

- Ask to sit down with your boss privately.
- Be prepared with examples of recent accomplishments, new responsibilities and skills, as well as copies of evaluations and positive feedback.
- Be persistent. Ask your boss when you can talk about the matter again and if he or she has a timetable for a decision.
- Dress appropriately the day you meet and act professionally.
- Consider asking for more vacation time, flexible hours or to work from home if you're told there is no money available for a raise.

DON'T:

- Blindside your boss in the hallway.
- Lose your temper. You don't want your boss to get defensive.
- Ask too often. You may be perceived as an unhappy worker and be let go during the next round of cuts.
- Tell your boss you need the money for a new car, pool or to pay bills.
- Threaten to quit unless you mean it.

