

You've probably heard how most people resist change.

How they covertly and sometimes even overtly sabotage organization change efforts — even changes that are beneficial. In fact, if you've worked in an organization for any length of time, you've likely seen this resistance first hand.

So you may be wondering, "Why would this situation be any different? Why would my boss embrace changes to the performance appraisal process any more readily than he or she embraces other organization change initiatives?"

The answer is because this change is different. Most bosses dread giving performance appraisals — even more than you dread receiving them. So anything you can do to make the process easier for them will be welcomed. We're not talking here about staging a palace coup. The changes we're proposing are more along the lines of a quiet revolution — where the goal is not to tear down, but to reform. Not to make performance appraisal better for employees at the expense of bosses, but to make the process better for everyone.

Most people resist change because change requires them to do something differently. It means learning to do something new. Learning something new means engaging in trial and error behavior, sometimes fumbling along, feeling and looking awkward and employing guesswork. With these outcomes, it's no wonder people stick with what they've always done, rather than embrace change.

This change is different. It doesn't require your boss to do anything new. He or she need only sit back and let you assume a different role. You're the one who will be doing things differently. So, taking the initiative to manage your own performance appraisal is nearly risk free.

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A New Definition of Involvement

Remember your first performance appraisal? Ever since then, unless you're the exception, you've probably had a limited role in every performance appraisal meeting you've been in. Limited to making a few brief comments or asking a few questions at the end of the meeting. Or along the way you may have even stopped making comments or asking questions because, through experience, you learned they didn't lead anywhere — no new insight or increased understanding by your boss, no in-depth conversation about some aspect of your performance. Most likely what you got in response to your question or comment was your boss defending the judgment he or she made about your performance.

The point is, making comments or asking questions at the end of an appraisal meeting is hardly involvement. It's the equivalent of voting in the Presidential election every four years and claiming to be an involved citizen. Both are feeble examples of involvement. And just as an uninvolved citizenry deserves whatever fate befalls it, so too do you in the case of your appraisal meetings.

The real power of involvement is that you too can control the meeting content and process — not just your boss. A one-sided approach to performance appraisal results in little more than compliance. What's needed is a new definition of involvement — one that places the responsibility for performance appraisal as much on your shoulders as on your boss's. Start viewing performance appraisal as something you do with your boss, not something “done to you.” Stop regarding yourself as a victim and become an

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equal partner. Share the responsibility for ensuring your appraisal is valuable and worthwhile. Have the confidence to shape the process of your own appraisal.

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Discuss Successes and Shortcomings

Congratulations! You've established a proper direction and set an appropriate tone, and the meeting is off to a great start. Now, the next step is to talk openly and freely about your performance successes and shortcomings. Your goal here is to align both your own and your boss's perceptions with the reality of your actual performance. Think of this step as trying to align three circles above one another where one circle represents your perception, one represents your boss's perception, and the third represents what you actually did during the performance period. A complete and accurate understanding of your performance — by both you and your boss — can only occur when these three circles are completely aligned.

Your role at this point is to provide your boss with a complete picture of your performance as you see it. It is also to get feedback from your boss, and anyone else he or she contacted, about their perception of your performance. This discussion and exchange of perceptions is what causes circles representing your perception and your boss's perception to inch closer and closer to the circle representing your actual performance. Keep in mind that this discussion is not intended to be a debate or negotiation session. Think of it as an in-depth exploration of your performance successes and shortcomings, plus a discussion of the efforts you made to achieve what you did.

When discussing your performance, don't be timid or shy. This is not a time for modesty. But — do be honest. Remember that no one is perfect. Paint what you think is an accurate picture of your performance and be open to

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feedback. Some people are uncomfortable doing this because it feels like bragging. If you feel this way, reframe what you're doing. Don't view it as bragging. Instead, think of it as helping your boss gain a complete understanding of your performance.

Keep in mind that your boss can't possibly already have a completely accurate understanding — even if you worked together every minute of every hour of every day of every week of every month for the entire year. So view what you're doing as helping your boss gain an accurate perspective. It'll free you to talk openly and candidly about your performance.

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