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4 ways to deal with criticism during appraisal like a pro

FEEDBACK



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On an average people respond to negative appraisals in two ways: they either lose self-confidence or they get aggressive and use reasons like manager partiality/incompetence etc. to justify the feedback.

In psychology, one's reactions to everyday events can be seen to be stemming from two kinds of attitudes- internal locus of control and external locus of control. Internal locus of control refers to the belief that one is responsible for and capable of controlling things happening to oneself. The external locus of control is the belief that events in the environment are controlled by external forces not under one's control. Research suggests that mental health and well-being is strongly correlated with internal locus of control.

This is not to suggest that partiality, insecurities and ego issues are not a reality within organisations. They might also be affecting the appraisal process, many a times to our disadvantage. However, when one receives an unhappy appraisal, a person with an attitude of internal locus of control thinks “what can I do about it” instead of “who is to be blamed for this”.

Here are some pointers that can be helpful in dealing with negative appraisals by taking responsibility for one’s life at work.

Step back

Criticism is not fun. The first instinct usually is to argue against it. Stepping back at this point can be very helpful in making an objective assessment of the appraisal. It could mean literally doing something else for a while, taking a coffee break, talking to friends etc and then revisiting the feedback. This simple step could save you from the damage of making aggressive kneejerk reactions.

Introspection

Feedback usually provides good fodder for introspection. At times the meanest of criticism could have a pinch (if not more) of truth in it. It makes sense to look at each criticism one at a time and make a self-evaluation of why that happened. Is it because you lack the skills? Is it because of non-cooperation of other stake holders? Is it because you don’t like your role? Thinking about the reasons for poor performance could help you devise a pointed plan of action.

Speaking with people who are invested in you

At times it makes sense to speak to people at work who are personally invested in you and are not competing with you. Their perspective at times helps us understand how we appear to others. This could help you put yourself in your boss’s shoes. However, it also means you need to develop and nurture such deep friendships (preferably at work).

Plan of action with timelines

If you are responsible for the way your career progresses, you should have a plan of action to correct your weaknesses and overcome the hurdles. Develop a clear plan: “I will learn a new skill”; “I will reconstitute my team”, “I will talk to my boss for a role reallocation” etc. Setting timelines for each plan of action also helps in keeping you on track.

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