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Appraisal, in the true sense of the word, is neutral in meaning. It is an evaluation, more than a positive or a negative one. But a 'below expectations appraisal' can only be viewed in one light - negative. And that's where the problems begin. In some situations, a below expectation appraisal may even lead to 'separation'. "There are many cases where an employee is caught unaware and is surprised with a low rating. Such is the situation, when the leader was unable to set goals effectively or failed in conducting periodic reviews and providing feedback. The yearly performance review should be a summary of one's annual performance and not an exhaustive meeting to discuss and scrutinise every minute detail. Other situations arise when the leader and direct reports are working from remote sites and at times, the leader either fails

they work closely with the employees. An employee's day-to-day activities and a change in behaviour are indicators of the employee's state-of-mind. Some behavioural indicators of an impending departure include a lack of interest/motivation, disengagement and sudden increase in absenteeism," says Sudhanshu Pandit, director HR Symantec India.

That said, there is still a greater role for the HR to play. HR managers should carefully handle the situation if an employee shows his/her willingness to leave the company, post an appraisal. "Once the performance rating has been delivered to the employee, HR needs to work with the manager to ensure that he/she is



The post-appraisal phase can be a challenging one for the HR manager. **Ricardo Vaz** delves into the new-age techniques that alleviate appraisal blues and also, give HR an opportunity to assist the workforce in understanding their assessment better

Performance reviews, reviewed

The season of waiting, wondering and hoping is upon us. It's that time of the year that makes every employee writhe, some with optimism and some with a pinch of reservations. This is the period where emotions are on a high, rumours float ubiquitously through the office corridors and evaluations, and re-evaluations are carried out. While the HR manager puts the back of an employee who has performed satisfactorily, he/she must not put those, who may have had a lapse in their

performance out of his/her mind. So, what are the new-age mechanisms that the HR manager is undertaking, implementing, or adopting to come to grips with post-appraisal blues, is a question that is raised often. "In the post-appraisal phase, organisations need to ensure that there is a transparent and consistent approach towards performance reviews, which enables employees to perform better. The focus should be on building the existing strengths of employees, rather than only telling them their weaknesses at the end of the year. An HR manager must remember that all of his/her employees join the organisation

justice to that very thought. Along with this, organisations should have strong training options, which an individual can fall back on to improve his/her skills, behaviours or technical capabilities," explains Sangeeta Singh, partner- HR, KPMG India. She further adds, "The key to dealing with post-appraisal blues is communication and open, honest and continuous feedback. Today, organisations need to ensure that there is an effective communication process in place, which establishes a common set of guidelines - known and understood by all employees and performance managers. Employees need to understand the impact of performance reviews on their careers." Suggesting a few methods that can facilitate an employer in helping his/her employee decode their negative criticism, understand the problem areas and deal with them effectively, Nirbhik Goel, vice president-human resources Hyatt International South West Asia Limited says, "For instance, corporations can consider evolving from performance appraisal to performance development systems, which could be an ongoing process throughout the year with formal reviews every six months. Through open communication, managers can give continuous feedback to their employees and formally complete performance development. A performance model that is competency-based helps in clearly defining what makes people successful in the organisation. Individuals possess and acquire competencies (read: skills, knowledge, abilities) over time, which they then apply in form of behaviours.



These behaviours produce outcomes, which in turn, result in higher individual and organisational performance. With continuous coaching and mentoring, the HR manager can guide and assist his/her employee in developing their skills, knowledge, and abilities necessary to perform to the required level." In addition to this, Vinamra Shastri, partner & practice leader, Business Advisory Services, Grant Thornton India LLP opines, "In my opinion, performance appraisal is a continual process of feedback and remedial course correction throughout the year, and in an ideal situation, a performance appraisal should not be a surprise or shock to the employee; and hence, appraisal blues shouldn't come about at all. However, if such a situation lamentably does exist, the new-age HR manager has a huge role to play in both performance improvement, and educating the employee's line manager on handling difficult situations, and ensuring that a continual feedback mechanism is in place. In the post-appraisal scenario, the HR manager has to ensure that the employee's morale does not take a plunge, and negativity does not spread across the workplace." Essentially, what are the new-age techniques that can help to deal with assessing a bad appraisal and encourage the employee to perform better? "As and when such a rancorous condition occurs, the key lies in treating it meticulously, so that the employee's morale does not take a plummet and negative vibes don't spread across the workplace. In order to make sure that there is fair play across the organisation, the company must make sure to have an excellent performance measurement mechanism," concludes Nilesh Shah, president global HR and corporate services, Omnitech InfoSolutions.

Therefore, helping your employees assess his/her assessment not only adds transparency and clarity in the post-appraisal period, but also these post-appraisal assessments encourages your employees to understand their key problem areas and facilitates them to decipher criticism and use it favourably in order to improve and develop themselves.

THE LAST APPRAISAL?

Unnati Narang tells you why after appraisals, curbing attrition becomes a top HR priority

to understand the expectations or is unable to interpret the business or work scenario the employee needs to work in, which could be affecting his/her performance and ultimately the goal attainment. Also, after delivering a below expectation performance review, leaders seldom prepare a development plan or commit to one over the next few months. This makes the employee lose faith on the leader and the system, thus compelling him/her to quit the organisation," says Ronnie Dias, county manager, HR, Nalco Water India Limited.

Similar views are echoed by other experts. "For an employee, a below expectation appraisal may lead to a situation in which the employee loses his/her faith in the management; moreover, the employee feels cheated. HR majorly faces the issue of unrealistic appraisal expectations; therefore, it's the HR's role to give an opportunity to the employees to understand and contradict their perception," says Ramesh Puri, MD, Executive Access.

Companies can take a beating if their key employees leave the organisation due to reasons like wrongly communicated expectations or a shoddily planned appraisal process. In that case, is there a way for HR to predict such decisions and gauge them from employee reactions? "Predicting employee decisions is never easy. It is easier for managers to predict such situations since

truly committed to the development of that direct report. Ensuring that the manager fills in a performance improvement plan (PIP) is one of the key steps. HR needs to communicate to the employee after validation that the performance review process was fair and consistent to the organisational practice; if the employee still decides to leave, it is at times best to let the person go," says Dias. But the HR manager's approach should differ from employee to employee. "For a key employee, managers need to go the extra mile to understand and apprehend the reasons that cause the decision. In the case of non-key employees, managers typically accept the decision and move on," says Pandit.

"An HR manager should spend more time and efforts on the key employees as compared to the non-key ones; in other words, one should know of ways to distinguish between apples and oranges. Also, managers should reduce subjectivity in appraisals substantially if they cannot eliminate it completely," concludes Puri.



hoping to succeed and gain recognition as the purpose of an appraisal is to aid this belief. In the post-appraisal period, the HR manager must do

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