

# Unhappy With Your Year-End Performance Review?

## Here's How to Respond Strategically

**IF YOU'RE READING THIS, CHANCES ARE YOU WEREN'T THRILLED WITH YOUR YEAR-END PERFORMANCE RATING.**

- YOU WORKED YOUR BUTT OFF.
- YOU MORE THAN HIT YOUR GOALS.
- AND YOU WERE TOLD....."CONGRATULATIONS—YOU SUCCESSFULLY MET MY EXPECTATIONS."

### TRANSLATION?

**YOU'RE IN THE MIDDLE OF THE PACK. "AVERAGE."**

*WHICH USUALLY MEANS AN AVERAGE SALARY INCREASE AND, POTENTIALLY, AN AVERAGE BONUS.*



**THIS IS NOT A PERSONAL FAILURE. ...THE SYSTEM IS RIGGED.**

**MOST COMPANIES USE SOME FORM OF FORCED DISTRIBUTION TIED TO BUDGETS.**

### THAT MEANS:

- MANAGERS ARE GIVEN A LIMITED NUMBER OF TOP RATINGS
- A FIXED PERCENTAGE OF EMPLOYEES MUST FALL IN THE MIDDLE
- STRONG PERFORMERS CAN STILL LOSE — NOT BECAUSE OF PERFORMANCE, BUT MATH

*A FEW PEOPLE WIN. MOST DON'T.*

### **WHY I'M TELLING YOU THIS**

**I'M LORRAINE HUBBARD — FORMER HEAD OF HR & GLOBAL TALENT, NOW A CERTIFIED CAREER COACH.**

### I'VE:

- SAT IN PERFORMANCE CALIBRATION MEETINGS
- COACHED MANAGERS TO DEFEND RATINGS THEY DIDN'T FULLY AGREE WITH
- SEEN EXACTLY WHAT SEPARATES PEOPLE WHO STAY "SUCCESSFUL" FROM THOSE WHO MOVE UP

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## HOW SOME PEOPLE BREAK OUT OF THE MIDDLE

- THEY DON'T FIGHT THE SYSTEM.
- THEY WORK IT — EARLY, CLEARLY, AND IN WRITING

### HERE'S HOW.

## STEP 1: ACKNOWLEDGE DISAPPOINTMENT (STRATEGICALLY)

- 🎯 MAKE IT KNOWN THAT YOU'RE DISAPPOINTED — AND WHY.  
BUT COME FROM A PLACE OF **ACCEPTANCE, NOT ARGUMENT.**

YOUR GOAL ISN'T TO KEEP NEGOTIATING THIS YEAR.  
IT'S TO SET YOURSELF UP FOR A DIFFERENT OUTCOME NEXT YEAR.

## STEP 2: ASK THESE THREE QUESTIONS:

- 1 "WHAT WOULD IT TAKE FOR ME TO ACHIEVE [INSERT GOAL — E.G., AN ABOVE-AVERAGE RATING]?"
- 2 "I WANT TO MAKE SURE MY PERFORMANCE GOALS GIVE ME A CLEAR PATH TO THAT OUTCOME. IF I HIT THEM, CAN WE AGREE I'LL BE IN A STRONG POSITION — AND THAT YOU'LL ADVOCATE FOR ME?"
- 3 "CAN WE USE PART OF OUR 1:1S TO REGULARLY CHECK THAT I'M ON TRACK?"

## STEP 3: CONFIRM THE CONVERSATION IN WRITING

- 🎯 **DO NOT SKIP THIS STEP.**

THIS IS NOT A DEBATE EMAIL.  
IT'S A CONFIRMATION EMAIL — POSSIBLY A FUTURE RECEIPT!

- "HERE'S WHAT WE DISCUSSED.
- HERE'S HOW MY GOALS REFLECT THAT.
- HERE'S HOW WE'LL TRACK PROGRESS."

### THAT'S WHAT MAKES THIS POWERFUL.

**USE THE EMAIL ON THE NEXT PAGE TO CONFIRM ALIGNMENT AND TAKE CONTROL OF NEXT YEAR'S OUTCOME.**

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## CONFIRMATION EMAIL (WITH GOALS ATTACHED)

Subject: Confirmation of Performance Goals and Alignment

Hi [Manager's Name],

Thank you for taking the time to discuss my year-end review and expectations for the coming year.

I want to be transparent that I was disappointed with my performance rating. However, I've had time to reflect and accept the outcome. My focus now is on making sure I'm set up for a stronger result next year.

Based on our conversation, I've submitted my performance goals for the year. I wanted to confirm that these goals reflect our discussion and provide a clear path toward achieving [insert goal, e.g., an above-average performance rating]. I also realize there are no guarantees.

Specifically, my understanding is:

- These goals represent the level of performance and impact required to be in a strong position for that outcome.
- If I consistently deliver against them, you'll be able to advocate for me at year-end.
- We'll use part of our regular 1:1s to check progress and make adjustments as needed so there are no surprises.

Please let me know if you agree that the submitted goals are aligned with what we discussed, or if there's anything you'd like me to refine.

I appreciate your partnership and support, and I'm committed to delivering a strong performance next year.

Best,

As always, I'm rooting for you

*Lorraine*