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How to have better annual reviews

Performance reviews can be challenging, but with preparation and a positive mindset, you can make the most of the opportunity. Here are some detailed tips that might help you have a more productive and positive annual performance review:

Preparation

1. **Understand the Process**: Familiarise yourself with the review process. Ask your manager or HR for details on the criteria, the timeline, and the format of the review.
2. **Set Clear Goals**: Before the review, list out your achievements, areas for improvement, and goals for the future. This can include specific projects, skills you've developed, and any feedback you've received during the year.

During the Review

1. **Be Specific**: When discussing your accomplishments, be specific about what you did, how you did it, and the impact it had. Use data and examples where possible.
2. **Ask for Clarification**: If you don't understand something, it's okay to ask for clarification. This ensures that you're on the same page as your reviewer and helps avoid misunderstandings.
3. **Stay Calm and Focused**: Performance reviews can be stressful, but staying calm and focused will help you communicate more effectively. Take deep breaths if you feel anxious and remember to listen actively.

Communication Tips

1. **Use "I" Statements**: When discussing your contributions, use "I" statements to take ownership of your work. For example, "I led the project team to complete the project ahead of schedule."
2. **Highlight Strengths and Areas for Growth**: Balance the discussion by highlighting your strengths and acknowledging areas where you can improve. This shows that you're self-aware and committed to growth.
3. **Ask for Feedback**: Actively seek feedback from your reviewer. Ask specific questions about how you can improve in certain areas or what additional skills you can develop.

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After the Review

1. **Follow Up**: If there were action items or goals set during the review, follow up with your manager to ensure you're on track. This shows that you're proactive and serious about your development.
2. **Reflect and Plan**: Take some time to reflect on the feedback you received and create a plan to address any areas of improvement. Set specific, achievable goals and discuss them with your manager.

Additional Tips for Neurodivergent Employees

1. **Advocate for Yourself**: If you need certain accommodations to perform your best, don't hesitate to discuss this with your manager. Explain how these accommodations will help you succeed.
2. **Use Your Strengths**: Leverage your unique strengths and perspectives. Highlight how these have positively impacted your work and your team.
3. **Seek Support**: If you're comfortable, seek support from colleagues, mentors, or employee resource groups. They can offer guidance and share their own experiences.

Neurodivergent employees can face unique challenges during performance reviews due to differences in communication styles, sensory sensitivities, and the need for specific accommodations.
Here are some common challenges they might encounter:

Communication Barriers

1. **Different Communication Styles**: Neurodivergent employees may have different ways of expressing themselves and understanding feedback. This can lead to misunderstandings or misinterpretation of their performance.
2. **Difficulty Articulating Achievements**: Some neurodivergent individuals may struggle to articulate their accomplishments and contributions effectively, which can impact how their performance is perceived.

Sensory Sensitivities

1. **Overwhelming Environments**: Performance reviews can take place in sensory-overwhelming environments, such as noisy or brightly lit rooms, which can be distracting or stressful for some neurodivergent employees.
2. **Anxiety and Stress**: The formal setting of a performance review can cause heightened anxiety and stress, making it difficult for neurodivergent employees to focus and communicate effectively.

Need for Specific Accommodations

1. **Lack of Accommodations**: Without appropriate accommodations, neurodivergent employees may struggle to demonstrate their true potential. For example, they might need more time to process feedback or prefer written communication over verbal discussions.
2. **Unawareness of Needs**: Managers might be unaware of the specific needs of neurodivergent employees, leading to a one-size-fits-all approach that doesn't consider individual differences.

Bias and Misunderstanding

1. **Unconscious Bias**: Reviewers may have unconscious biases that affect their evaluation of neurodivergent employees, leading to unfair assessments.
2. **Misunderstanding Neurodivergence**: A lack of understanding about neurodivergence can result in misinterpreting behaviours or communication styles as unprofessional or unproductive.

Strategies for Overcoming Challenges

1. **Advocacy and Communication**: Neurodivergent employees can advocate for themselves by communicating their needs and preferences to their managers. This can include requesting specific accommodations or explaining their communication style.
2. **Preparation and Practice**: Preparing for the review by practicing responses, writing down key points, and bringing examples can help neurodivergent employees feel more confident and organised.
3. **Support Systems**: Seeking support from colleagues, mentors, or employee resource groups can provide additional guidance and encouragement.

4. **Manager Training**: Encouraging managers to receive training on neurodiversity can help them better understand and support their neurodivergent employees.

Different types of neurodivergence can impact performance reviews in unique ways, as they each come with their own set of strengths and challenges. Here's a breakdown of how some common types of neurodivergence might affect the review process:

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Strengths:

- Attention to detail
- Strong analytical skills
- High levels of focus and dedication to tasks

Challenges:

- Difficulty with social communication and interpreting non-verbal cues
- Sensory sensitivities that may make the review environment uncomfortable
- Struggles with open-ended questions or abstract concepts

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Strengths:

- Creativity and out-of-the-box thinking
- High energy levels and enthusiasm
- Ability to multitask and handle high-pressure situations

Challenges:

- Difficulty with sustained attention and organisation
- Impulsivity that may lead to interruptions during the review
- Tendency to overlook details when discussing accomplishments

Dyslexia

Strengths:

- Strong problem-solving abilities

- Excellent verbal communication skills
- Ability to see the big picture and make connections

Challenges:

- Difficulty with written communication, which may affect self-evaluation forms or written feedback
- Trouble with reading and interpreting written materials during the review
- Anxiety about spelling or grammar mistakes

Dyscalculia

Strengths:

- Creative thinking and innovative problem-solving
- Strong verbal and linguistic skills
- Ability to approach problems from unique angles

Challenges:

- Difficulty with numerical data or metrics, which may be used to assess performance
- Challenges with time management and meeting deadlines
- Anxiety about discussing quantitative aspects of work

Dyspraxia

Strengths:

- Creativity and strong visual-spatial skills
- Excellent long-term memory
- High levels of perseverance and determination

Challenges:

- Difficulty with fine motor skills, which may affect written communication
- Challenges with organisation and time management
- Anxiety about physical discomfort or awkwardness in the review setting

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Strategies for Different Types of Neurodivergence

1. **Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD):** Request a structured format for the review with clear and specific questions. Provide examples of your work and ask for written feedback to review at your own pace.
2. **Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD):** Prepare a written outline of your achievements and areas for improvement. Set specific goals with your manager and ask for regular check-ins.
3. **Dyslexia:** Request verbal feedback and discuss your strengths in person. Use assistive technology to help with written communication and documentation.
4. **Dyscalculia:** Focus on qualitative feedback and discuss your strengths in non-numerical terms. Ask for support with numerical tasks if needed.
5. **Dyspraxia:** Request accommodations for written communication and focus on your verbal strengths. Discuss your achievements in terms of creativity and problem-solving.

Understanding how your unique neurodivergence impacts your work and communicating your needs can help ensure a more equitable and productive performance review.