

# Will you use these 9 hints to improve your appraisal interviews?

 [ontheagilepath.net/2016/03/will-you-use-these-9-hints-to-improve-your-appraisal-interviews.html](https://ontheagilepath.net/2016/03/will-you-use-these-9-hints-to-improve-your-appraisal-interviews.html)

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With this post I share my insights and learnings about (semi)annual employee talks (appraisal interviews). Done right – an important way to sync between employee and lead, done wrong a real killer for motivation.

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Like already nicely described in the book [abolishing performance appraisals](#) – we really have to take care, as it's a tool with high importance for the employee.

One sentence I remember from the book:

The span of a 30' meeting can transform a vibrant, highly committed employee into a demoralized, indifferent wallflower who reads want ads on the weekend

## Drawbacks to consider

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Do the following drawbacks sound familiar to you when thinking about employee talks (and performance appraisal sessions)?

- A survey of the Society for Human Resources Management found that more than 90% of appraisal systems were not successful
- **most employers expressed overwhelming dissatisfaction** with their performance management systems
- **no evidence that it motivates people or leads to meaningful improvement**
- due to design flaws (inherent) – **it produces distorted and unreliable data about the contribution** of employees
- symbol of **parental boss-subordinate relationship**
- characteristic for **patriarchal orgas**
- **boss takes responsibility** for development (through discussion of strength and weaknesses)
- purpose is more about maintaining control – means of social control
- **impedes authentic communication and partnering**
- **money on the table** as part of the discussion – as a weapon that gets in the way combines compensation with developmental discussion
  - undermines openness and vulnerability that development requires
  - all what our ears hear is money
- **another person is involuntarily telling us**
  - about growing our edges
  - where we stand with the institution
  - what stretch goals we'll set
  - and how we're going to be watched in the next year
- **fear**
- **do harm**
  - we're reminded by our boss that they own us

- there is no reason to create low trust practices for all – that are needed for just a few
- wastes time
- **causes stress**
- **destroys commitment and relationships**
- **people with not the best ratings – are preoccupied with the numerical rating** rather than the message – the good conversations they hoped rarely happens (except for those receiving top ratings)
- **HR finds itself policing, refereeing and collecting a lot of paper** that doesn't mean much to most people
- **example: would you use it with your partner**
- **people see that their pay, promotion and favorable status in reality are linked to the opinion of one person** and where they stand with that person at a given moment
- as orgas continue to flatten, **supervisors are burdened with an ever-increasing number of direct reports**
- performance appraisal – undermine improvement because of their unintended effects, such as **demoralizing people and rupturing relationships with supervisors.**
- compound the problems of **politics – conversations and processes take place that have no meaning** but to play the game
- (except for exceptional ones) **ratings impact is usually negative and counterproductive** to the cause of improving performance

Time to think about better ways to work with it (if necessary at all). Next step – what should we consider for employee talks.

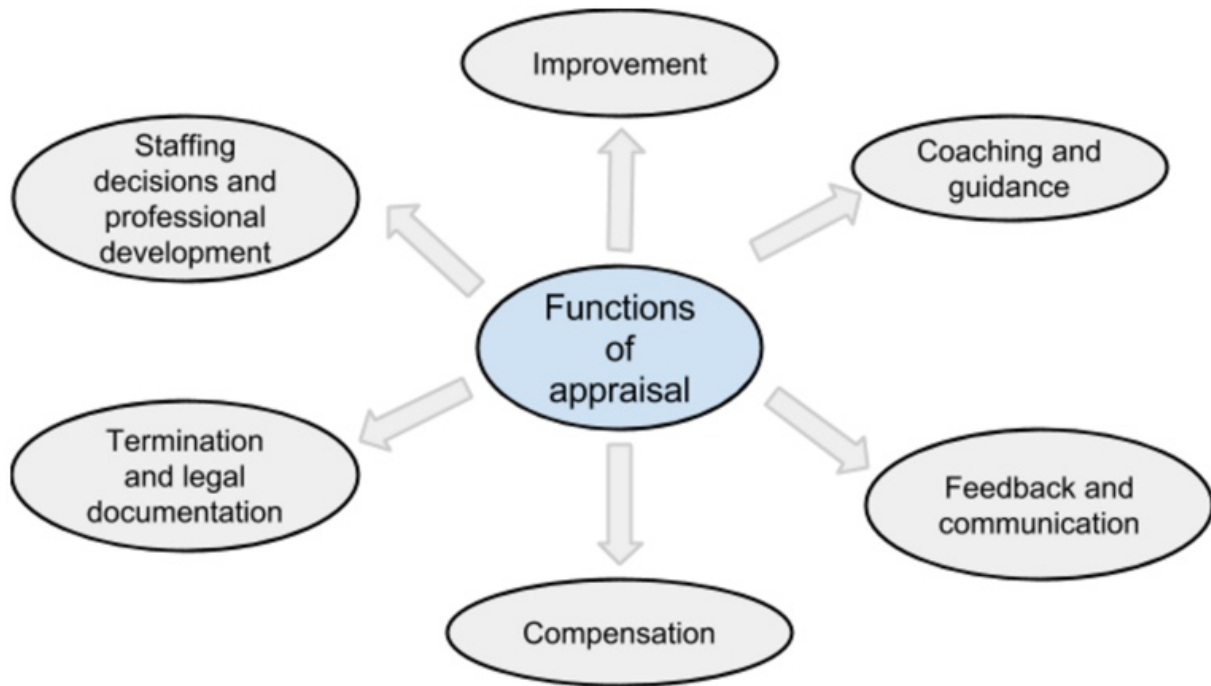
## What to consider – lead perspective

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### #1 Clarify the purpose

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Clarify the purpose of the talk. Is it about further development, feedback, salary – and is it the best way to achieve that purpose. Make that focus transparent so that everyone can prepare properly. In the book they describe 6 possible topics it tries to cover often. All of them can be distributed to in time and context related situations. For me a longer term outlook and possible steps and an wide range collected feedback combined with an honest feedback for my work remained.



Challenge every part and ask – e.g. using these suggested questions:

- Why do you use employee talks?
- Do they accomplish your intended goals?
- What are their real effects?
- Do you really need it?
- If not, are there alternative ways to accomplish your intended goals?
- What type of working culture do we really want to create? One where managers are responsible for their employees or where everyone through collaborative efforts is accountable for the work to be done?

## #2 Wide range feedback

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Feedback should be provided in time, connected with the event to give feedback for. Accumulating and waiting for example one year to provide feedback does not add that much value. Worst case is, that it opens an already solved topic again.

In addition ask yourself – were you really involved in the situation you try to provide feedback for? If not – stop it and let others provide it, who really can refer to a situation. Otherwise you will get challenged by more questions to explain the situation and you have no chance to follow that road.

I use the employee talk mainly to gather and provide **feedback on a wider range**. This time I collected feedback from everyone who worked with a team member – asking 3 simple questions:

- How do you see your working relationship?
- What works really well when working with her?
- What would you wish to be changed when working with her?

All answers were accumulated and neutralized. Every team member got that feedback and it was a really important input for further discussing necessary adjustments.

It took some time to ask and to aggregate the feedback. And I think at max once every 6 months is a good time frame to not annoy people and to really leave time for changes to evolve.

I guess it's called 180°...

I must admit, that way of collecting feedback still has some flaws, as it is mainly positively (is that really a flaw) and people take care to not squeal to the boss.

### **#3 Prepare, prepare, prepare**

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Really be prepared for the talk and plan enough time. I used 90' for the talk with some space afterwards. To prepare a talk I plan in addition 3 hours. I block that time well in advance and try to have it focussed. It is a leader's service and a really important task.

After the talk I help to summarize it, what takes again 60'. It means nearly a day per talk! An important investment of high value for the employee. She is getting valued and contributions are seen and it is her time!

### **#4 It's not your (lead) show**

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It is her time – that means to provide space for her to talk about her environment, her team, current topics and challenges. I guess at least 70% is her speaking time and active listening from leadership side is a good orientation (and not the other way around, overwhelming with bullshit bingo leadership talk). As a lead – I actively practice active listening – especially in that talk.

### **#5 Ask for feedback about the talk**

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Learn with every employee talk to inspect and adapt and provide an even better one next time. For me a great opportunity to slightly adjust.

### **#6 Decouple salary talks**

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If possible remove salary discussions from that meeting. It has the tendency to poison it completely as the employee will be focussed on that moment entirely and dysfunctions like dishonest and tuned communication can appear. If possible adjust when market conditions change or significant improvements appeared – in time to the changes and not fixed to special date ranges.

If you can't avoid it, ask for the expectation and explanation for the expected change. Leave yourself time to think about it afterwards. I often got to know the pattern to anchor using a fixed raise suggestion without a negotiation. This was mainly frustrating except extraordinary huge raises.

## #7 Extract concrete next development steps

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During the talk you will discuss a lot and very likely you both will find some areas for further development. Maybe you already made up your mind before. Plan for 2-3 items for the next period. Please consider the context – e.g. existing team goals, current tasks and load. Be careful and better commit to less, than being overloaded and achieving nothing.

Ask whether it fits to the current topics and can really be achieved. Are there ways to combine it with the current work or can something else be removed. Can you help?

## #8 Rely on first hand experiences

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Just cite situations you have been involved in and avoid the temptation to interpret. If you don't know details and background – stop talking about it.

## #9 Feedback for you too

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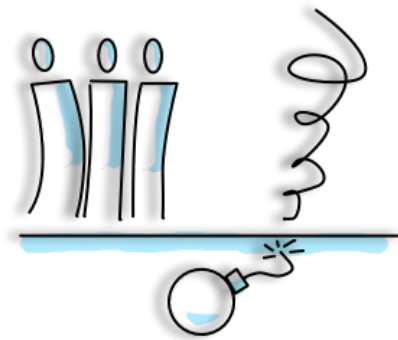
Provide a space to talk about the current work relationship between you and the employee and possible ways to improve it.

Receive and accept (depending on your relationship honest) feedback. Listen and don't judge or start to justify. I know it's difficult.

## Please avoid

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- being unprepared and wasting the employees time
- shrinking it to a fast pace session where the employee has no time to express
- misusing it as your show
- performance appraisal and salary domination
- hearsay argumentation and feedback approaches
- mixing the talk with topics that could be addressed much better in time



## Further readings

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Book summary for Abolishing performance appraisals

- The double sided sword of using future-oriented loyalty incentives