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Self-Evaluation for Direct-Reports

January 2022



Have you ever been asked to draft your own evaluation? Have you ever asked your direct reports to draft theirs?

“Build upon strengths, and weaknesses will gradually take care of themselves.”

Joyce C. Lock

“Strong isn’t about having a million strengths, it’s about facing and dealing with your weaknesses.”

More and more of my clients are experiencing this practice of being asked to write a self-evaluation in advance of their annual review. A client just shared with me that her manager asked her to redraft it three times because the first two times he did not feel she was adequately representing her strengths and accomplishments.

That got me to thinking...

One of the things I spend a lot of time helping clients with is truly grasping the breadth of their strengths, talents and skill sets. From early career to C-suite clients, I work with them to help them uncover more than what they were seeing in themselves. It's very common that we, as individuals, do not see all of our own strengths.

There are various reasons people don't tend to see all their own strengths – from a lack of self-confidence, to being so accomplished that the individual just assumes that what they do is something everyone knows how to do. On one end of the spectrum, a person compares themselves to what they see in others thinking they don't have those strengths and at the other end, doing things so well and so easily that they assume everyone else does it just as easily. What is easy for you, is often one of your strengths, unique to you! If it's easy for you, it's more likely to be because it's one of your strengths, than it is that everyone else does it just as easily or as well.

So, I was thinking about what a great practice this is. It helps people deliberately think about and identify their strengths. It also gives the manager the opportunity to encourage a person to dig deeper and be more confident about claiming their strengths. Then, it ultimately gives the direct report the opportunity to hear what strengths their leader sees in them that they had not seen in themselves.

So here are some tips below for both you as the drafter of a self-evaluation and you as a leader asking your direct reports to draft theirs:

Tips for drafting your own self-evaluation:

The above two quotes seem to contradict themselves. Here's my take on the whole issue of where to put your focus:

First, when you focus on your strengths, you build your confidence muscle and hone your best skills into mastery.

When you work with people who share the same strengths, or possibly complementary strengths, you sharpen each other – the old adage that iron sharpens iron. There is also a whole body of knowledge and practice called "Appreciative Inquiry" which focuses on what we do well and continuing to do more of that. It doesn't ignore the weaknesses, but it places the focus on getting better at what we are good at and what we are known for.

When you focus on weaknesses in and of themselves, it is possible to get lost in what you do not have, do not do well, or keep managing to mess up. That is not a positive place to be! If you are focused on the weakness, you are focused on the negative which can leave you feeling less confident or even, at worst, a failure.

- Start with the goals you had for the year (or whatever period).
- Did you hit the target? Did you exceed the target?
- If you didn't hit the target – what got in the way and how would you anticipate such obstacles in the future; what did you learn and how will that impact what you do differently in the future?
- What strengths and skills did you employ?
- What strengths did you develop or enhance this year?
- What new skills did you develop?
- What did you learn? – New things you learn mean new strengths and skills!
- What new ideas did you share or implement that helped the organization?
- What contributions did you make to the team?
- How were you helpful to other team members or other departments?
- What are you most proud of?
- What skills would you like to develop? What skills do you need for the next level promotion you may be seeking?
- What skills do you need to strengthen or practice more?
- What's a weak spot or a blind spot that's been brought to your attention? What will you do to grow in that area and how might you ask others for help?

Tips for leaders asking their direct-reports to draft self-evaluations:

- You can share the list above with them.
- Think about how you would answer each of the questions above for them. If they are not fully seeing and owning their strengths as you see them, then maybe you will want to ask them to redraft, but be sure to tell them why so they are encouraged!
- Help those who are “just too humble” to “brag about themselves” to think of self-evaluation differently. If one does not see their strengths or own them confidently, then in a sense, they are not contributing as strongly as they might. We contribute our best when we capitalize on, focus on and operate from our strengths. Help them see this as a reason to get past their hesitancy.
- Be prepared, ultimately, to share all the strengths you see in them and how they could further enhance those strengths and use them even more powerfully.

However, if you choose to look at a weakness as an area for growth, to make your strengths stand out even more, then you have the positive to balance the negative.

Second, when you want to look at a weakness, I suggest doing so with a solid plan and a vision for what you will look like, how you will behave and what success you will experience, when you have overcome the weakness, etc.

In other words, envision the success when deciding to tackle a weakness.



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BE YOUR BEST

- Leaders who focus on the strengths of their team members build stronger, more successful teams.
- If you're struggling with a person's deficits, ask them to share first what they want to work on and where they think they could contribute even more effectively. Then, rather than criticize, coach them. Ask them how they can work on that and what options they have for learning, getting better and who could help them or mentor them and how they can ask for help. After they have shared, you can offer additional suggestions, because now they are more open to hear yours, since they will see you as helpful and encouraging, rather than just being critical.

What about the already overconfident?

Are you worried that this practice could have an adverse impact for someone who is already highly vocal about their strengths and accomplishments and is seen by others as competitive and constantly blowing their own horn? There are those folks, so here's an activity that could be great for this person and the team as a whole. Ask the person, or if you have a team, then the whole team, to create a list of strengths for each of the other members of the team, or for others they work with throughout the organization. For the overconfident person, if they come back with too little about others, you can ask them to redraft, telling them you see a lot more strengths in others than they've listed and you want them to go back and think about it some more and add to their list. This will help them to start to look at others and dig a little deeper instead of focusing only on themselves. If they want to be a leader, this is a good activity because they will need to identify the strengths of those they are leading and help to further develop those strengths. Then, to make the activity even more powerful, ask each team member to share in a one-on-one, in-person or on a virtual/visual call (not just in writing) what strengths they see in each other. This is also a fabulous team-building activity. It has an amazing impact individually and on the team as a whole!

So, go after those strengths – and dig deep! It's worth it.

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Joy is a conference speaker, team and leadership development consultant, customized trainer and facilitator and a Certified Professional Coach with expertise in personal career coaching, job offer and salary negotiations and executive coaching.

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