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Bath Consultancy Group

If you only do one thing this week ... tell your bosses what you think of them

Employers should receive appraisals as well as employees – just be careful how you go about '360-degree feedback'

1 [Sandra Haurant](#)

2 guardian.co.uk, Monday 15 February 2010 06.30 GMT



Bottling up frustration at your boss is not advisable. Photograph: Teri Pengilley/Teri Pengilley

Whether it's a failure to communicate useful information or a tendency for slip-ups that make you and your colleagues look bad, the chances are you could tell your boss a thing or two about the way he or she works. Recently it was even claimed that doing so [would make you less stressed](#).

The trouble is finding the right way to approach the matter. Bottle things up and you may end up exploding and saying things you regret, but speak out on the spur of the moment and you may come across as antagonistic. So what is the most constructive way to go about telling your boss what you think of him or her?

In an ideal working world, you would be able to be open and honest with your employers, but, as Chris Smith, principal consultant at the [Bath Consultancy Group](#), acknowledges: "Whether you can do that depends on your situation, not everyone has that sort of relationship with their boss."

Which is why a more formal set-up can be useful. Smith is an advocate of 360-degree feedback, where employees rate managers, managers rate employees and colleagues rate each other. "It typically works with people providing some anonymous feedback based on a questionnaire, which has usually been put together by someone with an HR function or an external organisation. It might be linked to the

company's values, or be based on a set of competencies," says Smith.

In theory, 360-degree feedback should provide a helpful insight for all concerned. "It can be very interesting – you might think you are a good listener or communicator but the feedback says the opposite," he says.

But if the process is not implemented properly, instead of being interesting, it can be downright disastrous, as one firm found out recently. "There had been a problem, and some [more junior] people had come in for a lot of criticism," says Melanie (not her real name).

The most senior members of staff were never subject to the same appraisals the lower tiers of staff went through, so it was suggested that some form of upward appraisal be brought in to highlight, in a constructive way, the fact that problems did not lie solely with the staff who had so far taken the flack. "We wanted the chance to say that the [managers] were a contributing factor," she says.

"We suggested it to the head of department. We were told no to an official 360-degree appraisal as it costs money to bring people in. Instead it was decided that we should do it informally and they would read our written comments." A document was set up and circulated, with a section for each manager "The trouble is, people would fill it in after a bad day and some said some very rude things. No one

really understood that this would be sent, unedited, to the head of department," says Melanie.

When it was, the document sent shockwaves around the department. "The atmosphere has been horrible. It basically destroyed any trust and goodwill there had been before."

Informal appraisals do not have to end so badly – if your manager has agreed to consider your comments there are ways to give feedback without bringing about a complete breakdown in your relationship. Keep the criteria tight, concentrate on key competencies relating to a person's job, keep questions closed and concise, and don't have too many of them.

A ratings system, for example one for poor and five for excellent, can work well, says Smith. While openness can be useful, keeping it anonymous can make the process more honest. And finally, be clear about the aim of the exercise. A successful appraisal will have a positive aim: ask yourself what your boss can do to help you do your job better, not what you like and dislike about his or her personality.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/money/2010/feb/15/tell-bosses-what-think/print>

