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### "Quotes"

*"I have to believe in myself, set goals for myself, set expectations for myself, and continue to work for those goals every single day."*

*~Saquon Barkley*

*"If you give...people enough information, they'll figure out what to do with it. They just need a little guidance."*

*~Tarana Burke*

*"If you are building a culture where honest expectations are communicated and peer accountability is the norm, then the group will address poor performance and attitudes."*

*~Henry Cloud*

*"Give people enough guidance to make the decisions you want them to make. Don't tell them what to do, but encourage them to do what is best."*

*~Jimmy Johnson*

*"Just because an employee does things differently doesn't mean he or she won't do the job right or as well."*

*If you establish expectations of the goal and the standards to follow, then methodology shouldn't be an issue."*

### How'd I Do?

A part of my work with **Executive Advantage** involves leading training sessions, facilitating retreats, and the like -- you know, making presentations of some sort.

I must admit something, though. No matter how long it's been, no matter how many sessions I've led, I still get a little squirrely when it comes to the point in the meeting when evaluation forms are distributed. The faces may be smiling. The heads may be nodding. The discussion may be flowing. But, there's always a slight stomach knot until the results come in. In fact, I don't even look; my husband gets them immediately upon my return to the office, and then he graciously endures my "how'd I do?" inquiries until each piece of feedback has been properly logged. Sad, I know!

In offices worldwide, the "how'd I do?" question is asked daily for some, but at least annually for all when time is set aside on the calendar for evaluating performance. So, join me in this month's edition of **EA Insights** as we examine what it takes to meet expectations. Believe it or not, the answer to how we're doing often is linked to a part of the performance-management process that receives little time or attention.

Keep reading! And, though not a formal presentation, feel free to touch base and let me know how I did!

All the best,

*June*

June Melvin Mickens  
Executive Advantage, LLC

### Meets Expectations?

**June Melvin Mickens**  
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*Yes!!! It's performance evaluation time!*

Okay, in the real world, that's not the way most people react when the season rolls around for that annual or semi-annual review. And, believe it or not, the lack of joy can be shared equally by reviewee and reviewer. Nope, it's often not a fun time for anyone.

Why do rating sessions fail to accomplish fruitful results in far too many instances? How is it that they frequently miss the mark? I think it often is linked to our expectations.

Follow along with me. Whatever the actual rating scale used by an organization, ratings essentially boil down to three general categories:

-- **Exceeds expectations:** That is, in a particular evaluation area, the conduct or performance typically delivered went above and beyond the standard. In other words, way to go!

-- **Meets expectations:** Falling here means that everything is okay; it's solid. There's nothing stellar, but things haven't fallen off the rails either.

-- **Does not meet expectations:** This rating reflects that the effort and/or result were insufficient to meet the criteria set for the task or the conduct area. It reveals that attention and correction is needed in order to perform more successfully in the future.



~Harvey Mackay

"Think about just exceeding expectations of every job you're being asked to do. Continually ask for feedback on how it's going. Ask everybody involved what you can do to do an even better job, and the world will beat down your door trying to ask you to do more and more."

~Alan Mulally

"We tend to live up to our expectations."

~Earl Nightingale

"Nothing shatters the relationship between you and your boss like you failing to meet expectations, deadlines, and goals."

~John Rampton

"Hope is having optimistic, positive expectations."

~Craig Sager

"I set realistic goals consistent with my talents."

~Judy Sheindlin

"Make sure you are clear about the expectations your boss has for you."

~Judy Smith

"I want to top expectations. I want to blow you away."

~Quentin Tarantino

"Set realistic goals, keep re-evaluating, and be consistent."

~Venus Williams

"If I want to know how I'm doing at work, I don't wait for a pat on the back; I ask the people who will give me a clear, objective opinion. When I need a real, arms-wrapped-around-me hug, I go to someone who does that. I stopped getting disappointed by my expectations from non-huggers."

~Chandra Wilson

Notice what all three groupings have in common. They all rest on *expectations*. So, when you think about it, success -- for self and/or for the organization -- is connected, at its core, to getting a handle on what's expected. The challenge too often, though, is that the person doing the rating and the one being rated are on different pages about expectations. And, that's a recipe for failure!

What's at the root of the expectation misunderstanding? Let me offer three possibilities.

**Unclear Expectations** -- Years ago, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled on an obscenity case. Famously, Justice Stewart wrote in his opinion that, although he couldn't provide a good definition of the term *obscenity*, by golly, "I know it when I see it". Chuckles aside, something very similar happens in the workplace daily. What does good work, or a completed task, look like? Don't really know, but (I guess) we'll know it when we see it. Good luck with that!

It's nearly impossible for a staff member to meet, and it's equally difficult for an evaluator to fairly assess, an expectation that's fuzzy. Roll your eyes, if you must, at the mention of SMART goals; however, the notion of incorporating specificity and outlining expectations at the outset pays dividends both for the person's ability to grasp what it is s/he must do and for an objective evaluation of that effort on the other end.

**Unspoken Expectations** -- Have you ever heard, or have you ever said/thought: "Someone [at your level/in your position/with us this long] should *KNOW* what to do." Yup, chalk that statement up to the old mind-reader mentality. It's a call to understand the expectation...by osmosis. But, let me be the bearer of bad news; this rarely, if ever, ends well.

Leaders, please don't assume that the people on your team naturally can see inside of your head and have a clear handle on everything you expect them to accomplish. Team members, please don't be too afraid, too embarrassed, or too arrogant to ask the questions and engage in dialogue to help that leader elaborate on his/her thinking so that you understand your charge. Unspoken expectations need not remain that way.

**Unrealistic Expectations** -- What's on tap actually may be clearly articulated, but if it's impossible to accomplish, there's still trouble ahead. Yes, setting at least some goals, for yourself or for others, that involve a stretch is important. Reasonable stretch encourages growth. On the other hand, assigning or taking on an unattainable job results in failure and, rather than stimulating development, it can have the opposite effect and deflate instead.

Creating realistic expectations takes effort. It means accurately assessing the person or people involved, the environment and its resources, the timing, and a slew of other factors. Though more of an art than a science, the intent is to have a mutual understanding that the assignment -- whether a slam-dunk or an improvement project -- is one that is *doable*. But, reaching this conclusion requires intentionality, planning, and discussion.

So, how do you overcome expectation hurdles? Team leader or team member, you do your best to define expectations up front so that there's a clear target in your sights. And, difficult as it may be, you invest time and effort into honest dialogue throughout the rating period so that real-time feedback, questions, coaching, and adjustments can occur. Coupled together, this fosters an environment in which expectations are met, if not exceeded, more often than not. It yields a setting in which formal performance evaluations aren't dreaded anymore; they're natural, healthy workplace conversations.

Honestly, do you experience trepidation at the thought of delivering or receiving the next performance evaluation? Do you have a good handle on the expectations you have set or been given? If rating season causes cold sweats for you, call on us at **Executive Advantage**. We're here to help you get a better grasp on expectations in order to increase your own success and that of those around you. [Contact us today.](#)



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## About Executive Advantage

At **Executive Advantage**, we are committed to providing results-based business and management consulting, leadership development, and coaching support. We partner with business leaders to build healthy, well-functioning organizations, where goals are met and people thrive. We also partner with individuals to create professional (and personal) lives with clearer direction, improved results, and greater balance.

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