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What suggestions do you have for making it through performance appraisal season? Sitting at a desk for a creative person may be the worst possible form of torture out there, second only to budget time.

– *Performance Anxiety*

Judy: Arrgggh! I get it—and I’m with you 100 percent. At annual review time when I was working in corporations, I used to say, “Please, just let me do my work!” and “I’m wasting time—always reporting on what I’m doing.” (All said to myself, under my breath, tucked away in my office, because this was one battle I knew I would never win.)

Maybe you should consider yourself lucky. In some companies, in addition to annual reviews, there are quarterly PowerPoint project updates that must be presented to peers, along with individual development plans to demonstrate improvement of specific skills. I was once employed at a company with all three requirements. The way I managed to get through it all was to spend a little time each week updating the various forms. I would block an hour every Friday after lunch to fill in review forms, update projects for my PowerPoint presentations, list any classes I had completed, etc. It was interesting and even satisfying to see the forms fill up each week. When it came time for my annual review, I only needed to do a little summarizing, because my records were already very complete. The process I used actually made review time enjoyable for me, because it was gratifying to look at all that my team had accomplished, and not a single gem of our work was left out!



I hear a lot from people who are unhappy in their roles and would like newness and inspiration to keep them motivated. What suggestions do you have to keep them motivated every day?

– *Motivation Conundrum in New York*

Judy: A mentorship or collaboration with someone outside your department may offer your team a fresh perspective on their current role. It is also an engaging way to actively begin building deeper connections with leaders. Ask those who need a boost to make a list of the people in the company who inspire them. Who makes them come alive? It may be an innovator, a leader who pushes the outside limits or a dedicated behind-the-scenes specialist who always gets the job done. Who would they most like to collaborate with on a project? When they have identified their leading motivator, encourage them to send a handwritten note asking if she/he would be willing to be their mentor or collaborator. Advise them to include a few lines about their personal goals, along with examples of why they were inspired by the individual.

Some companies have mentorship programs with formal guidelines to facilitate and build

these relationships. Others do not, and if that is true of your company, you and your team can develop your own plan. Communication with a variety of mentors over time is motivating, can open eyes to a bigger picture of the company, and the connections that develop may offer new opportunities. The process may even lead to a “mutual mentorship,” where two professionals share their specialized expertise in an inspiring collaboration.

Here’s my own personal story of a mutual mentorship: After 20 years in marketing at Target headquarters in Minneapolis, I moved to Merchandise Presentation to focus on fashion apparel. I had been invited to share the visual merchandising ideas in my textbook, “Silent Selling,” with Presentation Specialists. This was the team who made decisions on how apparel would be arranged on store fixtures.

On the first day in my new office, one of Target’s 250 in-house fashion apparel designers scheduled 30 minutes with me. Brenna had seen my marketing presentations featuring trends in visual merchandising around the globe, and she wanted to learn more about my vision for my new role. As a product designer, she understood that presentation of her merchandise in our stores would directly affect sales.

After sharing our ideas in a mutually enthusiastic meeting, Brenna routinely invited me to see samples of her designs in the planogram room. There, we worked together to arrange the products on various fixtures in unique ways. Our partnership led to colorful, exciting product presentations that lined the “racetrack” in more than 1,800 Target stores and drove sales and market share gains. Brenna still stands out in my memory, because she took the initiative to connect at the first opportunity. Our collaboration created a relationship of respect and understanding for the expertise that we both brought to what became a “mutual mentorship.”

ask judy:

ADVICE FOR CREATIVES NAVIGATING THE WORKPLACE



I have a great team. What can I do to really show them how much I appreciate them?

– Searching for Appreciation Inspiration

Judy: You have a great team for a reason, and I'm guessing they reflect your enthusiasm and the passion of your leadership. If your team consists of five to seven people, why not invite them to have lunch with you, your treat? That's one-on-one; don't try to speed date the entire team in one sitting. You may also want to consider inviting your boss to these lunches. It's probably not often that your team has time with your boss, and they may

really appreciate the opportunity. But be sure to ask your team members if they value two bosses for the price of one—it may not be everyone's cup of tea.

If you have a larger group, you may have to shorten personal time to a 20-minute coffee and a scrumptious chocolate dessert (yes!) break. An occasional handwritten note also is a kind gesture. Everyone knows how busy it is day to day, and taking time to do these things will mean the world to them.

Here's why I think personal attention is so important: Before I went to work for Target, I attended a presentation in Minneapolis by John Pellegrine, who led Target's marketing team. When I walked into the auditorium, the lights were down low except for spotlights on white plush Santa Bears with holiday-colored stocking caps seated on every chair in the room. I will never forget that image, nor the casual, heart-warming, inspiring talk that John gave when he came on stage. I left the presentation with one big idea: I wanted to work for Target.

A couple of years later, I was interviewing with John, and my dream came true. I was hired to

develop a visual merchandising department from scratch. I didn't report directly to him, but once or twice a year he would invite me and my director to join him for lunch. He'd always begin by asking my team to work on an exciting new project, a spark of an idea that he wanted to bring to life. Then the three of us would visit, enjoying casual conversation about what was going on in our lives.

Those lunches were magical. I left highly inspired, couldn't wait to tell my team about the new project we'd be working on. I felt more engaged in the larger company as these lunches continued over the years, and was always honored to have time with John. His gift of personal time with me was the single most influential motivator during my career [at Target]. **da**

JUDY BELL IS THE FOUNDER OF ENERGETIC RETAIL (ENERGETIC-RETAIL.COM) AND AUTHOR OF "SILENT SELLING." SHE HELD AN INSPIRATIONAL ROLE FOR 22 YEARS AT TARGET CORP. AND NOW SHARES HER INSIGHTS ON NAVIGATING THE CREATIVE WORKPLACE WITH DESIGN:RETAIL IN THIS BI-ISSUE COLUMN. SEND YOUR QUESTIONS FOR "ASK JUDY" TO JESSIE.DOWD@EMERALDEXPO.COM.



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