

360 Degree Assessments—A Springboard for Leadership Development

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In today's business environment, we understand that our level of effectiveness as a leader significantly impacts the teams we lead, the colleagues we work with and our ability to reach individual, departmental and organizational goals. Whether we're an effective leader looking to become stronger, or we're finding others are challenged with our leadership style, one of the most powerful steps towards becoming a better leader is our ability to step up to the mirror.

A 360 degree assessment will serve as a mirror and an opportunity, through interviews and/or surveys, to gather the perspectives of the people who interact with you at work about your leadership, management and communication style. Gathering this feedback will provide a springboard for how you might leverage your strengths, focus on your improvement opportunities and provide a foundation for a meaningful development plan.

The results from a 360 degree survey can range from a two-three page report to a 30-page report, depending on the depth of the survey and purpose of the outreach. Comprehensive 360s might gather and breakdown responses to as many as 100 questions according to leadership competencies as they relate to employee groups (i.e., primary manager, peers, direct reports). Others are simple questionnaires (25-30 questions with a few essays) that gather all responses to be included in a group summary.

Many larger organizations provide the opportunity, technology and tools for 360 assessments, aligning the questions with established leadership competencies. Ask your manager or HR department if 360 degree assessments are available through your organization, and if so, request a sample and learn about the process.

Other than a 360 debriefer, who might help an individual review the results of an assessment, the results are often kept confidential to the receiver as a personal development resource. This may not be the case if the 360s are tied into an organizational performance process.

Whether you're engaging the help of external professionals who specialize in creating effective 360s, or you're personally creating a brief questionnaire, Google "360

survey tools” and take your pick of online resources to explore because there are plenty to choose from. Several online survey hosts provide ease in creating and customizing surveys and ease and anonymity to survey respondents.

Tactical Guidelines That May Help as You Administer a Simple or Comprehensive 360 Degree Assessment:

- If possible, identify a mix of relationships—successful and challenging—and if applicable, a full circle of individuals—peers, direct reports, and managers—to participate as respondents.
- Position your outreach. When soliciting feedback from your chosen respondents, you’ll want to e-mail a brief statement about why you’re asking them to participate—this may include your desire to receive candid feedback as part of your own professional development plan. If you’re working with a coach who will facilitate interviews, offer his/her name and offer a heads up that the coach will contact the participants personally within the next few days to schedule an appointment.
- Assure respondents that the survey results will be anonymous. Choose survey systems that are built to provide anonymity. If you’re working with a good coach who is facilitating 360 interviews for you, he/she will only provide you with a summary of common themes, not individual feedback.
- Request a specific date for completion of the survey (within one week of the request). On the day the survey is due, if the total number of respondents have not yet replied, send a general e-mail reminder (to all respondents) thanking those who have completed the survey and reminding those who haven’t.
- As personal as the feedback may be or feel, make an effort to view the feedback as data that will help you identify trends and common themes, validate your successes and identify and prioritize your development opportunities.
- If possible, identify an internal or external coach who will help you debrief the 360 and work with you over time to learn, apply and debrief new skills and approaches that will increase your leadership effectiveness.
- After the survey has been closed out, send out a follow-up note/e-mail to your

respondents thanking them for their time and candor. Some leaders even share a component of development that they're personally working on as a result of the feedback.

The most effective 360 assessment results are provided to those individuals who are genuinely ready to see their reflection and apply the data to on-going leadership development.

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