

Ace your work report card

The three friends met years ago while they were working at different divisions of Time Warner in Manhattan.

One of them, Elaine Meryl Brown, took an executive development class that helped her decide leaders aren't just born — leaders can be made. Brown formed a support and mentor network. Over time, the three friends decided to turn their life lessons into a book, a savvy "mentor in your pocket."

The trio — Brown, who worked for HBO till last year; Marsha Haygood, who worked at New Line Cinema until 2006 and now runs StepWise Associates, a career and personal development company; and Rhonda Joy McLean, who's still at Time Inc. — have just released "The Little Black Book of Success."

This excerpt is from a chapter titled, "To Measure Your Performance, Get Feedback."

You may think you're doing a fabulous job and you probably are, but you'll need to get confirmation from the person who matters most, the one who reviews your performance, and is qualified to give you a raise, bonus or promotion: your boss.

Feedback helps you grow, develop and gives you a chance to correct your mistakes. You're fortunate if you work for a company that gives feedback and views on a regular basis. If you don't, you'll have to be proactive and ask for it. Giving feedback makes some managers feel uncomfortable because they don't like to deliver negative news. They think giving negative



Co-authors (l. to r.) Marsha Haygood, Elaine Meryl Brown and Rhonda Joy McLean at a reading last week at the Hue-Man Bookstore in Harlem.

news is an instigator for interpersonal conflict instead of growth, feel uneasy about the process in general or simply don't know how to approach this task. But feedback is information that measures how well you achieve your work objectives and results.

When you have your feedback meeting, don't rely on memory. Review the notes of your contributions that you've been tracking in a personal leadership notebook. Use the information to prepare for this meeting. During the meeting, ask relevant questions about your work and seek guidance.

It's also the time when your good listening skills come into

play. Be sure to take notes on your feedback and, most important, don't take negative feedback personally. Remember this is about your performance, not personal criticism. And if you receive constructive criticism, which you will because nobody is perfect, know that these are areas for improvement that simply require more of your time, energy, focus and attention to develop a better you.

So that you continue to get the feedback you need, ask for it regularly; perhaps quarterly or semiannually as the case may be, but definitely after the completion of a big project while it's still fresh on your manager's mind.

Of course not all feedback

when this could not be further from the truth.

Just because your boss is not criticizing your work or reprimanding you for not doing a good job doesn't mean he doesn't think that way every now and then. It's your responsibility not to make any assumptions about your overall performance. It's your boss' job to tell you how you're doing. Consequently, even if she feels uneasy about giving you feedback, it's something you must ask her to do. In addition to this, be open to hearing honest feedback from your co-workers and others you interact with on a regular basis, as well.

As your boss begins to recognize your performance change and see your growth — which you may have to bring to her attention — she'll see you as someone who takes the performance feedback seriously, which is a good way to get noticed and rewarded.

On the other hand, sometimes we sabotage ourselves by ignoring constructive criticism and refusing to change. Other times, we get an attitude and internalize these feelings, which block us from moving forward, and being stuck prevents us from growing. In general, be open to feedback, use it as an opportunity for self-evaluation, and make appropriate changes to your behavior and/or performance if necessary.

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THE LITTLE BLACK BOOK OF SUCCESS

LAWS OF LEADERSHIP FOR BLACK WOMEN

ELAINE MERYL BROWN, MARSHA HAYGOOD AND RHONDA JOY MCLEAN

is negative. Positive feedback should give you reassurance that you're moving in the right direction and you should keep up the great work.

We tend to assume that when we show up for work, do a good job, even stay late, the fact that we're operating on all eight cylinders means that we're right on track. However, there are times