Performance reviews: Should you respond to negative comments?

Question: “In my performance review, my boss included some negative comments from his own manager. Since I don’t agree with these remarks, I said so in the “Employee Comments” section of the appraisal form. I stood up for what I believe to be true, but now I wonder if I made a mistake. What do you think?” — Uncertain Employee

Marie’s Answer: I think you’re worrying about the wrong thing. Instead of fretting over your response, you should be trying to correct management’s negative impressions. Here are some things to consider:

• Your appraisal form will soon be filed away and forgotten, but negative management perceptions could affect your career for a long time. After all, higher-level managers approve raises, sign off on promotions and decide who gets laid off.

• Even if you disagree with the higher manager, you need to understand the reasons behind the unfavorable comments. Your boss probably knows, so request an explanation, then ask him to help you repair your reputation.

• If the higher manager is acting on inaccurate information, you should provide the facts as soon as possible. But if your performance is at issue, then you must take a long, hard look in the mirror and decide whether changes are in order.

Adding rebuttal comments to your appraisal was completely appropriate, as long as you expressed yourself in a mature, professional manner. But if your written remarks were irrational or overly emotional, ask whether you can submit a corrected version.