

PROVIDING EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK

Feedback is essential to human/employee development. It not only helps employees correct mistakes before they become habits, but it also reinforces positive behaviors, encourages the development of desirable work habits, and helps employees achieve their goals.

For feedback to be effective, it must be given in a safe, collaborative climate that is conducive to learning. Use the following guidelines to create such an environment:

- Explain your purpose (intent – affirming, controlling, defending or relinquishing). Let others know that your purpose is to help them, whether that is to help them develop, be more effective, understand others' perceptions, or make better choices.
- Establish trust – act with their best interest in mind.
- Work to *really* understand the people with whom you work (Straight Talk® is a potential resource to use to get to know someone else's style of communication).
- Invite people to shape the feedback process. Balance the power by sharing some of the decisions and control with the person to whom you are providing feedback.
- Be genuine – let your own personality, insights, observations and self-disclosures add depth and richness to the feedback you give others.
- Treat feedback as information, not as a value judgment.

Feedback's impact depends not only on the climate in which it is given, but on its timing. To be effective, feedback must be well timed, (i.e., not given when you are angry) and, timely. Regular feedback is key to the development of employees' skills.

Providing Appreciative Feedback

Appreciative (aka, positive) feedback is a powerful motivator when it is **specific** and **behavioral**. Global compliments, while encouraging, are too broad to be effective in maintaining or improving employees' performance. It is important to give appreciative feedback to ALL of those around you: your boss, your peers, as well as those who report to you.

To make your appreciative feedback specific and behavioral:

- Describe the behavior you are recognizing, such as meeting a deadline, surpassing productivity projections, or participating more fully in a meeting

- Emphasize the impact of the behavior so that the person can clearly see why you believe it is important. You can talk about the impact on you, the job, the organization, and the team.
- Let the person know exactly what behaviors to continue. For example, “I am delighted that you came up with a unique solution to that audit issue and included it in the final draft,” is more effective than “You did a good job.”
- Develop a habit of looking for and commending specific positive behaviors; such reinforcement will increase the incidence of those behaviors

Providing Constructive Feedback

It's usually easy to identify performance issues, but it's not always as easy to communicate constructive (aka, negative) feedback effectively and constructively. How you deliver constructive feedback can make the difference between continued decline or an improvement in the employees' performance.

The following guidelines can help you provide constructive feedback:

- Respect the person's need for privacy. Your reaction to a person's behavior or performance should be between you and the person.
- Give feedback that is specific and behavioral, rather than general and judgmental. Describe the behavior in objective and specific terms. Focus on the work, not on the person. Saying, “You are getting lazy,” is much more likely to arouse defensiveness than saying, “You've missed the last two deadlines.”
- Next, describe the behaviors impact on you, the team, or the attainment of the person's goals.
- Avoid overwhelming the person with too much feedback all at once. Focus on relevant and important observations. Read the person's nonverbal cues to know whether you need to reposition a point, provide support, process their feelings and reactions, or move on to the next topic.
- Express empathy when you perceive discouragement. Acknowledge that change does not happen overnight and can be difficult at times.
- Dealing with resistance – resistance to receiving constructive feedback is a normal response. How you manage the person's response will help focus the conversation back on solutions:
 - Acknowledge that the feedback can be difficult to hear. Don't argue.
 - Paraphrase their resistance, “I understand that this information is difficult to hear.”
 - Reaffirm that your intent is to help them be successful.

Providing Appreciative Feedback

Planning Questions

Before providing appreciative feedback – in practice sessions and on the job – plan by answering the following questions

What specific action have you recently observed that deserves recognition? (when appropriate, include who, what, when, where, or how much)

Why is this action important to recognize?

Your Personal Barriers

From your experience, what potential barriers will you need to overcome in order to achieve success in recognizing positive results?

How will you overcome these barriers?

Providing Constructive Feedback

Planning Questions

To prepare for providing constructive feedback, complete the following questions and key actions about a feedback opportunity

➤ **Framing question: What do you want to accomplish by giving this feedback?**

➤ **Key Action 1: Convey your positive intent.**
What common goals or outcomes can you point to?

➤ **Key Action 2: Describe specifically what you have observed.**
What did you observe? What exactly happened?

➤ **Key Action 3: State the impact of the behavior or action**
What was the impact on you or others? On achieving organizational goals?

➤ **Key Action 4: Ask the other person to respond**
What will you say to draw out the other person's reaction to your feedback?

➤ **Key Action 5: Focus the discussion on solutions**
Exactly what you say for Key Action 5 will depend on the person's response. How do you think the other person will respond? Write a description.

What changes will you ask for or what suggestions will you offer?

➤ **Key Action 6: Determine how to support the solution**
Ask what support (particularly yours) the person will need to be successful.

Additional Resources

Bracey, Rosenblum, Sanford, Trueblood. *Managing From the Heart*

Daniels, Aubrey, *Bring Out the Best in People*

Douglas, Eric, *Straight Talk: Turning Communication Upside Down for Strategic Results at Work.*

Goleman, Daniel, *Working with Emotional Intelligence.*

Personal Decisions International, *Successful Manager's Handbook: Development Suggestions for Today's Managers*

Stein and Book, *The EQ Edge: Emotional Intelligence and Your Success*

Tamm and Luyet, *Radical Collaboration: Five Essential Skills to Overcome Defensiveness and Build Successful Relationships*