**Manager – Constructive Feedback**

#### What to Know:

Remember that you’re giving feedback to a person and the message that is heard is more important than the message that is given. People are more likely to hear feedback when it is specific, focused on behaviors rather than the person, a combination of positive and constructive, and when there is an opportunity to voice their own observations as part of the process. When feedback is actually heard, you’re more likely to elicit the behaviors you’re looking for.

#### Mythbusters:

“Sandwiching” feedback — where you sandwich negative feedback between two pieces of positive feedback — is not as effective as some may claim. When feedback feels insincere people are less receptive and may overlook the constructive information you’re sharing. Rather than hide critical feedback, be upfront with employees and set the expectation that all feedback conversations should include discussion around positive performance and potential growth opportunities.

**Questions to Ask:**

* What kind of feedback do you need to meet our business priority? (For example, if the priority is to improve customer service, I may need feedback in how well I am doing at resolving difficult customer situations.)
* How do you know if you are meeting your expectations around this priority? Is this effective? If no, why?
* Think of a time when you were given feedback and it helped you perform better at your job. What about that situation made it positive?
* What can we do within this group to provide each other with more feedback so we all can develop and accomplish our priority?
* What can we do within this group to get better at the skill of giving feedback?
* What could your supervisor do differently to get you the feedback you need?

**Best Practices:**

* Do not wait for the annual review process to give feedback. Time feedback so that it matches the cadence of the work (e.g., after an important customer interaction, at the end of a project, after taking on a new responsibility).
* Give feedback in a future-orientated manner. Rather than lingering on the past, ask the employee to consider what went well that could be done again and what could be done differently next time.
* When giving constructive feedback, focus on the behavior rather than the person.
* When giving feedback, do less telling and more asking. Ask the employee questions like:
  + How do you think that went?
  + What are you proud of?
  + What did you learn?
  + What would you do differently next time?

#### What Managers Can Do:

Consider short, yet frequent check-ins with each direct report (e.g., 20 minutes, once a week) and focus on: 1) what’s going well? 2) where are you having challenges? 3) how can I help?

Focus on providing real-time feedback and use questions to help employees process their own performance. Ask questions like: how do you think that went? What do you think you could do differently next time?

In conversations with direct reports, focus on the behavior rather than the person. For example, rather than saying, “You are confrontational,” consider describing a specific behavior such as, “yesterday, when you raised your voice….”

We often avoid providing feedback because we don’t want to upset others. However, it is important to remember that being direct and honest is the kind thing to do. Feeling frustrated and not saying anything leads to resentment, conflict and confusion.

#### What Employees Can Do:

Be proactive about asking your supervisor for feedback, especially after major events or milestones. Ask your supervisor: what do you think went well? What could I do better/or differently that would help me be more successful?

Feedback conversations don’t have to be scary or formal. Rather than wait for a full debrief about a project, find opportunities to informally ask your supervisor for feedback about specific topics. Questions such as, “How do you think that went?” or “Is there anything I could do differently next time?” can be very insightful.

Be prepared going into a feedback conversation with your manager. Think back on a specific timeframe and make concrete notes about your performance. Try to describe examples using STAR: situation, task, action, results. If your manager doesn’t solicit your input, ask if you can offer a few examples that demonstrate what’s going well and where you’d like to improve. Coming into a performance conversation with your own ideas demonstrates that you take ownership in your development.

#### What Leadership Can Do:

Role model the behaviors of asking for feedback to encourage others to do the same. For example, after a project or meeting, check-in peers or direct reports and ask: How do you think that went? Do you have any feedback on things I could have done better/differently?

It’s all too easy to give critical feedback or point out what needs more work, especially when you’re short on time. Don’t fall into this trap. Positive feedback is actually more effective and is highly motivating. Make a point to call out the positive.

Be careful of creating a culture that is too “nice” in the sense that people do not give each other feedback. Make continuous learning and improvement a regular part of your day-to-day conversations.

**Read:**

* [*When giving critical feedback, focus on nonverbal clues*](https://hbr.org/2017/01/when-giving-critical-feedback-focus-on-your-nonverbal-cues?referral=00563&cm_mmc=email-_-newsletter-_-daily_alert-_-alert_date&utm_source=newsletter_daily_alert&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=alert_date&spMailingID=16380838&spUserID=MTY1MjQ4MTg0NDES1&spJobID=941669042&spReportId=OTQxNjY5MDQyS0)
* *Crucial Conversations by Kerry Patterson and Joseph Grenny*
* *Radical Candor by Kim Scott*