

Developing the High Performance Workforce Series

Article #3: Employee Feedback

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Feedback is giving timely and specific information to your employees about job performance based on recent experience or observations. It includes positive and corrective feedback.

Giving your employees regular feedback will:

- improve quality and productivity
- motivate workers
- decrease conflict
- identify training needs sooner

Having a clear approach to providing feedback will help ensure results.

How to Provide Effective Feedback

Think FAST: Frequent, Accurate, Specific, and Timely (Bruce Tulgan).*

- **Frequent** feedback helps employees get used to you talking about their work and behaviour. Look for daily opportunities to offer guidance and praise.
- **Accurate** feedback is critical. Make sure you have the correct information about the issue or event. You may damage the relationship with your employee if you wrongly accuse.
- **Specific** feedback is the best way to help employees change behaviour. General statements will not help employees clearly understand what you need them to understand.

Don't say: *"This was not your best work."*

Say instead: *"This project was completed three weeks later than you originally estimated. The customer is thinking about getting this work done elsewhere due to the missed deadline. What will it take in the future to ensure we can deliver on time?"*

- **Timely** feedback is more effective and easier to deliver. People have better recollection of events and are more willing to discuss issues when approached right away. A good rule—"next week is too late."

*Practice observing employees and look for "teachable moments".
You can seize the feedback opportunity to incorporate a little "on the job training"*

Effective Leaders...Tell people what they expect them to do:

- Explain to employees the value of their work
- Provide regular feedback
- Make the work do-able
- Reward successful performance

Reasons for Feedback

All feedback is constructive. Positive feedback is just as important as corrective feedback. It can build the employee's confidence, self-esteem, commitment, and loyalty. Reasons to provide employee feedback include:

- Recognizing a job well done.
- Correcting errors.
- Identifying skill gaps and training needs.
- Responding to complaints from customers or co-workers.
- As a tool for motivating employees to do their best.
- Reinforcing training/learning.

Timely feedback enhances results. Daily interactions about performance can lead to faster improvements in productivity, contribute to less conflict, reduce errors, and affect overall employee turnover and retention.

Advantages of continuous feedback:

- It's a powerful way of motivating people; giving feedback helps build relationships.
- It improves efficiency by providing opportunities to adjust goals leading to better results.
- It lets employees know whether their performance meets your expectations.
- It helps employees to identify strengths and manage their own areas for improvement.

Types of Feedback

The only way for employees to get better at what they do is to provide them with candid and timely information on how they are doing. *Feedback can be:*

- Spontaneous—on the spot.
- Informal—part of regular supervision and ongoing communications.
- Formal—delivered at specific meeting times and documented.

Feedback is not about forms or formal appraisals; it is about clearly and consistently communicating work expectations. Feedback, on a regular basis, lets employees know what is working and what is not working. If you have ideas and suggestions that can help them be effective, it would be unfair to not share them with the employee.

Feedback is also the most difficult task a manager faces. No one likes to hear about his or her shortcomings, and no one likes to deliver bad news. But by developing ongoing feedback habits, you can make daily feedback easy to do and easier to respond to.

Dealing with the Difficult Employee

Describe performance issues in terms of the behaviours you see, not attitudes and personalities of the employee. Take a look at some suggested responses to employee complaints.

| The employee says.... | You can... |
|--|--|
| <i>“That’s not my job.”</i> | Clarify your expectations and ask them to be clear about what they think the job entails. |
| <i>“I’m not trained to do this.”</i> | Ask the employee if they feel they have everything they need to do the job. Ask if you can support them in some way. |
| <i>“That’s not my fault.”</i> | Be specific about what you perceive the problem to be, and talk to the employee about when you first noticed the issue. |
| <i>“I can’t go faster...I can’t do that job.”</i> | Acknowledge what the employee does well. Ask for their feedback on what they feel is reasonable and how they feel they are doing in relation to other employees. |
| <i>“If you don’t like what I’m doing, I can quit.”</i> | Be clear about expecting the behaviour to improve. Give them a day to think it over, and remind them that you support them in their role. |

Don't ignore the behaviours, hoping for them to go away. Ask for feedback and follow up with the employee within a reasonable period of time. If the problem continues, consider issuing a written warning.

Do's and Don'ts of Communication

Individuals have different communication styles. Be prepared to listen and question. Stay focused on the problem, not the individual.

| DO | DON'T |
|--|--|
| Put your self in the other person's situation. A little empathy can buy a lot of good will. | Give corrective feedback in front of others. Criticize – it's seldom heard as being helpful. |
| Let the other person know their feelings are valid. | Name call, label, or threaten. Raise your voice. |
| Clarify. Restate what your employee has said to be sure you understand their real meaning. | Diagnose the motives behind the actions. |
| Use "I" Statements to ensure that the employee hears what you are thinking and feeling. | Give unsolicited advice. |
| Summarize. Constantly restate and update your position and the feedback you receive. | Ask excessive or inappropriate questions that don't relate to the issue. |
| Identify the elements of the solution you are jointly working towards: expectations, timelines, consequences, how progress will be reviewed. | Offer reassuring statements that avoid the reality of the situation. |

Planning for a Feedback Session

Choose an appropriate time and place to bring up a problem.

Knee jerk reactions can escalate situations.

Set a time and place that will encourage meaningful discussion.

Clearly state the reason for the feedback.

Objectively outline the problem. Stick to the facts and avoid making emotional statements. Accept any responsibility you might have for the situation.

"I want to talk to you about...."

"I saw..."

"When I was told, I looked into the issue by...."

Explain the impact of the issue.

Describe how the problem impacts you personally, the work place and the business.

"I am very concerned about...."

"I am upset that is occurring because..."

Check for input.

Is your understanding of the situation accurate? Is there additional information to clarify the situation?

Encourage the employee to give their side of the story.

"Is that the way you saw it..."

"Do I have all the information?" "What's your reaction?"

Summarize the problem and discuss suggestions for resolution.

Once the problem is clear, work together to find a solution. Discuss, negotiate and compromise. Listen carefully and clearly identify how the problem will be resolved.

“Let’s review...”

“What do you propose...”

“We agree then that the problem is.... and that the problem will be resolved by...”

Identify the next steps.

Clearly identify who will be doing what, over what time period.

“The following steps will be taken ...”

“I will do And you will do...”

“I will follow up with you by.....”

Motivation: Six Things to Make Employees Care

If people care about their work, they work harder and smarter—they take pride in their work and in doing it well. So what can you do to encourage employees to care about their work?

1. **Be fair.** Treating people fairly and equitably builds trust and increases motivation.
2. **Challenge people with responsibility and opportunity.** High expectations for employee performance can often lead to an increase in confidence, capabilities, and performance. Given an interesting, demanding activity, most people rise to the challenge.
3. **Give people authority over their responsibilities.** Delegate decision-making authority along with responsibility. Not having the ability to delegate authority makes employees feel powerless and can prohibit their development. Acknowledge those who excel by letting them take on more responsibility.
4. **Recognize people for their work.** Monetary compensation is important, but humans are social beings. Let employees know you appreciate them.
5. **Do what you say you will.** Relationships are based on trust. If you make promises and don’t deliver, employees will begin to feel that everything about the company and their jobs is suspect.
6. **Match the person to the job.** People do their best when they are doing things that they have talent for and a passion to perform.