

Provide Effective Employee Feedback to Get the Results You Want

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Why is it that so many managers avoid giving honest feedback to employees?

Intuitively, you know that performance appraisals and employee reviews help you give and get the honest feedback essential to develop your employees and build successful organizations. Fear, however, of making a mistake or offending an employee may prevent you from providing the feedback he needs.

Feedback Mistakes

Here are some of the mistakes managers make when giving employees feedback:

- Providing empty criticism or praise: making off-the-cuff remarks like, “Great job,” or, “You really made a mess of things,” – without also providing specifics or suggestions for improvement.
- Delivering the message the wrong way: giving negative feedback in public, via e-mail or voice mail.
- Waiting until performance or behavior problems are too serious before addressing them.
- Only providing negative feedback.

Characteristics of Effective Employee Feedback

Effective feedback is:

- **Specific.** Details are a key part of effective feedback. Instead of saying that you’re disappointed in an employee, list the actions which occurred to make you feel that way. If an employee does a great job, explain what he did right – and the impact his actions had.
- **Timely.** Whether it’s positive or negative, effective feedback is delivered as soon after the event as possible.
- **Based on observations.** Constructive feedback is not empty criticism; it is descriptive, based on observations and always directed to the action, not the person or his intentions. Effective feedback focuses on the “what” and “how” of the behavior, not the “why” (which tends to make a person defensive).
- **Designed to help an individual understand his behavior.** The main purpose of constructive feedback is to help an employee understand where they stand, in relation to

expected and/or productive job behavior.

- **Actionable.** Successful feedback focuses on actions or behaviors that the individual can do something about – and provides specific suggestions for improvement.

Tips for Making Your Feedback More Effective

To ensure your feedback gets the results you want, craft your message carefully. Use the following tips and techniques to confidently deliver feedback that positively impacts performance:

- **Be proactive.** Don't wait for problems to escalate before addressing them. Meeting with employees regularly (monthly or quarterly) provides more frequent opportunities to discuss issues before they become serious. It also conveys the message that you care about your employees and want to be accessible.
- **Be direct.** When delivering any type of feedback, get to the point within the first two sentences. Provide the specifics of what occurred, starting sentences with, "I have observed," or "I have had reported to me," to help you stay issue-focused and avoid beating around the bush.
- **Tie employee performance to company goals.** Employees like to know how they fit into the "big picture." When delivering feedback, show how improvement in an individual's performance can improve the department and organization as a whole.
- **Balance the good with the bad.** If you have to provide negative feedback, be sure to point out instances where employees do things right, as well. Identify opportunities for providing specific, observation-based feedback employees will truly find motivating.
- **Track progress.** In addition to providing feedback, set timetables for the changes in behavior you expect – and make plans to follow-up and monitor progress.

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