

"POSITIVE WAYS TO PRESENT CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK"



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Performance improvement coaching is a necessary part of supervision, management and leadership, yet many people in these roles are uncomfortable or awkward at doing this. All too often a difficult-to-deliver message is ignored, or perhaps massaged to the extent that the recipient does not realize the seriousness of his or her behavior. In other cases, corrective feedback is presented in a way that is harsh, hurtful and damaging to the self-esteem of others.

Here are some ways that supervisors and managers can offer feedback in a way that is constructive for the employee and beneficial to the business:

1. Observe inappropriate or unacceptable behavior first hand if possible. It is too difficult to approach an employee on an issue that other people have observed and reported back to you. While sometimes this is the only source, it is preferable to give feedback based on your own direct observations.
2. If the behavior has to do with interactions with internal or external customers, deal with it immediately, so that the feedback is fresh and the person can relate to what has just happened. "Joe, I just observed that when you were giving benefits information to our employee, you did so with an aggravated tone in your voice. Were you aware that you were doing that?"
3. Try to discern between an isolated incident and repeated behavioral patterns that need to be addressed. Give your employees the benefit of the doubt, but don't let it be a self-justification for procrastinating or avoiding a necessary discussion.
4. For situations that have built up over time which now trigger your aggravation, frustration or anger, allow yourself to cool down and gain perspective before approaching the employee. A low key yet serious tone of voice which conveys concern - not anger or frustration - will have far more impact than feedback filled with emotionality.
5. Always focus the discussion of the behavior, not the person. At no time should an employee feel attacked or disrespected. Avoid calling a person rude, lazy or irresponsible, even if it appears that way to you.
6. Clearly state the behavior that you want, be as specific as possible, and explain why your request is important. "Dawn, it is important that you have your daily reports completed and forwarded to finance each day by 3 p.m. so that they can keep their part of the reporting process on track."
7. Ask what you can do as the manager to help make this possible. Be open to the possibility that there might be legitimate circumstances in the business that you are unaware of that are preventing the person from performing as desired. Be ready to listen and respond.
8. For serious issues, choose a private and confidential setting to address the problem. There is no value in reprimanding an employee in front of their peers. In fact doing so compounds the problem, as they will be focusing on their feelings of embarrassment rather than listening to the validity of your feedback.
9. Give specific expectations and a timeframe in which the behavior or performance needs to be improved. Curtness on the phone, for instance, should be curbed and eliminated immediately. Other behaviors might need more time for training, coaching or practice.
10. Monitor the employee's behavior regularly and give positive feedback for desired improvements. Show them that you appreciate their efforts and acknowledge their successes.
11. If the above steps do not bring the necessary results, have the courage to take the process to more serious and necessary levels of accountability and consequence.