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Giving Effective Feedback, Self-Study Guide (Supervisors and Managers Series)



Authored by: (Courseware Company, 2020)

Giving Effective Feedback, Self-Study Guide (Supervisors and Managers Series) – Adapted for learning purposes

Definitions

Overview

We offer feedback to others all the time, although we may not do so consciously. Our verbal expressions, body language, and gestures all contribute to reflect what we are thinking, and the astute observer is able to figure out what we are really saying.

In this session, you'll consider what feedback entails, and when to be ready to provide our feedback to others.

Food for Thought

When it comes to providing feedback, there are a few things to tell ourselves. First of all, feedback is a commentary on how you think someone is doing, and as such that feedback can include positive or negative observations, or both. Feedback that is heard and acted upon is what we would consider **effective feedback**. This sort of feedback is provided in a constructive manner.

Providing **constructive feedback** means that you are focused on providing feedback in a helpful manner, to help the other individual to learn and grow, not to insult, belittle, or punish them. (Sometimes actions do require some kind of negative consequence, too, but that is separate from this process.) Our objective in this course is to help you provide constructive feedback.

Our experience has shown us that some people do not like getting feedback at all. They may have had bad experiences with performance reviews or harshly judgmental parents or coaches growing up. Or, perhaps they are modest and not accustomed to receiving praise or speaking about themselves in front of others. Keep these potential anxieties in mind as you prepare to deliver feedback.

As well, feedback is supposed to be delivered honestly, but some of us are not very good about being honest. On the one hand, many workplace supervisors are concerned with being perceived as “fair and friendly.” Instead of being honest, they avoid delivering the truth in case the employee dislikes them for it.

On the other hand, we can be so honest with people that we are hurtful instead of being constructive. Another question to ask yourself is: can our desire to be honest release too much information and be hurtful instead of constructive?

When Feedback is Needed

Some people want – and need – feedback more frequently than others. It's up to you to gauge what is appropriate and what you can offer constructively and effectively. Most people get far less feedback than they want. If you change your habits to deliver more feedback more frequently, that's great! We see feedback as a positive event, and we will teach you how to make it that way.

When it comes to formal performance review time (which is typically annually or semi-annually), people expect to get feedback from you. However, it is our position that there should never be any surprises in the formal review. Your people should already know how they are doing and what they need to be working on because of the informal feedback that you provide. In addition, they should never be told that they've been

doing something incorrectly for six months and you have decided to withhold the information from them until the formal review is completed. Doing so creates bad feelings and can erode trust with your team.

Speaking Clearly

Overview

If you're offering feedback to someone, we suggest that you apply the essentials of good communicators. Be clear, concise, complete, and correct in what you have to say so that things are conveyed the way you intend them to be.

In this session, you'll learn the essential ingredients for sharing feedback in a way that is heard by others.

Being Descriptive

When providing feedback, you want to make sure that people are hearing what it is that you are saying, so you need to make sure that the language that you use is descriptive and clear.

Staying Neutral

Words and body language are our only real tools when it comes to delivering feedback (although you will probably do formal performance reviews in writing too), and it is extremely important to manage what you are saying with your mouth and through your posture, gestures, and facial expressions.

Keep in mind that your goal is to provide constructive criticism that is heard and acted upon. This means that it's essential that you keep your words and body language consistent.

Characteristics of Effective Feedback

Overview

By now, you've probably realized that feedback is an absolutely essential communication skill, no matter what your role is in the workplace and whether you are a leader or not.

In this session, you'll review six characteristics of effective feedback. This is a very helpful list to keep handy as you prepare for your feedback meetings, as well as coaching sessions.

Six Characteristics

One goal of feedback is for it to contribute to an improvement in future performance. Even when it does not lead to a desired level of performance, the meeting itself provides the platform to discuss expectations, results, motivation, and how to succeed. For employees (or even suppliers) who choose not to perform at an adequate level, the meeting serves as a benchmark within the larger performance management arena. If an employee refuses to comply, has been supported and coached to do well, and continues to refuse, then the supervisor has the necessary means to move into a disciplinary performance management plan.

When feedback is perceived to be negative (because of our own behavior, or perhaps because it is not well delivered), people will naturally try to avoid it, or at least minimize the negative effects. However, we need to let people know that it can be a great tool for personal development, especially when we include

information on both the issues and the possible solutions. With this in mind, let's delve deeper into the six major characteristics of effective feedback.

In Private

Feedback should be given in private if your comments can be embarrassing, and a formal feedback meeting should always be held in private. While some people like the attention that comes from sincere praise or celebrating an accomplishment in front of others, some do not, and no one wants negativity shared in front of their peers. (This should be apparent without having to state it, but sometimes we get excited and forget!)

Balanced

Balance in this context is about designing the feedback session so that, even though there may be constructive criticism required, the employee does not feel attacked, or that all you have to say about his work is negative. We recommend that you avoid the older form of "sandwich approach" (by making a positive comment, a negative, and then a positive). However, you should still start any feedback with a positive comment about some aspect of the employee's work. If you are not comfortable with this, or not good at small talk, write some comments down ahead of time to keep yourself focused. Your employee will appreciate that you get to the heart of the meeting quickly instead of letting any anxiety build. Feedback that is delivered in specific terms and in a sincere manner is usually accepted well, even when we are receiving criticism.

Relevant

Keep the conversation focused on feedback that is relevant and job related, and to things which the employee has control over. For example, complaining about the way a letter looks when the employee only has access to an ancient printer that adds lines to everything, or asking for a sophisticated looking brochure when there is no budget provided for the proper paper and licensed photography, only adds to the employee's stress and frustration.

Specific

Avoid general statements when you deliver feedback. "You seem unmotivated," is not nearly as helpful as, "You arrived late to work at least three days a week, your last two assignments were late, and you did not attend the new employee lunch last week."

Documented

Base your comments on documentation, facts, and your own observation. Don't rely on what another manager or a colleague told you, or what someone overheard, when you should be available to monitor what is going on yourself.

Personal (In the Right Way)

Compliments or criticisms that are directed generally toward the team are meaningless to an employee. "We just don't seem able to get out error-free invoices," is not as constructive as, "Three of the last invoices you sent out had errors in them." Describe the behavior that is unsatisfactory, rather than judge a person because of it. Base it on their actions, and don't make a personal attack on the individual.