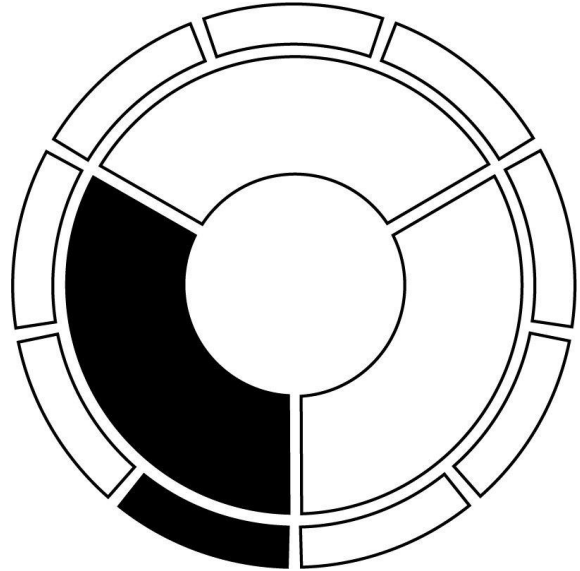


PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

FEEDBACK CONVERSATIONS HANDOUT

Feedback is such a critical part of organizational life that it is safe to say that learning and improvement are next to impossible without it. Yet, most employees surveyed in typical companies report that they do not receive all the feedback that they need to do their jobs well, much less the feedback that would help them continually improve their performance so that they can excel in their roles. And if you talk to a typical manager, they will likely tell you that they feel uncomfortable providing this necessary feedback and often procrastinate or avoid giving feedback altogether.



Self-Evaluation

How would you evaluate your feedback skills if you did an honest self-assessment?

Do you give frequent feedback to your colleagues?

Are you comfortable giving positive feedback?

What about negative (constructive) feedback?

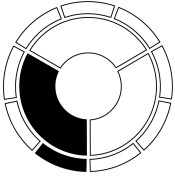
Do you let people know right away what didn't work, was ineffective, or that they could do better?

Feedback is essential for learning, improvement, and team performance, yet many managers procrastinate or even avoid giving it.

Why is this?

In our experience, it is human nature to want to avoid activities that we are not good at, or that make us feel uncomfortable.





PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

For all of the above reasons, feedback is an essential skill that managers must become proficient at. Managers who are committed to high performance on their teams and in their departments must create a “feedback-rich environment.”

Giving feedback is like learning a new sport. Take skiing, for example. Or tennis. Or golf. Almost everyone is poor at first until they receive some formal training. Like these sports, giving feedback is just not something that comes naturally for most people. Perhaps you are like many of us and have spent years avoiding giving feedback and missed those opportunities to practice and improve.

Well, it's not too late. If you put the following guidelines and tips into practice, your feedback ability will begin to improve immediately. We have found that offering managers and leaders a simple set of steps, or a simple formula, is a great way to get them to start practicing the right way so they develop the right habits.

A Simple, Effective Feedback Formula

There are numerous books, courses, and guidance on ways to give feedback. We use a simple yet effective feedback framework developed at the Center for Creative Leadership called “S-B-I.”

Situation

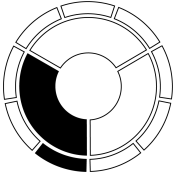
Describe the situation and provide the context in terms of why this behavior or aspect of performance is important to you, the team, or the organization. State your purpose and context for the feedback. (This is also known as framing).

To begin, you might say something like,

“Tom, I want to give you some feedback about the Drexell proposal you recently completed.”

This introductory statement sets the stage for the feedback conversation.





PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Behavior

Name a specific observable behavior you want to call attention to. This should be a statement of fact, not a perception (interpretation or judgment), and it should not use labels (does not characterize the person). You can say...

"I understand you worked evenings and weekends to meet the deadline."

This statement focuses on the facts of the behavior and avoids any interpretation or judgment.

Impact

Share what the specific impact of that behavior was on you, the team, or the business from your perspective, using "I statements." For example, "I want you to know how much I appreciate your effort to go above and beyond what was expected to create such an excellent result." "I feel confident Drexell will respond positively."

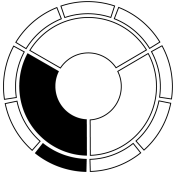
Using "I" statements conveys your own experience (and feelings) rather than characterizing the other person. Also, by owning your own experience, you are stating your impression or perspective and are not stating a fact (which promotes defensiveness or argumentativeness).

For instance, you can say, "Jack, your efforts last week with the Smith Account repaired a customer relationship I thought we had lost for good." This statement reflects your own experience and the positive impact of Jack's actions.

Similarly, "Your decision to offer an extra site inspection as a 'make-good' clearly worked. I was proud of how you handled the situation" focuses on your perspective and feelings about the situation.

"Christina, I wanted to acknowledge the way you spoke so calmly with that upset customer." "He wasn't able to see why I couldn't do what he asked until you explained it. I really felt supported." This is another example of using "I" statements to express your experience and appreciation.





PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Why You Should Never Use “Labels” in Your Feedback

As managers and leaders, we must never use labels to describe an actual person we work with; that would be bad form, indeed. Using labels not only makes some people uncomfortable, it is politically incorrect, and could even be illegal in some states. It is bad for business.

The use of labels creates a whole host of problems for managers and their companies. And not just negative labels, positive labels, or “attributions,” as they are technically called, do so as well.

Harvard Professors Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey, did extensive research on this, which they write about in their excellent book, “How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work: Seven Languages for Transformation”.

Following are some examples of “positive labels” in the context of feedback.

“Steve, you are a good communicator.”

“John is a total rockstar at sales.”

Kegan and Lahey explain;

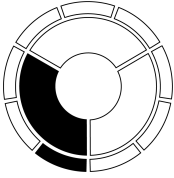
“If we characterize people, even if we do so quite positively, we actually engage— however unintentionally— in the rather presumptuous activity of entitling ourselves to say who and how the other is.” “We dress the other person in a suit of psychological clothes. As much as they might appreciate the fancy quality of the cloth, they are likely to feel, ‘Well, it doesn’t exactly fit.’”

Rather than characterizing the person with a label, just use an “I statement” and share how you feel about their behavior (not their character or personality).

Following are the same examples of positive feedback minus the labels.

“Steve, I really appreciate how you use stories to illustrate your points. I find it very compelling and helps drive the point home for me.” “John, I appreciate how you always prepare thoroughly and answer client objections skillfully.”





PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

The Problem with Using Labels When Giving Constructive Criticism

If the label is negative (constructive criticism), it's very likely going to trigger defensiveness, argumentativeness, resentment, or even anger.

If the purpose of giving constructive feedback (criticism) is to help the other person improve by internalizing the feedback and changing their behavior, then using a label is self-defeating.

People tend to reject negative labels and close down to feedback.

When you use labels in your constructive feedback, the other person doesn't learn anything beyond the fact that you suck at giving feedback.

Instead of this, "Karen, you are showing up as unprofessional." or "You are sloppy." Say this instead...

"Karen, I've noticed that you often have stacks of miscellaneous things on and under your desk."

"I'm concerned that your workspace could reflect negatively on our department when a customer visits."

The Problem with Using Labels When Giving Positive Feedback

If the label is positive, the person receiving the feedback may not identify with that label (character trait), may feel uncomfortable or embarrassed by the positive label, and is likely to reject the compliment.

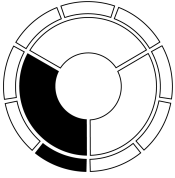
Examples:

"John is a rockstar salesman."

"John, you are a world-class public speaker."

John may not feel comfortable being labeled a "rockstar" or a "world-class public speaker". That may not fit his self-concept. Or it may make him feel uncomfortable and want to reject the feedback (Aw, shucks, I just got lucky).





PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Here is how it would sound minus the label...

“John, I was so proud of the way that you overcame the client’s objection using compelling case study data.”

“John, when I know you are on the presentation team, I feel relaxed and confident because you are always prepared to answer client objections so skillfully.” It is difficult for John to refute the factual statement of what happened or your feelings about how his behavior impacted you. Because he doesn’t reject the positive feedback, he hears it and he is more likely to internalize it.

The Problem with Praise

When I use the term “praise,” I’m using it in the technical sense of the word, in the same way that psychology experts Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey use it in their popular business book, *The Seven Languages of Transformation*.

Praise is often offered using positive labels and attributions that are intended to make a person feel good. And in some cases, they might make a person feel good, but feeling good isn’t the main point of feedback.

Some ask, “What if the person being labeled with a positive trait actually likes and internalizes that positive label?” “Is that still a problem?”

Yes, it is.

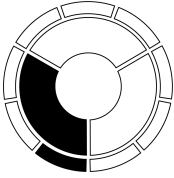
Not only does it not help the person, it may actually harm them.

This sounds counterintuitive at first, but not if you are familiar with Carol Dweck’s “Mindset” research.

Using positive labels (character traits) to describe people is precisely the thing that triggers what Stanford Professor, Carol Dweck calls a “Fixed Mindset”.

Her research—which you can read about in her bestselling book, “*Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*”—shows that using positive labels can lead to a whole host of learning and performance issues both in children and especially in adults.





PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

These issues include:

- Becoming a know-it-all
- Being afraid of making mistakes or feeling like a failure
- Avoiding taking risks
- Rejecting feedback and opportunities to improve
- Fudging work or downright cheating (in a desperate attempt to live up to the label)

Kegan and Lahey describe the positive feedback seen in most organizations as “praise and prizes.”

Although this approach is intended to make people feel good, their research at Harvard shows that it creates a cultural sense of “winners” and “losers” in the organization and diminishes, rather than increases, energy, and morale.

Pro Tips For Giving Feedback

Be specific and concrete.

Address the person directly and specify the context and behavior. Avoid generalizations such as “great,” “poor,” “inappropriate,” or “outstanding.”

The goal is for the person to understand what he should keep doing, start doing, or stop doing.

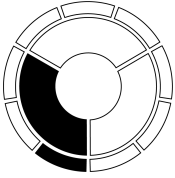
Be Timely

If you wait too long to give a colleague feedback, it won’t be very useful. The best time to give feedback about a specific event, behavior, or performance is immediately following or as soon as possible (same day or next day).

Frequent

High-performance teams cultivate a “feedback-rich environment.” People should always know how they are doing, the quality of work they are delivering, and how they are “showing





PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

up” (being perceived by others). All workers are entitled to feedback about their job performance. Having said that, you must use your own judgment about how often you can offer feedback without the person feeling overwhelmed or saturated.

Focus on the Future More Than the Past

Rather than fixating on what a person did in the past, effective feedback emphasizes what will work better in the future. This is easily accomplished with phrases such as, “What might work better next time…” or “You might consider trying ____ the next time.”

Pro Tips For Giving Constructive Feedback

A manager in a leadership training program we conducted once referred to constructive feedback as an “uncomfortable conversation.”

In our experience, it’s only uncomfortable if you aren’t any good at it.

When you get good at giving feedback, it’s a positive experience. It’s an opportunity to help someone learn, and an opportunity to support someone to have more success.

The keys to constructive or critical feedback are essentially the same as positive feedback, but the stakes are much higher.

Here are a few additional tips specifically for giving constructive feedback.

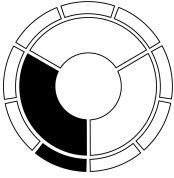
SBI-R

Add an R at the end of SBI so that it becomes SBI-R

When giving constructive or corrective feedback, making a recommendation or a request is helpful. So, after you deliver the feedback (S-B-I), make a request such as, “Going forward, I would like to request that you plan to be more prepared for these weekly meetings.”

Or a recommendation, “I think in the future it may work a lot better for you if you schedule some time on your calendar to complete the work on these kinds of project deadlines rather than just leave it to chance.”





PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Be Discreet

Be discrete when giving constructive feedback. Offer it in private, never in front of others. People may need to save face in front of their peers and digest what you have to say.

Consider Feelings

Reflect ahead of time about the potential emotional impact of the feedback. How might the other person feel about it? You are probably familiar with the “sandwich” method.

You make a positive statement (bread), then constructive feedback about what they can improve (the meat), and then a second positive statement in the form of reassurance or encouragement of some kind. This can be effective if you incorporate the other tips in this lesson, and if it doesn’t come across as formulaic or cheesy.

Can you think of some ways you can use the guidelines and tips in this lesson to get better at feedback?

Is there a way to frame the next feedback you give in a way in which the other person is more likely to hear and benefit from it?

Can you offer some kind of connection or reassurance that you care, and are available for additional support if they need it?

Conclusion

Feedback is the lifeblood of learning and improvement. There is no “Performance Management” without feedback. It’s not hard, but it is technical. By learning the proper technique and getting good at it, you are making a significant investment into your ability to be effective at performance management in your leadership role. This investment will allow you to become a better leader and add more value to your organization, guiding your team to higher performance and continuing to form a part of your organization’s ongoing success story.

