New Life
Pathways Coaching & Training

How to give "tough messages," and still be liked and respected

Providing feedback to staff is always tough, but if it's "constructive," you not only get the message across, but, build a more cohesive and capable team as a result.

Do you remember when your parents told you to eat your veggies because they were good for you?

Now that you're an adult, you know they were right.

Well, just as they were right from the beginning, I'm asking you to trust me when I tell you this: **constructive feedback is the only way to learn and develop**—both personally and professionally.

That means, you as Manager, have a responsibility to your staff to help them develop. That means, you have to give constructive feedback.

What is constructive feedback?

First, I'll tell you what it's not.

Constructive feedback is not criticism (which has a negative connotation because it is so often generalized and personal).

Constructive feedback is a not personal (e.g. <u>you</u> are lazy), but a targeted response to an individual's action or behavior (e.g. you did not accomplish <u>the task</u> you agreed to complete) that is intended to help them learn, and is delivered from a place of respect.

Constructive feedback is not "closed" but rather invites the individual receiving the feedback to shed light, share their perspective, or provide their response. (e.g. Do you see it differently?)

Constructive feedback does not blame, but presents a collaborative approach to problem-solving. (e.g. If we are all to go home tonight on time, task A needs to get done. What support can the team offer to finish task A, so that everyone gets to go home on time.)

Why constructive feedback works

Constructive feedback enables us to give honest, "tough messages" to those with whom we work.

However, instead of insulting, shutting-down others, or alienating those who receive the feedback, and thus lowering their morale and their resulting productivity, it motivates them to ask for help, and acknowledge a skill or competency deficiency, while feeling supported and respected.

Two of the most important factors influencing employee retention/satisfaction are: "great boss," and "feeling part of a team" (Hay Group Study on retention). Constructive feedback, because it is delivered out of respect and a genuine desire for the individual to improve, accomplishes both.

Providing feedback, in this way, enables you to build the competency and cohesiveness of your team, while effectively managing performance issues. It also enables you to remain respected, well liked, and overall, considered " a great boss."

Principles of feedback

1. Choose correct timing for feedback

Praise is most effective when given as soon as possible after the behaviour has occurred. Immediate feedback will help to reinforce a correct behaviour and make it more likely to happen again.

When an incorrect behaviour is not corrected with feedback, the staff member may incorporate it into his or her customer of colleague interactions unknowingly. It is highly desirable, when possible, to give corrective feedback before the situation occurs again.

2. Ask for self assessment

Beginning by asking the person for self-assessment involves them in the feedback process.

It helps to promote an open atmosphere and dialogue between the person doing the coaching and the person being coached. Often the person is well aware of his or her won strengths and weaknesses.

It is more effective to allow the person to voice opinions before providing your own assessment of performance.

Through self-assessment, the person can gradually assume more responsibility for his or her own abilities and performance.

3. Focus on specifics

When you focus on a specific correct or incorrect behaviour, you remove the feedback from the sphere of personality differences and the other person will be more willing and able to change.

For example, when providing corrective feedback:

Do: "When you were talking to customer xyz, I noticed that you forgot to use her name"

Don't: "You are not building rapport with the customer"

When providing praise:

Do: "When you spoke to customer xyz, I noticed that you used really good open and closed questioning techniques"

Don't: "You communicated well there"

4. Limit feedback to a few important points

Good coaches and communicators identify one or two critical areas and help the person address them one at a time.

It is too hard to examine and try to change many aspects of behaviour at one time.

Restrict your feedback to one or two important points so that you do not overwhelm the other person with too many things to consider.

5. Provide more praise than corrective feedback

Positive reinforcement is one of the strongest factors in bringing about change.

Unfortunately a lot of people always focus on the negative.

When you give corrective feedback, remember to point out corrective behaviours first. This is as important as pointing out mistakes and areas that need improvement.

And always end the conversation on a positive.

6. Give praise for expected performance

People deserve to be praised for doing their job to the expected level. Too many people take the expected level for granted however.

Remember that praising anyone who meets established standards is as important as praising the exceptional performer.

Praise is a strong motivator, and enough praise may be what it takes to turn an average employee into an exceptional one.

7. Develop Action Plans

Work together to identify the desired performance or result and how it can be achieved.

Decide when the steps will be accomplished.

Useful techniques to use when giving feedback

Now that we have highlighted the main principles of giving feedback, lets look at some useful techniques we can use in feedback sessions:

Open-ended questioning

Use open-ended questions to allow and encourage the person to give more detail and elaborate.

Use words like:

What?
How?
Who?
Tell me?

Avoid closed questions when you are trying to get more information from someone.

Avoid words like:

Do you?
Did you?
Have you?

Also be careful when you use the word "Why". The person may think that you are blaming them or being critical if you use it. They may think that you disagree with them if you use this word.

Reflecting Back

This is about putting what the other person has said into your own words and reflecting it back.

This is called paraphrasing and by doing this it shows that you are listening and more importantly that you are listening and understanding!

For example:

Individual – "I always seem to get the rough end of the stick - no-one listens to me at all…….."

You – "You seem concerned that no-one listens to you and that you seem to be getting a dumb deal"

Maintaining Silence

Encourage the person to take their time.

Always give the other person time to think through their reply to a challenging answer.

Do not feel uncomfortable about silences but do be wary that silence can make people feel very uncomfortable.

Maintain eye contact and demonstrate an interest.

Summarising

Summarise the output of the meeting and action plan to ensure that you have heard correctly and understood from his/her perspective.

Restate the key aspects of the feedback discussion

Conclude the discussion and focus on planning for the future.

Example: "The three major issues you raised were……"
             " To summarise then……"

Being Sensitive

Acting sensitive to the needs of the person is important as they may reject the feedback initially.

Give the person space to think in his/her time. This may help the person to absorb the feedback

Initiating Action and Offering Ideas

Example:

"Can you think of an action that would help build on your skills in this area?"

Offer ideas without forcing your personal opinion.

"One thing you might do is…."
"Have you thought about…….."
"Your options include……….."
"What can I do to help?"

Gaining Ownership

Help the person to integrate the feedback into their own experience and view of themselves.

Link the feedback as much as possible to business results and objectives – this will help increase ownership.

Any change in behaviour will only occur through acceptance and ownership of then feedback by that person.

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│   Open-ended    │
│   Questioning   │
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│     Active      │
│    Listening    │
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│   Reflecting    │
│      Back       │
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│   Maintaining   │
│     Silence     │
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│   Summarising   │
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│     Being       │
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│    Gaining      │
│   Ownership     │
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* EXERCISE *

GIVING FEEDBACK

Pick a partner, and choose who is to be A and who is to be B.

A will be providing feedback on B's performance.

You will both be given role-play sheets of what has been going on and the person you are to play.

After you have completed that, change roles and complete role-play 2.

What worked well?

What could have been done better?

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What will you know for next time?

Receiving Feedback

As long as feedback is given in a non-judgmental and appropriate way, it is a valuable piece of information for learning and for our continued development as a person.

Constructive feedback is critical for self-development and growth; here are some points to bare in mind when you receive feedback.

1. Don't shy away from constructive feedback, welcome it
2. Accept feedback of any sort for what it is – information
3. Evaluate the feedback before responding
4. Make your own choice about what you intend to do with the information

The feedback emotional rollercoaster

Whether you are giving or receiving feedback it is useful to bare in mind the following model when it comes to people who receive feedback.

D A W A

DENIAL
When people first receive feedback, they have a tendency to deny it. Please avoid immediate defensiveness – arguing, denying and justifying. This just gets in the way of your appreciation of the information you are being given.

ANGER
After the denial stage comes anger! So you've been told that your work is not as good as what it ought to be. You've said, "It's as good as always" so you are denying it then you become angry as it stews in your mind and body. The immediate reaction is to fume!

WITHDRAWAL
After the anger has calmed down, the person has had time to reflect and ponder on the feedback. "Well, I have been making more mistakes then normal" This is when time is taken out to mull over the feedback and think about what it actually means.

ACCEPTANCE
The final part of this model is finally accepting the feedback, assessing its value and the consequences of ignoring it, or using it. "I HAVE been making mistakes"

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