

Article

Improving Employee Performance through Feedback

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The best way to move an employee toward improved performance is by establishing a trustful relationship with them and providing ongoing performance feedback, both positive and negative.

In order for performance feedback to be of benefit for the employee and the organization, the process by which it is given must be managed correctly. First, the manager must model the behavior or “walk the walk”. Relationships based on mutual respect and trust are not built on an attitude of “do as I say, not as I do”. Second, the manager must be committed to the individual’s development. There must be a sense of trust on both sides, which can be gained by creating a sense of community in the organization.

Although the concept of working together towards a common goal or purpose is fundamental to an organization’s success, teamwork is not as robust and complete as creating and being in community with one another. Community signals a fundamental caring and investment in one another’s well being. Creating a community begins with the realization that we all win, or none of us win. Organizations in community are the most successful in developing their employees based on performance feedback. In fact, these organizations often encourage 360 degree feedback between managers and staff.

Performance feedback is the on-going process between employee and manager where information is exchanged concerning the performance expected and the performance exhibited. Constructive feedback praises good performance or corrects poor performance and should always be tied to the performance standards. As a rule, effective constructive feedback is:

- Provided to help someone, not hurt his or her feelings.
- Specific rather than general. Telling someone they do not project a customer friendly attitude is not as effective as pointing out specific examples from a meeting or phone call in which they exhibited the negative behavior.
- Behavioral-related, not person related. For example, you may give someone feedback that they spoke more than anyone else in a meeting, and dominated the agenda. That is behavior related and is much more effective than calling them loud or outspoken.
- Meant to address behavior which can be changed.
- Clear, and to the point.
- Timed appropriately. Feedback presented at an inappropriate time may do more harm than good.
- Followed-up. Set a time, if appropriate, to review the behavior, and ensure you provide additional feedback, either positive or negative.

When providing feedback, use the following guidelines:

- Point out poor performance immediately upon observing it and praise immediately on observing good performance
- Specify what does, or does not meet expectations
- Explain how the observed performance affects the team and/or organization



- State appropriate performance
- Obtain agreement on the problem and mutually seek a solution
- Agree on an action plan
- Do not dwell on a point. Move forward after the discussion, and do not bring it up again unless you observe the negative behavior a second time
- Avoid giving correction in public
- Be open to receive performance feedback yourself

The above observations and suggestions have been time tested both in our internal organization and in our consulting engagements. With practice, they establish a supportive and professional work environment in which employees do not feel constrained by or afraid of performance measurements. They are open to taking risks, and accepting accountability when necessary.