

Providing Effective Feedback

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Introduction

This article has been written to provide you, the Employer and/or Manager with practical steps on how to provide regular feedback to your team members in a consistent, timely and meaningful way. The provision of feedback is an invaluable process; ensuring that employees remain on track with their performance objectives, reflect on their behaviour and the impact of their behaviour and develop their skills and competencies.

Feedback

Giving feedback is about presenting information to an individual on their performance, which helps them:

- Understand how they have been doing against their objectives
- Understand how effective their behaviour has been
- Take appropriate action to address any shortcomings
- Continue and build on effective behaviours
- Identify learning or training needs

Guidelines on Giving Feedback

We offer ten tips to ensure that the provision of feedback is a balanced, objective and meaningful exercise:

1. Set SMART Goals

Before you can give feedback it is vital to jointly set goals with the employee, in line with your performance management process. 'SMART' is a useful acronym to remember when defining the goals;

- **Specific Objectives:** Research has demonstrated that general, vague objectives are less likely to result in improved performance. All objectives should be very specific defining the 'what' and the 'how'
- **Measurable Objectives:** Objectives must be measurable at regular intervals and these intervals (whether daily, weekly or monthly) should be clearly defined so progress can be quickly evaluated to establish whether some adjustment needs to be made. Measurable goals should include who does what and when and how; for example sales targets, financial metrics, numbers of customers etc
- **Achievable Objectives:** whenever we set goals we must ensure that the employee - given the time, skills and resources available - can achieve them, in the defined timeframe.

- **Relevant Objectives;** goals must be relevant to the role of the employee and the department in which they work.
- **Timebound Objectives:** All objectives should be clearly time bound, i.e. given a clear timeframe for completion. By building in a review date and a target date you will ensure that the employee remains on course.

2. Factual Feedback

Feedback should always be provided on actual results or observed behaviour which has affected performance in some way. It should not be based on assumptions about the reason for the behaviour. For example, you should say 'we received a comment from a customer that the delivery of their goods was late, can you comment on this' instead of 'you tend to be slow despatching orders'.

3. Describe and Don't Judge

The feedback should be presented as an observed account of what has happened. It should not be accompanied by a judgement. For example, 'I witnessed you having a heated discussion with a supplier, what was the situation?' as opposed to 'I overheard you having a row with the supplier.....we can't tolerate that sort of aggressive behaviour.'

4. Refer to specific behaviours

Relate all your feedback to specific items of behaviour. Don't give general feelings or impressions. For example you could say 'at times when you are dealing with customers, your manner may be perceived as abrupt' and give specific examples. As opposed to 'the problem with you is that you are an abrupt person'. This will immediately elicit a defensive response.

5. Provide Immediate Feedback

To be effective, feedback should be provided within 48 hours of the activity taking place. Overall feedback on performance against the SMART objectives should be provided during the performance review meeting. However if you always wait until the review meeting to provide feedback on specific events, time will have passed and people simply forget the details. In this way opportunities for meaningful feedback can be lost.

6. Ask Questions

When giving feedback it is important to ask questions. This encourages reflection on the part of the employee and facilitates greater learning. For example: 'why do you think this happened?'; 'On reflection could the situation have been handled in a different way?'; 'what impact do you think that behaviour had on the customer/employee/colleague etc?'

7. Focus

It is also important to focus on aspects of performance the employee can improve. Where the feedback is negative remember there is a limit to the amount of criticism an individual can take. If they are unable to improve, this may indicate a training requirement, the need for additional resources or a job design issue. It may also be a case that you have not hired effectively!

8. Provide Positive Feedback

Provide feedback on all the things the employee did well in addition to areas for improvement. People are more likely to work positively at improving their skills if they feel empowered by the feedback process. When providing negative feedback, sandwich it with the positives of the persons performance, e.g. open with some positive feedback, followed by the negative and close out with the positive feedback

9. Prepare for the Feedback Session

As with all meetings preparing for a feedback session is very important to ensure the key areas are addressed in an efficient and meaningful way.

10. Learning opportunities for you

Embrace the process as a learning opportunity for you. The employee should be encouraged offer you feedback on all aspects of their role, including feedback on you as their manager!

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