

Fundamentals of a constructive feedback

The term "feedback" stands enveloped in a negative connotation. It is up to managers and leaders to change that perception and utilize it as a powerful game-changer in business. But for this, they must embrace the tenets of openness, transparency, timeliness and continuous conversation. The concept of feedback is not new; it has been part of the often-dreaded performance appraisal process, where managers doled out advice to their juniors once every year. This seldom did any good, for it was past-regressive and focussing on "reprimanding" than "developing" employees. Gradually, certain forms of feedback such as 360 degrees feedback were incorporated in the feedback process, yet feedback has remained much of a top-down, unidirectional dictate rather than an ongoing conversation. This must change, and who other than supervisors and leaders to usher in a new normal in feedback management? So, it is important for managers to know what exactly constitutes constructive feedback.

What is constructive feedback?

Managers must first themselves understand what constitutes constructive feedback. Goal-oriented i.e. based on actions in line with the goals and not on attitude. Hence feedback should be detailed and specific, in line with the outlined individual, team and organizational goals that the employee is expected to meet. Real-time, i.e., on a continuous, ongoing basis, as close to the timeline of the incident as possible.



Future-forward rather than past-regressive

Seek inputs from all relevant stakeholders, i.e., multi-directional. This means that useful feedback can come from colleagues, customers, peers, and even juniors and need not follow the designated hierarchy. Supportive, i.e., helps teams be better at their work, and not merely belittling or proving a point.

Continual and ongoing in the form of two-way dialogue. Today feedback is not merely about "telling," but should serve as a reflective experience for the recipient so that he or she can take concrete steps to improve performance. Above all, the desired outcome of feedback is to build trust between employee and employer and thereby work towards a high performance.

How to deliver constructive feedback?

It is human tendency to avoid giving feedback, especially bad one; humans tend to avoid any kind of conflict. But HR and business managers must change the lens they use to look at the feedback loop and consider it as a means to constructively convey information that helps employes to outperform. Here is a step-by-step guide on how to make that happen:

Preparing for feedback: The first step in preparing is to identify the behavioral issues by dwelling on the desired employee outcomes. Managers must turn to real instances and refer to data sources to gather concrete examples of performance issues. At the same time, they must serve as good listeners, understanding employee expectations and determining whether these expectations are realistic. Logistical concerns also matter in the feedback experience; managers should choose an undisturbed environment, and give feedback with full focus at the appropriate time. While we live in a globalized and virtual age, it is best to give feedback in-person as far as possible.



Presenting feedback: Feedback should be presented such that it does either of the following, i.e. "reinforces the right behaviors" and "redirects undesirable behaviors". For effective reinforcement, managers should first define the good behavior, explain its positive effect, and then give due credit for success by thanking and encouraging. Managers who aim to redirect bad behaviors must first take time to explain the undesirable behavior and its negative impact in full. They must then listen to the recipient's reaction and clarify expectations. The conversation should be such that the recipient is made to reflect, realize and acknowledgment that a problem exists and to hold the person accountable. The tone should be supportive and developmental, and the manager and employee should discuss and develop solutions together. Not having an overtly negative tone helps in focussing on futuristic development rather than past mistakes.

Documenting feedback: In the time-rush, it is easy to forget to document the discussion minutes. However, managers must be careful to immediately document the feedback discussion. This is imperative to set a tone of seriousness and also help the ongoing measurement of performance through continuous records.



Most employees today like to be equal participants in their own and their organization's growth. They are keen to take on new challenges and develop new skills. However, this is not possible without the right support from the employer, specifically their supervisors. One important means of offering this support and enablement is giving feedback that is open, honest and continuous. Feedback is a powerful tool to shape employees' behaviors. Indeed, Feedback is like a clap, it works well only with two hands, in this case, one being the employee's and the other the employer's (manager). An employee's attitude and approach to the feedback process are equally critical to help achieve the feedback-objectives. While the feedback giver should learn to specify, at the same time the recipient should enthusiastically probe to get the desired input, to give detailed insights on how to improve performance. Management guru and esteemed author, Ken Blanchard has rightly said: "Feedback is the breakfast of champions." Given and taken the right way, the right feedback can work towards driving high performance, for employees and organizations alike.

Source : Rucha Kulkarni, <https://tinyurl.com/ybddtzel>