

How to... give constructive feedback

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IF YOU want to manage the performance of your staff effectively, providing timely and meaningful feedback will be a crucial element of ensuring that they know how well they're doing and where they need to improve. Effective feedback helps to encourage good performance and nips in the bud the behaviours and actions that aren't helping the company.

In short, providing constructive feedback is a critical management action, so why do we avoid actually carrying it out? Perhaps convincing ourselves that the bad behaviour isn't so bad or that the parts of the performance that are good, eg output of work, outweigh the misdemeanours, eg causing conflict.

So how do we turn what can feel like criticism into a positive outcome? How do we provide constructive feedback for our staff?

Firstly, get your mindset right. Rather than think of it as criticism, consider constructive feedback as genuinely wanting to help someone to improve. If this is your motive the words that you choose, your body language and tone of voice will come across as supportive. This creates the right atmosphere for the conversation and will really improve your chances of the feedback being accepted positively.

Secondly, have specific examples of the behaviour or actions that you want to change and be clear on what you would like to see as an outcome. Largely people will be unaware how they are coming across or the effect their actions and specific examples of behaviours that you have



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observed will be invaluable in illustrating what you mean and moving them towards accepting that there is a need to change. This acceptance can be helped by pointing out the benefits to the person, others or the business.

Remember you are tackling behaviour here, not criticising the person. For example, it's perfectly valid to point out an increase in errors but not to jump to the judgement that they "don't care about work".

Moving on to your approach during the

conversation. What you actually say depends on the situation but common tips are to be clear and concise, avoiding long introductions; be supportive and not dogmatic; be open to listen to their views but be firm and fair with your views; don't compare with others; give time for a response; reaffirm your motives that you are there to help them to improve.

Finally, agree actions and follow up. The key point in the conversation is when the person agrees to take responsibility to change and you should move the on to getting a commitment to actions. When you notice any positive efforts for the person to change their behaviours or actions make sure that you acknowledge them. Remember how difficult it can be to break habits and change behaviour so they will need further feedback and encouragement.

All of these steps can feel like a lot of hard work and when written on paper there seems a great deal to think about. However, there is no point to feedback if it is not accepted by the member of staff so it is worth the effort to get the approach right. Also, as a manager, if you practice good quality feedback rather than off the cuff statements that you hope will hit the mark, your investment will pay off. People will start to develop more effective ways of working which is imperative for your success.

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