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Feedback for Better Job Performance

“**H**ow am I doing?” That’s the most important question in the business world, yet it remains the most unasked—and unanswered. Why? There are many barriers to workplace communication that often inhibit the free flow of giving and receiving both positive and negative feedback (the latter also called constructive criticism).

Yet performance feedback is critical to employee morale, productivity, and effective communication. When employees are unsure as to whether they are performing up to expected standards, they experience anxieties and feelings of insecurity—and these are highly detrimental to work performance. An open communication culture helps foster employee work practices that are both efficient and effective.

Today, feedback should come from co-workers as well as supervisors, and it should be given often, not just at performance-review time. As the acronym FAST suggests, feedback should be:

- **Frequent**—given regularly, not just once or twice a year
- **Accurate**—provided after all the information is gathered
- **Specific**—naming why a behavior or work performance was good or could be improved
- **Timely**—delivered immediately whenever a particular work performance is noticed

Giving fair, balanced feedback is also important. If a supervisor only gives negative feedback without ever providing recognition for a job well done, then employees may feel that all they ever hear are the complaints, never any praise. They

may say, “Why should we bother trying to do our best, when no one ever notices or cares.”

Overcoming Feedback Barriers

Often, there are barriers preventing individuals from giving feedback. For example, some supervisors claim that they are too busy to give regular feedback or that “no news is good news.” Others don’t have confidence in their feedback communication skills or may harbor a fear of being disliked by the employee for criticizing a job done poorly. Most will agree that to give positive feedback is much easier than telling individuals that their work performance needs improvement or that their work behavior is inappropriate. However, a good supervisor has to give both positive and negative feedback.

To overcome the barriers for giving constructive criticism, remember these tips:

- Keep negative feedback private and confidential.
- Use face-to-face communication whenever possible.
- Don’t lose your temper and don’t ridicule.
- Keep to the performance that needs improving.
- Listen to the employee’s side of the story.
- Don’t treat a first-time offense as a felony.
- Let the employee know that we all make mistakes; and we can learn from them.
- Don’t threaten or use intimidating language.
- Identify the value of correcting the behavior, from a productivity standpoint.
- State clearly the expected performance, and be sure the employee understands it and agrees to it.

Receiving Feedback

To develop personally and professionally, we all need input from others. Feedback frequently saves us from future embarrassment and helps us to discover our weaknesses while improving our work performance. It can also reinforce our strengths and capabilities, giving us increased self-confidence.

Employees should actively seek feedback, if they don’t regularly receive it. Everyone has a right to know how he or she is doing in the workplace. When the environment and tone of a criticism given by another is warm and supportive, it is much easier for an employee to respond openly to it. But, unfortunately, this is not always the situation. Although we cannot control what someone else says, we can control our response.

Here are six steps for handling criticism from *A Complaint Is a Gift* by Janelle Barlow and Claus Moller:

1. Thank the person for the feedback and recognize that he or she has taken a risk to bring something to your attention.
2. If you made a mistake, admit it.
3. Apologize if appropriate.
4. Promise to do something about it, and then do it.
5. Take steps to improve.
6. Enlist the other person’s help to monitor your progress.

For continued business success, one key motivating factor stands out—appropriate employee feedback. Everyone needs to sharpen these communication skills and try it.

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