

Sept 12, 2024

Giving Constructive Feedback - for Supervisors



Giving constructive feedback - both positive and negative - is a critical element of the supervisory process. Studies have shown that while many supervisors are uncomfortable giving feedback, it is considered very valuable by workers - and is a major factor in their job satisfaction and performance. Those who value it also rated their managers highest for being honest and straight forward in their reviews. Having a supervisor that is skilled at delivering feedback is a powerful workplace asset, and developing your skills in this area will be valuable in all aspects of your career and life.

Motivational experts have suggested that 5 positives for every 1 negative is about the right proportion for feedback...everyone likes praise! Providing feedback demonstrates your

investment in worker progress and development, and shows that you care enough about workers to share sometimes inconvenient truths. Practicing giving feedback regularly in daily conversations or weekly meetings makes it a natural occurrence and helps dissipate the fear. Be a role model by asking for feedback on your performance as well, and be open to hearing it.

Share Feedback With All Workers

Don't make the mistake of only giving feedback to those who most require improvement. Failing to provide feedback to your best workers can risk losing them, incurring a very expensive replacement process. It's important to provide feedback to all workers. As a supervisor your job is to ensure your team is communicating effectively and working toward a common goal.



When there is little communication, workers may drift off toward other objectives. Providing regular constructive feedback enhances communication and is a good way to prevent issues early and keep the team moving toward a common goal.

Focus on Being Helpful



The goal of feedback should always be to help the worker improve, not to criticize or reprimand. The need to give negative feedback triggers nervous anxiety in most people. Giving feedback can be as stressful and hard as hearing it, which often results in supervisors delaying or avoiding it until a crisis develops. Focusing on helping the worker improve diminishes the fear for both parties. Consider that if you were doing something poorly, you'd probably be appreciative if someone kindly let you know what you're doing wrong, and provided helpful suggestions. Frame your message as helpful by recommending a better way or highlighting a new approach to reach a mutual goal, and resist the urge to criticize or reprimand. Unless your feedback contains useful information

relevant to future activities, it's probably just an opinion and not worth sharing.

Follow These 5 Steps to Give Feedback

1. **Get Ready** - First, make sure you have gathered all relevant background information (who / what / where / when / why). Give the worker the benefit of the doubt and keep your intentions helpful and positive - your job is to give them perspective on their actions. Avoid giving feedback when you are feeling frustrated or judgmental - poorly delivered feedback cannot be recalled and can shut the worker down, affecting morale, trust, and engagement. Plan out what you want to say and how you'll say it. You'll need to describe specific concrete examples of the behaviors that need correction, followed by what your expectations are. Try to keep it simple and outline for the worker what the next steps will be.



2. **State the Facts** - The best way to give feedback is face-to-face. Choose a quiet private location and a low-stress time for a conversation – when there are no expected distractions – without making a big deal about it. Ask the worker for permission to give feedback. Turn



your phone off, mute your email notifications, and prevent interruptions. Check in with yourself and ensure your mindset is focused and helpful. Your tone and body language is the most important element in your interaction...keep your tone matter-of-fact conversational, not overly professional or personal. If you come across as being open and sincere, the employee is likely to respond in the

same way. If it's tense situation, you might start with something they are doing well as an example of meeting your expectations. The SBI method (Situation / Behavior / Impact) is an effective format for beginning the conversation:

- Situation
- Specific behaviors exhibited ('this occurred' not 'you did this').
- Impact of the behaviors - and why it's hurting their performance

To be useful and impactful, your feedback should focus on the positive or negative behaviors (as opposed to the worker personally) and the impact of their actions.



For example: “the machine was not adjusted to standards, resulting in the loss of this load”; not “you screwed up the machine settings and lost us a lot of money”.

Positive - praise effort, not ability:

“I was observing you service the client’s vehicle this morning (Situation) and I was impressed that you were fast and efficient and followed all safety protocols. (Behavior) The effort you put in was an excellent model for the new people and saves me a lot of training time.” (Impact)

Negative - state the facts and impact:

“I was observing you service the client’s vehicle this morning and noticed two work procedure steps (2 and 5) were skipped and the safety protocols (like locking out electrical energy) were not followed (Behavior). It concerns me that it’s just a matter of time before we have another incident, plus it sets a bad example for our new people which I’ll have to correct. (Impact)

If the worker does not respond well, be kind, and return to the facts. While you can't control the worker, you can and must control your own reactions. If the situation is too tense, or the feedback is particularly hard-hitting, consider taking a time-out or giving the worker some time off to absorb it.



3. Active Listening – After you’ve presented the facts, stop and actively listen. Allow time for the worker to explain, ask questions, or share their plan for improvement. Ensure that the

worker fully understands the issue...if not, repeat it. Ask open-ended questions until you're sure they understand the big picture. Be direct and genuine. If you come across as being sincere and helpful, the employee is likely to respond in the same way. During the conversation, make sure to give your employee your complete attention so they know that you're invested in their dialogue. Be aware of your body language, such as having your arms naturally at your side rather than crossed, and making direct eye contact, to make sure they feel comfortable and safe. Don't 'trap' the worker in a small room, and ensure they have easy access to a physical exit. If the worker is seated, you should also be seated.

4. Provide Constructive Feedback

Finish by letting the worker know what your expectations are, and follow that with constructive feedback related to the worker's job or responsibilities to help them get there. Workers with a fixed mindset see their abilities as static and unchangeable, so feedback can seem like a personal attack. Frame your feedback using a helping mindset, and emphasize that you are drawing their attention here to help them improve



their performance. Keep it simple, and focus on one main behavior to change. Be specific, encouraging, and provide actionable steps for improvement. Ensure the worker is clear on your expectations moving forward, and try to work with the worker on setting a goal. Offer assistance and help, and have an 'open-door' policy. Make sure they know you are 'on their side' and have faith in their abilities to change.

"Today's job wasn't up to our standard. In the future, for everyone's benefit, I need everyone onboard with following all company work and safety procedures. Can we agree on that? I know you can do this. Is there anything I can do to help, or any new procedure we can implement that would help?" (Expectation)

A tennis instructor got a new client with all sorts of problems. Her stance was wrong. She was holding the racket wrong, her weight was on the wrong foot, and her swing was obnoxious. They worked diligently on all the issues but she still didn't improve. Finally, in desperation and with her about to quit, he focused on her stance only, and instantly her game improved. Once she'd mastered the stance, they worked on how she held the racket until she got it. They moved on to her swing, and for the first time she beat the instructor in a game. They focused on the remaining issues one at a time, until she had mastered them



all...then she replaced the instructor when he was promoted!

The motive of the story is: keep it simple – focus on one main issue at a time!

5. Clarify

Finish by checking that they fully understand the problem and your expectations - can they repeat it back in their own words? Clarify and make any needed corrections, then end the meeting on a positive note. Ask for a commitment. Document the meeting and key points in your supervisor's log, give the worker some time to change behaviors, then follow up with recognizing positive progress.



“Thanks for your time and willingness...just so we’re totally on the same page – can you confirm the next steps in your own words?”