

GIVING CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK

Feedback is an essential element for everyone in an organization's workforce. Giving feedback is a task you perform again and again as a manager or supervisor, letting people know where they are and where to go next in terms of expectations and goals - yours, their own, and the organizations.

Feedback is a useful tool for indicating when things are going in the right direction or for redirecting problem performance. Your objective in giving feedback is to provide guidance by supplying information in a useful manner, either to support effective behavior, or to guide someone back on track toward successful performance.

Some situations which require giving constructive feedback include:

- Ongoing performance discussions
- Providing specific performance pointers
- Following up on coaching discussions
- Giving corrective guidance
- Letting someone know the consequences of their behavior

Some clues that constructive feedback is needed are when:

- Someone asks for your opinion about how they are doing
- Unresolved problems persist
- Errors occur again and again
- An employee's performance doesn't meet expectations
- A peer's work habits disturb you

SIX WAYS TO MAKE FEEDBACK CONSTRUCTIVE

Part of being an effective manager or supervisor is knowing what feedback to give. The trick is learning how to give it constructively so that it has some value. Constructive feedback is a tool that is used to build things up, not break things down. It lets the other person know that you are on their side.

1. If you can't think of a constructive purpose for giving feedback, don't give it at all.

2. Focus on description rather than judgement.

Describing behavior is a way of reporting what has occurred, while judging behavior is an evaluation of what has occurred in terms of "right or wrong", or "good or bad". By avoiding evaluative language, you reduce the need for the individual to respond defensively.

For example: "You demonstrate a high degree of confidence when you answer customer questions about registration procedures, rather than, "Your communication skills are good."

3. Focus on observation rather than inference.

Observations refer to what you can see or hear about an individual's behavior, while inferences refer to the assumptions and interpretations you make from what you see or hear. Focus on what the person did and your reaction.

For example: "When you gave that student the Financial Aid form, you tossed it across the counter," rather than describe what you assume to be the person's motivation, "I suppose you give all forms out that way!"