Some Advice on Giving Feedback

When providing feedback keep these tips in mind:

- **Judge the work, not the worker.** Ensure feedback is job-related, focuses on the behavior in question, and is consistent with the standards and expectations of the job. Comments such as, "You've got a long way to go to meet our standards" attacks personally and does not effectively communicate what needs to change, or what the job standards are.

- **Comment on what you know to be true.** Feedback should focus on what you see or hear—good or bad—not on interpretations, assumptions, or rumors.

- **Be descriptive.** Clearly describe the effective/desired or the ineffective/undesired behavior and use examples or illustrations. Use language that motivates and stay away from absolutes, such as "you always" or "you never." Set realistic expectations and be certain the employee has the know-how and the equipment needed to achieve them.

- **The sooner, the better.** Good feedback occurs as quickly after the incident as possible.

- **Don't do all the talking.** Give the employee a chance to respond, ask questions, and express his or her point of view.

When managers are asked what their employees need to perform more effectively, the answer is usually training, equipment, or even money. When employees are asked the same question, they are likely to say: feedback. For employees to perform well, they need to have a strong belief in their capabilities. They need to know what they are doing right, what they are doing wrong, and what they need to change.

Why, then, are managers so hesitant to give on-the-spot feedback? Many assume employees already know when they are doing a good or a poor job. Others are afraid of conflict and don't want to upset an employee, so they might drop hints—hints that are never understood correctly. Other managers simply don't know how to give feedback. But when employees receive regular feedback from caring managers, motivation and confidence blooms, and they become capable employees with enthusiasm for their work.

- **Challenge the employee to generate his or her own ideas and suggestions.** Questions like "What can you do to solve the problem?" or "What do you suggest?" will motivate and demonstrate confidence in the employee's performance, while allowing the employee to maintain control over his or her work.

- **Don't overload.** There is nothing more discouraging than listening to a litany of praise or criticism. Overdoing the praise will seem insincere. Bombarding an employee with criticism will cause the individual to fear making additional mistakes. Identify the positive or negative performance issues that need attention and address them with concern and sincerity. For those employees with serious performance problems, identify and address those behaviors that must change immediately. Hold off on the other less critical issues and address them gradually. This allows the employee to experience successful small steps that lead to an overall increase in the level of performance.

Finally, giving effective feedback is not a skill that can be mastered by reading an article. It must be practiced! Look for the opportunity to comment on an employee's performance. Keep these guidelines in mind and watch as your employee's performance improves and confidence grows.

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