

Feedback minus the hurt

Is it really feedback that managers have been trying to give their people or is it something else? Imposing a view? Letting out their frustration, or simply a feedback that is badly delivered?

We know that an important leadership practice is how to give good feedback that can really motivate the receivers without the "sting" that can offend them and go on a long way to help them improve faster. Feedback shouldn't hurt or maim!

Why is feedback important?

Can you imagine a person going through life without any input on how they are doing and where and how they can do better than what they are doing now? If the sports coach does not meticulously go through with their athletes on every aspect of their performance, there is little hope that they can ever win tournaments consistently and become champions. Living in a world that is devoid of feedback is dangerous for we are likely to do lots of wrong things without realising how harmful they are to our progress.

On the other hand, when we have adequate and consistent feedback, we grow to become the person we want to be because the path is clear as nothing is left unattended. This is why coaches are invaluable to one's progress because giving feedback is an integral part of their job.

When is feedback not a feedback?

Sometimes good intentions of giving feedback to others can turn sour because they are not actually giving feedback. Instead, it can be interpreted as criticising, telling off or demeaning others because one or more of these things may have happened: Being "emotional" (and not calm) at the time it was given. Making it a personal opinion (rather than a matter of fact) that was not objective or neutral. An "attack" on the person's dignity rather than addressing their behaviours. It can be pushed down to them as a final judgment to accept without any chance for the other party to explain.

How should feedback be given?

We all need to learn the powerful way to deliver feedback by observing these steps:

1. Be present and ask for permission. It is a matter of respect to the person and it helps them to be more receptive to what you are about to say.
2. State your purpose. Knowing your good intention promotes healthy conversation.
3. Highlight positive aspects first, but be careful of 'the praise sandwich'! Be fair and balanced as there is good in everyone.
4. Share observation of the person's behaviour (and not the person). Talk about their actions which are easier to accept than about their characters. For instance, instead of branding the person arrogant, talk about the difficulties that other people have in talking to him/her.
5. Ask for their views. Give them space to explain.
6. Listen to them respectfully and empathetically. Value what they have to say and they could be right (and you are wrong).
7. Explore possible solutions. Work together as a partner who is sincere to come up with solutions rather than leaving the feedback as an "open wound".
8. Ask them for their actions. Get accountability so that they can move forward.

How much did you learn here?

1. What will you watch out for when you give feedback to others?
2. What will you be doing when you give feedback to others?
3. Instead of saying that the person is not committed, what can you say so that you do not hurt the person's feelings?
4. How can you ensure that your feedback is objective and fair and is not misinterpreted as just your personal view?
5. How will you handle the situation when they do not accept what you have to say?

For more help on giving just the right level of criticism and praise, contact me for support.

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