

This is the second of three articles about working with feedback. The first article is entitled "How am I doing?" The third article is entitled "Who do you think you are?"

The last article discussed the value of asking for feedback and how we can help and encourage our colleagues to give us feedback. The other side of the coin, of course, is "How willing and how effective are we at giving feedback when asked?"

We can often find it much more difficult to give feedback than receive it. We can even find it difficult to give praise. I'm told the 3 greatest causes of stress are overwork, boredom and not feeling valued. (Take a look at your last employee survey to see if you and your colleagues feel valued, recognised and well rewarded). As you read this can you think of any recent instances when you wanted to give some feedback to somebody but decided not to? Can you remember why you decided not to?

- I was apprehensive of the kind of reaction I might get. I thought he/she might be angry or upset.
- It's only my perception – how do I know I'm right?
- I felt really nervous. It was easier to not say anything.

Beware! I suspect the most common reason we have for not giving people feedback is that we are looking after ourselves. However, we persuade ourselves that we are actually looking after the other person.

- I was apprehensive of the kind of reaction I might get. I thought he/she might be angry or upset. (Will I be able to deal with his/her anger? What will I do if he/she's upset?)
- It's only my perception – how do I know I'm right? (I'll feel a fool if my observations are made to look wrong. I hate feeling foolish. If I don't give my feedback, I avoid the risk of feeling foolish).
- I felt really nervous. It was easier to say nothing. (I don't like feeling nervous. I'm not confident I can cope with whatever the reaction might be. If I decide not to give feedback, I can stop feeling nervous and apprehensive)

One of our roles, as team leaders, is to help the people who report to us develop three attributes – attitude, skills and knowledge. In our first meetings with our team members we should be trying to create a development culture within which we agree to help and develop each other. We should be discussing how the team member sees his/her strengths and development areas. We should be agreeing the kind of feedback that the team member wants to receive and we, as the manager, will be giving.

We will be setting the expectations and checking that a team member understands both what will happen if the expectations are met (appraisal, promotions, bonuses, development opportunities etc) and the consequences if the expectations are not met (appraisal, bonuses (lack of!), training, dismissal etc). Doing this helps to create an environment where people expect feedback. In fact, as managers, we are being paid to do this and it would be a dereliction of our duty if we didn't. As we observe our team members we should be spending time catching them doing things right (so our feedback can be supporting i.e. "That's good – do more of it") and catching them doing things wrong (so our feedback can be correcting i.e. "I'm sorry but this isn't acceptable. Let me explain what's required"). All of this can be done in the context of:

- Will my feedback help him/her do his/her job better?
- Will my feedback help him/her develop in the way we have agreed is relevant?

If the answer to either or both of these questions is "Yes" then we are duty bound to give the feedback and we should try to overcome the feelings (apprehension, fear, etc) we have that may be trying to make it difficult for us.

I believe we also have this duty to our own manager and our colleagues as well as our team members. However it will be easier for our manager and colleagues to hear our feedback if we have already agreed with them that this is the way we want to work with them.

Some suggestions when giving feedback:

1. Set up agreements that you will give each other feedback and agree the type of feedback that is appropriate.
2. Be observant and collect data that you can talk about when giving feedback.
3. Give your feedback privately and soon after the event.
4. Speak for yourself (In my view) not on behalf of others (We all thought ...).
5. Be clear about your motive. Scoring points or trying to demonstrate how observant you have been is not giving feedback. Your feedback must relate to helping the recipient either be better at his/her job or developing the attitude, skills and/or knowledge.
6. If you find yourself debating internally about whether or not you should say what you are thinking the answer is usually to say it!
7. If you find yourself deciding not to say something make sure you are deciding for the right reasons. Protecting ourselves from feelings we don't like is not a good reason to withhold feedback.
8. Try to be non evaluative e.g. "I was unable to follow your line of thinking and, for me, an example would have been very helpful" is more likely to lead to an exploratory discussion than "Your presentation was confusing".

The next article will discuss "Who Do You Think You Are? When we are given feedback do we hear it or do our defence mechanisms take over?"

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