

## Effective Feedback

Feedback is the breakfast of champions!

Effective feedback is like the GPS on your employee's performance journey. You provide ongoing information — both positive and constructive — to help your employee.

Wouldn't it be great if employees had their own internal performance GPS that would let them know immediately when they missed a turn on the road to achieving their goals? *Here's current performance and there's desired performance. On track...on track...oops, recalculating!*

It's a great idea, but the reality is our employees don't always keep on track on their own. FEEDBACK is our employee's performance GPS and it's up to us to provide it — and provide it in a way that actually results in change.

Did you know that most employees — when asked — cited lack of direction and unclear expectations as the primary reason they couldn't perform?

That would make feedback critical for employee performance. Feedback is to performance as ... well, breathing is to life. We need it and we need it all the time. Yet feedback is not always received as intended. Leaders sometimes avoid giving it because frankly, some people don't welcome it. And, HOW we give feedback is key to how it is received and acted on.

For many people, receiving feedback can be painful because it is often received in a very different way than it was voiced. Feedback is sometimes received with the following reactions:

- *"Who are you to judge me?"*
- *"Well, the reason I did that was because...."*
- *"You don't know what you're talking about."*
- *"I already know that. Do you think I'm stupid?"*

### Focus on Information, Not Judgment

The challenge with feedback is that often it is seen as judgment of the person, rather than as information that would be useful to the person. Have you ever gone the afternoon only to smile in the mirror and notice a poppy seed stuck in between your teeth? How many people did you smile at that afternoon who didn't say anything? Didn't you wish they HAD provided some information — some feedback — on your situation?

Sometimes people don't know what they're doing or the impact it may be having — both positive and developmental. Let's redefine feedback as useful information that the other person doesn't have to help them perform better, NOT as judgment of them.

### Focus on the Future, Not the Past

The intent of feedback should be to improve future performance, NOT judge past behavior. There's nothing we can do about the past. Feedback should focus on the future!

Often we feel compelled to dwell on what we saw or what we heard when, in reality, it really doesn't matter that much. What DOES matter is future behavior, so focus there. Consider using the following future-oriented phrases to help you focus your solutions on the future:

- *“to make it even better the next time...”*
- *“to make things more effective...”*

## Reduce Defensiveness by Making Suggestions Optional

Change is more likely to occur when the person buys into the suggestion. One way to encourage buy-in is to make your suggestions optional. (Of course, if the behavior you're expecting is NOT optional, don't offer it as an option!)

Imagine the way your people will accept your feedback when they feel they have some control over what they do with it. Consider the following phrases to help you provide suggestions:

- *“You may want to consider trying...”*
- *“Something that's worked for me that may work for you is...”*

Not only do we want to present our suggestions as options, we must BELIEVE that they are options! If our suggestion is NOT an option — if the employee MUST do it our way or else — then we're likely having a difficult conversation, not providing feedback.

## Give Feedback with CAIR

To provide feedback effectively, follow the CAIR model:

Begin by outlining the context for our feedback — when and where the incident happened. For example, “At the staff meeting this morning...”

Continue by outlining the person's actions — what he or she did. “...when you said that ‘this was stupid and a waste of time’...”

Then describe the impact of the person's actions — on the meeting, the team, you, the person, others. “...the meeting came to a halt; people stopped contributing.”

At this point, you may want to help the employee save face by saying something like, “I'm sure that wasn't your intention...” You may want to stop and listen to the other person — actually you can stop and listen at any point — so the other person feels heard.

**C**ontext – where/when it happened.

**A**ctions – what the person did.

**I**mpact – the effect of the person's actions.

**R**equest or **R**einforce behavior.



As appropriate, you may rrequest a different behavior or rreinforce current behavior. When the feedback is constructive, you want to ask for a change. If the feedback is positive and reinforcing, we want to request CONTINUED positive behavior.

The intent of feedback should be to improve future performance, NOT judge past behavior. You CAN provide more effective feedback by 1) focusing on information, not judgment; 2) focusing on the future, not the past; 3) reducing defensiveness by making suggestions optional; and 4) following the CAIR model when delivering feedback.

This information comes from *Powerful Feedback Techniques*, a module in Entelechy's *Unleash Your Leadership Potential* training. Check out this module as well as our 40 other modules, training tools, and eGuides at [www.unleashyourleadership.com](http://www.unleashyourleadership.com).

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