DELIVERING FEEDBACK AND HANDLING CONFLICT

Resource Guide

Providing Feedback

As a supervisor, you will work with all types of people in all types of situations. With this in mind, it only makes sense that there are many types of feedback that we can deliver. In turn, delivering the appropriate type of feedback increases the chance that the receiver will hear, understand, accept, and act on that feedback.

Characteristics of Good Feedback

In order for feedback to be well received and acted upon, four main characteristics should be present. Simply remember the STEBAH acronym:

- **Specific**: Be specific about what behavior you want the person to change.

- **Timely**: The feedback should be delivered as soon as possible for maximum effectiveness.

- **Expressed Directly**: The feedback should be delivered in a direct manner to the person whose behavior needs to change.

- **Behavior-Focused**: The feedback should focus on the behavior that should be changed, not the person, or their personality.

- **Actionable**: The feedback has to be about something the person can change. Complaining that their left-handedness is causing a slowdown on the assembly line is not productive, because it is not realistic to expect the individual to be ambidextrous.

- **Helpful**: Deliver the feedback in a manner that shows that you want to help the individual with this problem. Key attitudes include respectfulness, honesty, open-mindedness, and empathy.

Feedback Delivery Tools

Direct Praise or Criticism

This is often used in informal feedback situations, but can also be used as part of formal feedback. Remember the characteristics of good feedback even when delivering these short items.
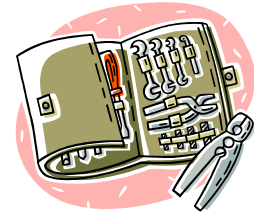
Some examples include:

- "That report that you sent out today looked great, Jamie."

- "You need to put your hard hat on, Aaron."

- "Thank you for helping Paul out with that task, Lisa."

Note that direct criticism, without any buffering (as described below), should be used very rarely – typically only when there is a safety issue (as in the hard hat example above).

The Feedback Sandwich

The feedback sandwich is a constructive way of delivering negative feedback. You simply sandwich the negative between two positives.

Example: "Susan, your report had all the right statistics in it, and I really appreciate that. However, we need you to use the company template. I've e-mailed it to you so that you can use it the next time. Good job getting it in on time, too!"

This approach has been criticized because it trains the employee to always expect a negative when they hear a positive, and it takes the focus away from the actual problem. However, it is especially useful for new or sensitive employees or in situations where the job is well done overall.

The Open-Faced Sandwich

The open-faced sandwich is a modified version of the Feedback Sandwich described above. In it, you give the person some praise, give the feedback, and then give constructive help on modifying the behavior. This places more focus on the problem at hand, but still gives the employee something positive to focus on.

Example: "Susan, your report had all the right statistics in it, and I really appreciate that. However, we need you to use the company template. I've e-mailed it to you so that you can use it the next time."

About 360 Degree Feedback

360 Degree Feedback is a tool that allows the employee to receive feedback from all the groups that they interact with, including customers, co-workers, supervisors, and people that report to them. It is a very intensive process, but when implemented properly, it can give people a real sense of their

strengths and weaknesses. Although 360 Degree Feedback is worth a course on its own, just remember that your team should be encouraged to deliver feedback to each other using some of the tools just discussed. This will improve communication and problem solving, and build team co-operation and maturity.

Informal Feedback

This is the type of feedback that you will deliver most often. This sort of feedback is quick, precise, and direct. It can be delivered in person, over the phone, or via e-mail. It can happen between co-workers, or between a supervisor and their staff.

When delivering this type of feedback, be sensitive to the message that you are sending and to the other people present. Criticizing a team member in front of the entire team will not be well received. Perhaps surprisingly, being praised in front of a group can make some people feel uncomfortable, too.

Formal Feedback

This type of feedback involves documentation and collaboration to identify areas of strengths and weaknesses, and to create action plans for addressing those areas. It is typically focused on the long term rather than the short term. Some examples include formal reviews, goal setting meetings, or reporting on the team's progress in a team meeting. Most often, formal feedback will be delivered from the supervisor to their staff member(s).

When setting up a meeting for formal feedback, remember the following tips.

- Give the employee lots of notice about the meeting.

- Be sensitive when asking them to meet with you. For some people, the phrase, "I'd like to see you in my office," produces an immediate phobic reaction. It's best to let them know privately and quietly.

- Let the employee know what the meeting is about and give them any necessary documents to prepare for the meeting. This will also help alleviate fear and anxiety.

- Make sure the meeting is at a convenient time for both you and the employee. Try to avoid scheduling meetings right before lunch or the end of the day so that neither of you feel rushed.
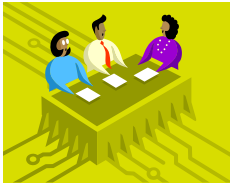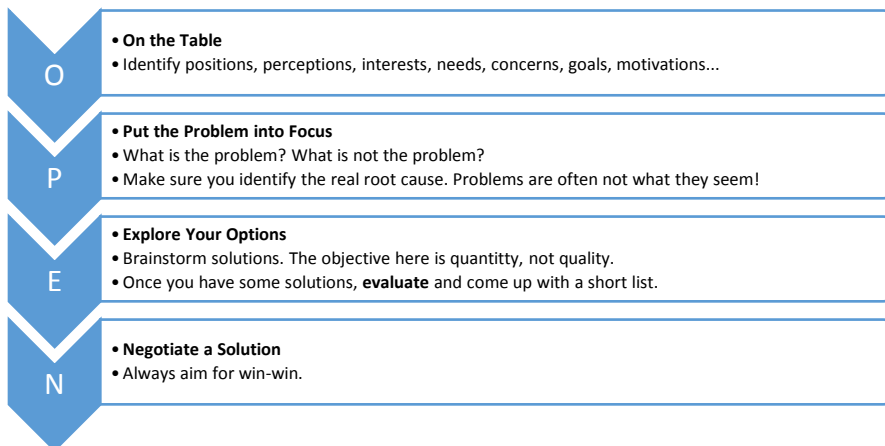
Resolving Conflict

Supervisors are often called in to help mediate conflicts within their team, or sometimes within other teams. Although many people dislike dealing with conflict, when it is managed properly, it can be a positive thing. With the proper tools, people are able to air their ideas and their issues, share information in a constructive manner, and work towards resolving their differences. All of this should result in a more productive, respectful, open workplace.

Using a Conflict Resolution Process

Having a pre-defined conflict resolution process is a valuable tool. This process will give any supervisor an objective, neutral way to identify, explore, and resolve conflicts. We recommend using the OPEN technique.

O
- **On the Table**
- Identify positions, perceptions, interests, needs, concerns, goals, motivations...

P
- **Put the Problem into Focus**
- What is the problem? What is not the problem?
- Make sure you identify the real root cause. Problems are often not what they seem!

E
- **Explore Your Options**
- Brainstorm solutions. The objective here is quantitty, not quality.
- Once you have some solutions, **evaluate** and come up with a short list.

N
- **Negotiate a Solution**
- Always aim for win-win.

After a solution has been negotiated, make sure to follow up and make sure that the conflict has indeed been resolved and that the proposed solution is working. If it is not working, it's time to go back to the drawing board, perhaps with input from others (if appropriate).

Maintaining Fairness

During the conflict resolution process, it is very important that you remain objective and neutral to ensure that the process is fair to all. Key behaviors include:

- Never taking sides, even if asked

- Asking for, and encouraging, a response from all comments

- Remaining objective and neutral, and avoiding subjective comments

- Offering factual observations to both sides to help root out the key issues

- Encouraging win-win solutions

- Ensuring a balance of power is maintained, so that one side does not feel bullied or neglected

Seeking Help from Within the Team

At times, it may be appropriate to involve the entire team in conflict resolution. This often occurs when:

- There is a conflict between all members of the team

- There is a conflict between a few team members that is affecting the entire team

In these situations, it is important to have a face-to-face meeting of the entire team. Write the OPEN process on the flip chart. The team's input should be greatest in the first three phases. In the negotiation phase, you (as the supervisor) should ensure that the proposed solution will not negatively affect others or cause more conflict.

Seeking Help from Outside the Team

If the people in conflict are unable to resolve the problem with your assistance, and team assistance has not worked or is not appropriate, then it may be time to seek help from outside sources. This approach can also be used when you have a conflict of interest in the issue at hand.

Outside sources can include:

- Other supervisors

- Mediators

- Human resources personnel

No one with authority over the team (such as your manager) should be considered, as they may intimidate the people in conflict and take focus away from conflict resolution.