How to Provide Effective Feedback

Providing feedback to others is something you will likely have to do at some point during your career. Whether you are a manager who supervises many employees or simply a mentor for a new co-worker, knowing how to provide effective and helpful feedback is important. Useful, well-presented feedback helps others to improve and grow professionally.

- Before Providing Feedback
- Timing
- Content
- Presentation
- After Providing Feedback
- Resources

Before Providing Feedback

It is important to understand exactly what the term feedback means before giving anyone feedback. Feedback refers to any information regarding an individual's efforts and progress toward reaching a certain goal. Effective feedback is clear, reasonable and accepted by the recipient. Keep this in mind as you plan out the feedback you will give someone.

Timing

Keep in mind that you should give someone feedback at an appropriate time when it will be well-received and understood. Consider the following tips:

- Give feedback in a timely fashion. Waiting too long to address the individual's behavior or performance during a certain instance will make what you have to say less important and helpful to the receiver.
- Refrain from addressing very old instances unless you are discussing a pattern in the individual's behavior.
- Avoid bringing up negative feedback at a time when the individual is extremely overwhelmed by work or personal problems. Doing so may further distress him or her.
- Maintain privacy by providing feedback to the individual when he or she is alone.

Content

Ensure that the content of your feedback is as valuable and helpful as possible by following these guidelines:

- Be specific. Refer to certain instances and suggest steps the individual can take to improve.
- Be clear. Provide a thorough explanation for the feedback and encourage the individual to ask questions if they do not understand.
- Be realistic. Comment on the individual's behavior, performance and skills rather than his or her personality traits which cannot be changed.

Presentation

Having good content is only half of the feedback process. Along with content, you should also consider the way in which you present your feedback. Consider the following tips:

- Be gentle and sensitive. If the feedback is negative, avoid sounding angry and remain calm. In addition, do not make the individual feel like he or she is in competition with anyone else.
- Use "I" and "you" statements rather than third-person pronouns. This allows you to have a more direct and open discussion. Using third-person pronouns can cause your feedback to sound vague and impersonal.
- Make sure that your verbal statements and nonverbal actions are congruent. Nonverbal actions include eye contact, head nodding and shaking, hand gestures, and any other movements. Avoid fidgeting and hold strong eye contact, as this will prevent the individual from getting distracted while you speak.
- Avoid overwhelming the individual with feedback, especially if your comments are mostly negative. If you have a lot of items to address, choose the most relevant and time-sensitive ones and bring the rest up at a later time.

After Providing Feedback

After you have communicated the feedback, your task is not over just yet. Close off your discussion by doing the following:

- Direct the individual to any other resources which may help him or her to further understand your feedback and improve.
- Encourage him or her to reflect on your conversation.
- Remind him or her that you are always available to answer any questions.

Remember that providing feedback should be an ongoing activity. The more consistent your feedback is, the more prepared the individual will be to receive and absorb it.

Resources

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development: www.ascd.org