

One of the main ways people get better at what they do is by receiving honest, specific and timely feedback.

According to most managers surveyed, poor (or no) feedback happens because education and training on feedback or mentoring is either lacking or non-existent in most companies.

But think about these questions: Did you ever give feedback that made a bad situation worse? Have you ever avoided giving feedback because it was too time consuming and difficult? Do you give feedback sparingly because you are afraid the other party might take it the wrong way and create a time-consuming conflict? Have you bypassed giving someone feedback and wound up doing the job yourself?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, think about the time, energy and opportunity you missed by not giving your employees good feedback.


Most people are not very comfortable with giving feedback, whether it's positive or negative. Because giving feedback involves telling another person how their behaviors or actions are perceived, it's fraught with emotional traps. Can you remember how anxious you were when you received feedback from your boss? Giving feedback poorly can result in escalating a conflict, reducing motivation or even demoralizing an employee. Feedback is a source of anxiety for many people and, for that reason alone, many managers avoid doing it at all. Instead these managers suffer with poor and unmitigated performance.

Yet, if you want to get the most out of your employees and develop a healthy working relationship, you have to give good feedback more often than just at performance appraisal time.

Six Steps to Giving Great Feedback

Knowing how and when to give constructive feedback enables a manager to reduce resistance, gain cooperation and trust, and creates an employee who collaborates in both recognizing and solving problems, and becomes an ally in productivity. To that end, consider these steps:

1. **Set the tone:** Use positive and constructive feedback in every session. Know what you want to say. Resistance evaporates once you establish a reputation for being open, straightforward, positive and constructive.
2. **Ask permission:** As soon as you ask permission to give someone feedback, and they agree, you've opened the conversation to a more willing recipient.
3. **Ask people for self-assessments:** This builds self-awareness and gets people involved in the feedback process, which may make it easier for both parties.
4. **Timing is everything:** Feedback is most effective when given as soon as possible after a behavior has occurred.
5. **Be specific:** Focus on specific situations and behaviors, and explain how the individual's decisions or behaviors affect other people and the business.
6. **Limit feedback to three points:** Good managers identify key leveraging points that will make the biggest improvement in their employee's behavior and zoom in on that. If you critique everything, the employee will get overwhelmed and will not improve.

The more you give feedback, the easier it becomes. Instead of avoiding it, continue to practice with any issue that arises. Soon, giving good, positive feedback will become second nature. Also, give your employees the opportunity to give you feedback on the feedback process. There is always room for improvement, so be open to what they have to say and incorporate changes as necessary. 

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CalCPA member feedback

CalCPA Members Share Managerial Tips of the Trade

“I would never ask an employee to do something I would not or could not do myself.”

—Wendy Waters, office manager, Shwiff, Levy & Polo, LLP

“I think it's important to learn as much as possible about the people that I have working with me by sharing stories about our families, our challenges and dreams. It makes for a deeper connection and a closer working relationship and, when you care about each other, you can move mountains together.”

—Daryl R. Petrick, partner, Bowman Certified Public Accountants

“Hire people you trust, trust the people you hire.”

—John D. Sensiba, managing partner, Ireland San Filippo, LLP