



5 Things Almost Everyone Gets Wrong About Feedback

When I first became a supervisor, there was nothing I dreaded more than giving feedback. My solution was simply to avoid it, but the negative consequences were too significant to ignore. Eventually, I learned to face my fears and see feedback as the valuable tool it is I made a lot of mistakes (far more than 5) along the way. Below are the most common I have seen since.

MISTAKE #1: Praise = Good; Criticism = Bad

Whenever I ask someone about the best feedback they ever received, they inevitably share an instance of praise. When I ask them to share the worst, they share a criticism. Good feedback does not equal praise and bad feedback does not equal criticism. Feedback is good when it is effective and bad when it is not. Often critical feedback can be far more beneficial than praise.

MISTAKE #2: Feedback is not Personal

Many people get defensive when they receive feedback and in a misguided attempt to diffuse the situation, they are told that it is not personal. But it is inherently personal. You know that expression, “We do not see the world as it is. We see it as we are”? Feedback can be highly subjective, and it is important that we present it as such.

MISTAKE #3: There is a Time and Place for Feedback

Too many supervisors give too little feedback. When they do, they tend to reserve it for formal occasions such as annual reviews and one-on-one check ins. For feedback to be effective, there must be a culture that normalizes it. Feedback should be a process where every member of the team can support every other member of the team any day at any time.

MISTAKE #4: Feedback Should Just Be about Performance

There is a belief that feedback should be reserved for performance, but feedback is not just about reaching the company goals. In many cases, what holds people back professionally may have little to do with performance. They may be perceived as unprofessional or aggressive or unpleasant to work with. They may have bad breath or B.O. They may ramble too much in meetings. We tend to avoid these conversations because they seem too personal or hurtful, but these are the conversations that can literally change someone’s entire career.

MISTAKE #5: Rejecting Feedback = Being Defensive

Supervisors often rationalize their avoidance of giving feedback based on their perception of their staff’s defensive reaction to it. Although some people are most certainly defensive, some supervisors interpret any disagreement as defensiveness. But staff are not obligated to take everyone’s feedback as gospel truth. Sometimes the feedback is unhelpful or simply untrue. So do not assume that disagreement is equal to defensiveness.

Feedback is hard for most people both in giving and receiving it. With intention and commitment, you have every ability to create a feedback culture on your team that works toward your goal of growth and development.