



What's the best ice cream flavor?

The greatest singer?

The most beautiful door color?

Of course, there's no one right answer to any of these questions, though some people will try to convince you otherwise.

(By the way, mint chocolate chip Mariah and blue.)

Feedback is the same.

It's personal.

One of the biggest problems with feedback is we pretend that it isn't. In many cases supervisors will say outright to their staff, *it's nothing personal*.

But it is and it should be.

Because each of your staff is different. Sometimes drastically so and like with everything else you do to build your relationship and support that staff, you need to adjust accordingly.

You can start by asking your staff.

What's the best feedback you've ever received?

What kind of feedback supports you?

How do you like to receive feedback?

You open that conversation and then you observe. Sometimes what we say and what we do doesn't match up, not because we're liars but sometimes we're not self-aware or we think that's true and it turns out not to be. Or we say what we think you want to hear.

When there's a discrepancy, that opens a door- hopefully a blue one- for that conversation.

Well, you told me this and this is what I observed. What do you think is going on there?

No judgments, just an opportunity to learn better what your staff needs from you.

Then you adjust accordingly.

As circumstances change, as you change, as they change, you're always building your relationship with your staff and this includes the way you give and receive feedback.



When you adjust, there are lots of ways that you can adjust to best serve them, one of which is when you give feedback.

The first time I was a supervisor I supervised two people and they were almost polar opposites, which was challenging at the time as a new supervisor, but in hindsight, it really helped me grow because I had to constantly adjust to what they needed.

We ran a really busy community center and one of my staff asked me not to give them feedback at the moment because there was so much going on, and it was really distracting to them.

Fine.

The other asked that I only give feedback at the moment because by the time we got to our weekly meeting, they had forgotten all about it!

Fine.

Some people will tell you they want direct feedback, but they don't receive it very well so you want to adjust accordingly. You need to be clear but sometimes you need to change the way you approach your feedback. Sometimes people want to just have a conversation around feedback not in the middle of another meeting.

You want to figure out what works best for them and in what format.

In most cases your feedback should be verbal, but there's always occasion for feedback that's not so serious to come across on a quick email or a note or a card or a text.

I had one staff member who really liked to prepare for everything and they asked if I could send some pieces of feedback we would be discussing in our agenda so they could prepare accordingly and I was happy to do that.

Ask them about their past experiences with feedback.

What's worked?

What hasn't worked?

What's been great?

What's been terrible?

You want to work together so that in the future when somebody asks them about their past experience with feedback, they're going to say that they had their best ever experience with you.



It's really important to tie your feedback back to goals, back to what your staff cares about, because if they care about it, then they're going to want to hear about how they can get there quicker or faster or better and what they can do to improve.

Hopefully they care about their performance and you want to give them feedback around their expectations and goals for the team and for the organization.

A lot of times staff is going to have personal goals that are related to work based on time and money. They may want to make sure they're home at five o'clock every day to greet their kids when they walk through the door. Or they want to get that raise because they're saving up for a house.

The goals are personal but they are related to them getting their work done efficiently so they can get home at a certain time or working really hard to get that promotion so they can get the money they need for that house. You can tie their feedback around that.

It's really important for you to understand what your staff's goals are. If you don't know, that's a homework assignment for you. Find out what their goals are, this year, next year 10 years, from now...

They might have absolutely nothing to do with the work they're doing now.

How can you support them to help develop those skills that they need in their future goal?

I supervised someone once who was studying to be a social worker and the first day we met, I asked what their goals were. They told me they wanted to be a runway model.

Now, I don't know anything about being a runway model, but it was helpful to understand that. It helped with our relationships so I could ask them about it.

There are a lot of skills that are going to transfer from any position- even ones that seem so drastically different as being a runway model and a social worker. Things like being organized and prioritizing well, communicating effectively so we could use that feedback for what they really cared about.

Again, you want to collaborate with your staff. It is not your job as a supervisor to come in and tell them what is right and what is wrong, when they're good and when they're bad. You're not their parent. This is not how a strong supervisory relationship works.

You want to collaborate with them, as a colleague, as a peer, as a professional so that they have voice and agency and investment into their own growth.

This is one of the most important things I want you to take away from this course. Feedback is personal.

You'll notice at the beginning of this lesson.



I didn't ask you what your favorite ice cream flavor was. I asked you what the best was. It's personal and subjective and so is most of your feedback.

We're going to talk in a later lesson about how to deliver objective feedback, which, to me, is the easiest kind because it's objective.

But outside of things that are quantifiable, most feedback is personal and it's essential that you present it as such.

This is how I perceived it.

Not that this is the only way to perceive it or this is the absolute truth.

This was my perception.

This was my experience. Tell me about yours.

You learn about each other and how you work and what you notice.

It really helps develop your working relationship and how to best support your staff. Sometimes your differences in perception are just stylistic in which case you can defer to your staff. But when you need to get on the same page, it's really important that you understand there might be lots of different directions to go in. One might not be more right than the other. You need to talk about how we get to some point of agreement.

This is something you should be coming back to again and again and again. *I think the blue looks better, but you think it's yellow. Let's talk about that.*

Understand that there are lots of legitimate ways to justify either one.

Now, I'm sure you've heard over time of a compliment sandwich. If you've grown up in places that maybe are a little bit cruder like Boston, you may have heard it referred to as the s*** sandwich. Basically it's the same idea which is you cushion the feedback in most cases critical between two compliments, between the bread.

In most cases I'm going to advise you against this, for a couple of reasons. 1) most people can see through it and the compliments come off as inauthentic. They're just waiting to hear what the criticism is. Or the opposite thing happens. They only listen to the compliments and they completely disregard the critical feedback in the middle. So unless your staff requests this and unless they've shown that they get a lot of value out of this style, then I will caution you against delivering feedback this way.

And here's where you don't want it to be personal. You are a human being. Naturally there's going to be some staff that you naturally like more than others. You want to make sure you're not over delivering critical feedback to staff simply because you don't like them, simply because it's personal.



I know you would never do this intentionally, but sometimes subconsciously our feelings get in the way.

When you're going to deliver feedback and you know that it's someone that you struggle with personally ask yourself if someone else on the team who you have a really good relationship with did this same thing, would you deliver this feedback or are you being extra critical because you don't like this person.

It's a really important awareness to continue to build within yourself.

Also you want to be cautious of not giving a lot of feedback on things that simply annoy you or aren't your preference, but that ultimately don't have anything to do with their performance or to help further their growth.

So remember feedback is personal and it should be