



I worked at a place that only allowed staff to wear jeans on Fridays, but this one staff would come in on other days wearing jeans. It made my boss furious, but not furious enough to have a conversation about it, so the behavior continued.

Until one day when we all got to the office and waiting for each of us on our chairs was a photocopy of the dress code policy. Highlighted in yellow was the section about only wearing jeans on Fridays.

This caused quite a stir around the office because everybody knew who it was in reference to including the person it was in reference to.

It was a mess.

It didn't need to go down like that. This whole situation could have been handled with a simple conversation.

And that's what you are going to do, when you are giving feedback to your staff. Not avoiding it, hiding it, or wishing it away.

When feedback is necessary, it's your job as a supervisor to make sure that you are giving that feedback.

In my opinion, situations like this that involve a clear violation of a policy or a clear lack of meeting an expectation in an objective way is the easiest type of feedback out there.

Yes, feedback is tricky and it's difficult. That's why we're here. But of all the difficulty that is feedback, this is the easiest kind and I'll show you why.

First of all, when you are broaching a situation where a staff member is not meeting an expectation, before you dive into it, it's important to understand why the expectation hasn't been met.

You don't need to assume it. You simply need to get that information from your staff.

Their answer is going to fall in one of these categories:

- 1) They didn't know about the expectation.
- 2) It wasn't clear.
- 3) They didn't have the proper resources, knowledge, or skill.
- 4) They simply don't have the capacity.
- 5) They don't care.

Now don't be like so many other managers and jump to that last reason.

Of course, sometimes your staff won't care but more often than not it's going to be one of these other reasons.



You need to work with your staff to understand what the reason was so that you can support them going forward to meet that expectation.

Anytime you're giving feedback- and otherwise- your language matters. It's important to avoid really subjective terms, sometimes referred to as blur words.

These words contain a lot of assumptions and also bias. If I say you're being unprofessional, what am I saying?

What does that word mean to me? And what does it mean to you?

What I think is unprofessional can be really different than what you think is unprofessional so it doesn't help inform the conversation.

Instead you want your language to be as clear as possible. If it's not, you want to remember- personalize it. Say, 'this is how I perceived this action' or 'this is how I interpreted what you said. Is that what you meant?'

You have a collaborative conversation around it and you come from a place of curiosity to understand in order to best support your staff.

You also want to avoid absolutes, especially words like 'always' and 'never'.

Most people don't always do something or never do something. If you use these terms, the response is likely to be around the exception. If you have a staff member who's frequently late and you tell them that they're always late, many of them will be quick to point out that one time that they weren't. So try not to use these words all together.

This is the feedback or feedforward formula, if you will. I know- roll your eyes all you want. I won't use this term too much but I did want to use it for this instance to highlight the fact that even when we're talking about behaviors in the past, ultimately we're doing so to positively impact the future. So feedback is feed forward in the sense that you're using that past incident to positively impact growth in the future. This is the feed forward formula.

Because it is a formula, you don't want to come off formulaic like a robot or that it's scripted. You're still a human being having a conversation with another human being, so use your natural language. Anytime you're giving feedback, you want to make sure these four components are included.

That is, what was done or wasn't done?

What was said or wasn't said?

The impact of that. If you're giving praise, that would have a positive impact. If it's critical feedback, then it will be a negative consequence.



Reiterating what the expectation is and then the expected next steps.

So let's stick with that example of punctuality because that's pretty objective. You could say something like, 'you have been late twice this week without letting me know.'

What's the result? 'Because it's a policy' is not a great reason. People need to understand what the actual impact of what they did is. Whether it's positive or negative.

In this case, 'you missed the staff meeting and you kept a client waiting. The expectation is that you're at your desk at 9 o'clock, and if you can't be, then you need to call and let me know. So going forward. Please be at your desk every day at nine o'clock and we'll check back in next Friday.'

This is scripted, and you don't want to read things verbatim, but you want to make sure you're including all four of these components.

You also want to involve your staff in the process. You want to make sure they understand and you want to ask them what they need to help them meet that expectation. In some cases, it might just be an expectation they can't meet for any number of reasons. In this case, maybe they have to get kids to school and the bus is always late and no matter what they do, they're never going to get there at 9:00. Do you have some flexibility to have them come in at 9:30 or whatever the case may be?

Talk with them about if it's possible to meet the expectation. Can the expectation be adjusted?

What do they need to meet that expectation? Empower them to come up with their own solutions and you can support them with those solutions.

Acknowledge your role so whenever something happens, you are the leader of your team. You hold a level of accountability. Even if your staff in your perception is 99% responsible for what's going on, you likely have some level of responsibility in what is going on as well.

Acknowledge that.

'I apologize that I didn't make that clear' or 'I'm sorry that that makes it difficult for you to get here at that time' or whatever the case may be. But again, you're not here to judge and punish and make your staff feel bad. You're here to support them and help them meet their goals and expectations and continue their growth.

Be a part of the solution and show accountability for your part in it.

Emphasize your support. That you're here to help them get there. You're on the same team. You're not against one another.



It's really important to follow through to make sure that you show that you are paying attention and that you want to help them succeed. And it's really important to recognize the growth.

A lot of times managers are quick to point out when the expectation still isn't being met, but once improvement starts to happen, they don't acknowledge it at all.

You want to encourage and acknowledge your staff when they start to make progress and continue to support them and encourage them to continue that progress.

When you are giving feedback, whether it's objective or subjective, whether it's critical or whether it's praise, you want to make sure that you're being supportive. That you're being clear and that you don't make a mess when somebody shows up on a Wednesday wearing jeans. That you have the conversation. That you work with your staff and you show them that you're on the same team.