

PEOPLE SCIENCE

The art of managing others for R&D Scientists & those who work with them

GIVING ACTIONABLE FEEDBACK, PART 2

Previously, we talked about the value of giving informal *and* actionable feedback so that employees know specifically what they can do to continue doing a good job. In this second part, we will explain how to give actionable feedback when employee performance does not meet expectations.

Giving informal and actionable feedback in situations where there is poor performance or distracting workplace behaviors requires a higher level of skill in leading feedback conversations.

Let's review the steps in giving informal and actionable feedback.

- Give informal actionable feedback as close to the time as the manager is aware as possible.
- Credible actionable feedback depends on specificity. What exactly do you want more of or less of from this employee?
- Relate feedback to impact on you and others.

Consider this situation. Jane, your employee, is late in meeting pre-arranged deadlines. You say: "Late again? Why is your work always late?"

Jane responds: "It's not my fault. Joe sent me the data late and I was at an off-site meeting last week."

Your goal is to get Jane to meet deadlines. Jane responds defensively, making excuses and blaming others. You pre-judged the situation, starting with "why is your work always late?" She may meet the deadline next time but there is no long term learning about how missing deadlines impact on others.

Here's another approach. "Jane, I've noticed you've been having trouble meeting deadlines. I didn't receive your report until today, two weeks late. I also know that you have been late with other deliverables for George and Clark. *How do you see the situation?*"

Jane responds: "You're right. I have been late. But I'm confused about something. I get one deadline date from you and then I get ASAP requests from George and Clark. I don't know who to respond to first?"

By keeping a neutral and non-accusatory tone, asking Jane to give her side of the story first, you've uncovered an unanticipated issue: Jane is not clear about her priorities.

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Once scientist managers nip performance infractions in the bud before they escalate to intractable, complex performance or behavior issues. Look around. Are there employees who need a correction conversation with you now?

Consider each of these steps to ensure success.

- Approach this conversation without pre-judgment.
- The you plan for this conversation, the more likely you will get the result you want: sustained improvement
- Take your time with feedback conversations.
- Limit your conversation to one area to improve. Too many negatives can close down the conversation quickly.
- Focus on changing the problem or behavior not the person; problems can be fixed, not people.
- Really, really listen to what is being said, ask questions to clarify and pause frequently.
- Limit statements beginning with "You...".
- Limit questions beginning with "Why...?"
- Listen to the employee's suggestions for self-improvement first and then offer your own.
- Allow feelings to be expressed and if necessary, offer to stop and continue later.
- End the conversation with clear steps on what is going to change, when the change will start, how the performance improvement can be measured and schedule a future conversation to review.

Consider these *benefits* for giving actionable feedback:

- Get consistent performance from those you manage, making you more effective and more efficient
- Have more time to do what you love: research
- Retain your talented employees
- Reduce turnover and retraining
- Improve employee morale

One last thought. Giving feedback puts the emphasis on what happened in the past. An equally valuable perspective is "feed forward": what can the employee do differently in the future to avoid the problem situation? Jointly developing feed forward suggestions is another way to end a performance conversation on a positive note.

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