Feedback: An Organizational and Individual Perspective
Part One
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Feedback - An Organizational View

Why is it that so many companies struggle with fostering and providing ongoing feedback? It seems that we have many forces trying to make sure that people get feedback through performance review systems, succession planning, high-potential criteria, etc., but what is the quality of the feedback that people really get in any of these approaches? As coaches spanning more than 20 years of experience, we continue to see clear evidence that organizations lack the ability, knowledge, or courage, to provide people with direct, high-quality, and actionable feedback.

When interviewing people in the 360° feedback process we often ask if the person has ever given the feedback directly to the person being coached. The answer is so frequently "no."

So why is it that it is so hard for people to talk directly to colleagues about how they work, how they could improve, and what they could do better to make them more effective?

Here are a few organizational ideas that could help with creating a culture that respects and promotes giving feedback so that it becomes a part of the fabric of daily life. These observations and suggestions are based on our work with 100's of organizations in different industries, different levels of leadership, different organizational cultures; and all have one thing in common: they want the people with whom we are coaching to get quality feedback.

Employee focus is equal to client/patient/customer focus - companies demonstrate tremendous focus on their consumers whether they deliver products or services. They measure it, seek out feedback to ensure they continue to grow, deliver quality in what they are offering, and continue to make business improvements. Yet, why is there less focus on getting or giving feedback that will help with performance levels? Some companies are doing this with surveys and they set up organized groups to address issues. These surveys tend to focus on general topics such as communications or opportunities for career development, but don't these miss the actual root cause? How can companies make giving feedback to people a *fundamental basic management practice?* Isn't there something to be said about asking people directly what they think? Or telling them directly what they could work on to be better? It seems we have taken for granted the importance of daily interactions and speaking frankly. If companies could create a culture that lives and breathes feedback for all stakeholders, then they might be able to address this age-old problem.

Feedback - An Individual Perspective

With all the value statements posted by companies to encourage employees to act with integrity, and the creation of communication strategies to inform employees of internal developments, there is still an opportunity for greater honesty. It is the responsibility of not only management but also of every individual. How can people gain more confidence in having frank conversations? Training can help, but if people felt comfortable speaking the truth, it would eliminate confusion and surprises at performance review time. We ask that people view this as an individual responsibility to tell people the truth.

Here are some tactical approaches and key guidelines to delivering feedback. The most important thing to remember is to stay focused on the three C's. No matter how well you think you can effectively give feedback, following the three C's will help you deliver it in a way that starts adding honesty to your relationships at work and at home.

Courage - make the resolution that you will have the conversation and know that you are doing it to be honest with the other person.

Confidence - that you can leverage your knowledge and insights to make the conversation meaningful to the recipient, and use specifics so that the information is based on actual observations or data.

Compassion - show understanding and kindness in delivering the message. Even if you have to be critical about the behavior or the work product, you can be considerate and respectful.

Guidelines for Giving Feedback

- The ideal manner in which to give feedback is to be:

    - clear
    - thoughtful and respectful
    - specific and accurate
    - careful about the timing
    - non-judgmental
    - careful to speak only to the behavior

- Feedback should begin with positive observations first, followed by areas for improvement. It should be delivered in a non-judgmental manner.

- Focus on areas that the person has the power to change.

- Even when invited to give feedback, the recipient probably did not want *that* feedback – be sensitive to the fact that critical feedback is always difficult to hear.

- Feedback often describes the participants' perceptions of the recipient's behavior. Even if recipients don't acknowledge that the perceptions are fair, they have to understand the ways in which other people see them.

- Focus on describing concrete behaviors and the impact those behaviors have on the ability to achieve personal and business objectives.

- Positive feedback can be given in public or private; feedback focused on areas for improvement should only be given in private.

- Use the word "I" not "we." "I observed you…" rather than "we observed you…"

- Avoid "over-dumping" feedback on someone. Often one behavioral example or issue is all that is needed to help the person understand.

- Give the recipient a chance to respond and listen as openly as possible, even if all you expect to hear are his or her rationalizations or casting of blame. At least you will find out if your feedback has really been received.

- Encourage the individual to consider what actions he or she might take to improve; support his or her suggestions with ideas of your own.

- Set up a time later in the week or the following week for a follow-up conversation to determine how the individual is responding.

Sentence Starters

- "I'm concerned that your style may be perceived as being…"

- "I observed your style as appearing ____ when you did _____."

- "I think your style might leave the impression that you are…"

- "My impression is that you unintentionally appear ____ when you ____."

- "Your approach might be viewed as being…"

- "I believe your style might indicate that…"

- "Your behavior might unintentionally be interpreted as being…"

Some of these ideas may appear simplistic but, if we look at giving feedback as too hard or too complex it may never happen. If we say "I am going to try this and not worry about being perfect," you can begin to have honest, candid conversations. Companies and people stumble, procrastinate, and avoid conversations that are

pivotal to enhancing the effectiveness of their leaders and employees. If we consider that giving feedback is fundamental to driving business success and creating a truthful, reliable, and respectful environment, maybe we would better understand how vital it is in our interactions.

In working with people who have received constructive feedback, delivered in an effective way, we find people realize the value. In turn they become more comfortable giving feedback to others. As organizations continue to develop people and promote a feedback culture, it will increase employee engagement, provide better communication channels among employees, and increase business productivity.

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