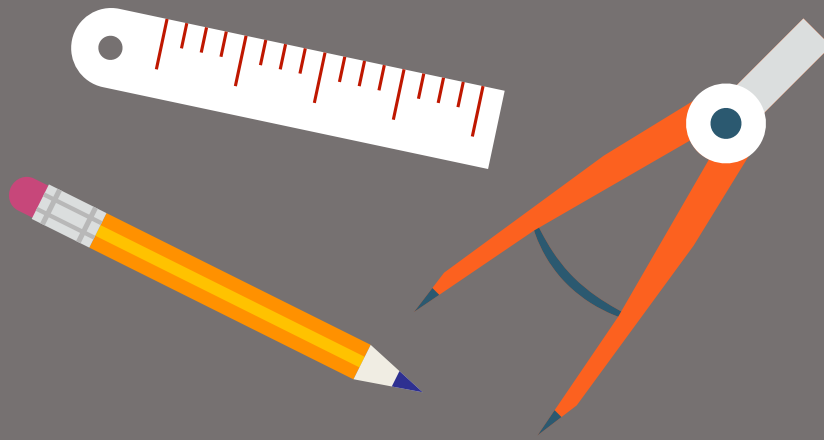


The ResourcefulManager ACTION Plan For Fail-Safe Feedback



PRACTICAL TOOLS

The Resourceful Manager ACTION Plan For Fail-Safe Feedback



It's the difficult conversation every manager dreads: Giving feedback that may not be taken gracefully. You've heard or even observed questionable behaviors or habits in an employee, and now you have to have "the talk."

The feedback doesn't need to be very long (though it can be if necessary). It just needs to be clear and set real goals to be accomplished in a set time frame.

It also helps if the manager reviews progress with the employee at regular intervals during the timeframe. That way the employee knows if he or she is making the expected progress. If they aren't, they know what to expect before the final date.

Put the fear of feedback behind you with the **ResourcefulManager ACTION Plan**. What does ACTION do? It allows you to prepare what you need to say — and how you're going to say it.

Think of it as an informal script.

Break down each ACTION item according to the situation you need to address.

Review it a few times before your feedback encounter. You don't have to memorize it, but the key is to stick to it. This will help you avoid turning what should be a positive, 10-minute chat into a 20-minute blow-out argument — especially if you think your feedback will meet resistance.

While you should allow time for open discussion, having the ResourcefulManager ACTION Plan ready helps you cover the points you need to make.

A – Ask for a good time to speak. This doesn't mean you need permission; it just allows the employee to pick a suitable time. Make it cordial but firm: "I need to speak with you about something; when is a good time?"

C – Center on the problem/issue. What's the purpose of this impromptu session? "I called you in because there have been problems with your production deadlines lately, and it's starting to affect our design department."

T – Talk specifics. Let the employee know there's a concrete problem, and you're not just going on rumor or hearsay: "The design department reported that three of your products were late last month because you missed a deadline. Can you tell me why this happened?"

I – Invite input. Allow the employee to address what the problem could be. It could be that the employee was aware of the problem and already thinking how to solve it, or that he or she was genuinely unaware of the issue.

O – Offer options. Whether the employee was aware of the problem or not, it's still up to this person to correct whatever mistake was made. Explain that you can assist on possible ways to address the problem. "If you'd like me to help, we could consider ideas to prevent this from happening again."

N – Note next steps. Put the steps in writing. Make clear that this isn't meant as a scare tactic. Instead, explain that you want to make sure you both have the same understanding of what the problem is, and have agreed on the corrective path to take.

Why Take A-C-T-I-O-N?

Because it'll keep getting worse

No manager is going to oversee a group of happy and inspired employees unless you foster an environment that welcomes feedback from all sides — from top down and within the ranks. A workplace environment that's terrified of feedback is one that will never reach potential. Instead, you'll have an office vibe that tells employees "don't screw up — or else."

Because good employees expect it

Employees want to be told if they're doing their jobs right and what, if anything, they can do better. When managers take the right approach, constructive feedback can be seen as learning opportunities, not punitive situations employees should fear. If employees are doing something wrong, or are unsure how to improve their job performance, chances are they'll welcome helpful feedback. It disrespects employees (especially those new on the job) if no one lets them know what they need to change to succeed.

This technique can be used in almost any feedback situation. With a little planning and an objective approach, "negative" feedback can become a valuable learning tool for your employees, and even for you as a successful manager.

ACTION Scenario 1

Handling heated arguments

- "I'd like to speak with you about what happened yesterday — do you have a few minutes right now?"

- “I was told you and Jeffrey got into a pretty heated argument. Before I ask him what the problem was, why don’t you tell me what happened?”
- “It’s one thing to disagree with someone, but several witnesses said you two almost came to blows. Obviously, we can’t have loud arguments exploding into fights while customers might be on the premises. So you do understand this is serious?”
- “OK, so tell me what you think escalated this. Was it something personal you or he said, or was it a misunderstanding? Is there a problem with Jeffrey that you feel needs intervention?”
- “Well to ensure this doesn’t happen again, I’d like the both of you to apologize and at least reach a workable truce. I could set it up and mediate if you think that would help. What are your thoughts?”
- “I’m glad you agreed to talk with Jeffrey. I’ll speak with him and send you a meeting note we can all sign so that everyone knows we reached a mutual agreement.”

ACTION Scenario 2

Handling lackluster job performance

- “Susan, I’d like to chat with you about some of your work recently; do you have free time this afternoon?”
- “Our sales chief has been concerned about your output lately; it’s been considerably lower than in the past, as you might have noticed.”
- “I did some comparing your numbers to last year, and your productivity did jump around that time, which is why it’s strange that this year’s seems so low. This is the basis of our concern.”

- “I want to examine with you the possible reasons behind the drop. Have you noticed a pattern in your work that changed? Have there been circumstances I’m not aware of?”
- “I’ve got some ideas on how you could improve, but I’d rather you give me options you think might work. You can think about it for a few days and get back to me.”
- “Let’s meet early next week. I’ll write up a memo that says we’ve talked. This way they’ll know we’re on top of the issue, OK?”

ACTION Scenario 3

Seasoned employee won’t get along with newbie

- “Frank, when you have a minute, pop into my office; there’s something I want to chat with you about, OK?”
- “As you know, Brian’s been with us for 7 months now, so I wanted to ask how things were going working with him. I know you’ve been here a long time and that he still has a lot to learn about how we do things.”
- “It seems like a few times you’ve had to directly collaborate with Brian that the project stumbled. For example, when you put together our budget proposals last month, I saw that the tone of the emails between you two got a little snippy. And it took you twice the time as the other departments to turn it in.”
- “I know you make a good effort to get along with everyone, but I need to you be honest about working with Brian. I’m concerned you might be frustrated by his work style, and that he might sense your impatience. Are there problems with communication you seem to fall into?”

ACTION Scenario 4

He said/she said harassment accusation

- “Tom, it’s important that I speak with you today; meet me in my office at 1 p.m., please.”
- “I’ll make this as to the point as possible. You know about Moira’s complaint to HR recently concerning some of the guys in your department. I realize HR has only heard her side of the story as of yet. But it’s important to get all the facts out.”
- “She now says that while they were harassing her about wearing a headscarf, you were not only there, but were also laughing, which encouraged them to get more nasty to her. You’re saying you were in the room, and laughing — but that you were reading something on your phone and didn’t even notice the others. Do I have this correct?”
- “Obviously, we need to clear this up. I’m concerned. Is there anything else you can tell me?”
- “If you’re OK with a short letter to HR explaining the situation, I can review it and sign it also, so they know that we spoke about it and took the proper course of action.”