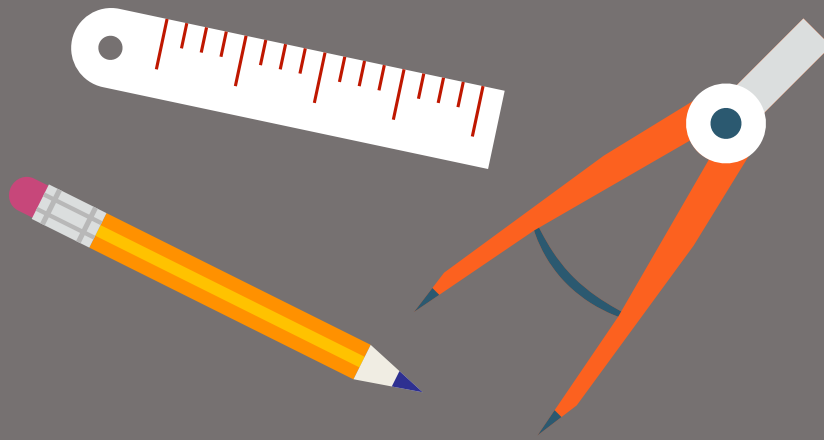


What To Say, What Not To Say When Giving Feedback



PRACTICAL TOOLS

What To Say, What Not To Say When Giving Feedback

Behavior-based language is the Golden Rule of feedback. Why? While it's acceptable to include praise and compliments within feedback if called for, feedback itself should primarily be "actionable," and not necessarily "good" or "bad."

Managers should concentrate on factual, tangible details when giving feedback to employees. This isn't easy, because we often resort to generalizing when we evaluate actions and behavior.

So how do you develop the habit of using behavior-based language? Specifying what the person did or didn't do targets the feedback at an employee's actions rather than at personality traits.

This language:

- describes behaviors or actions, rather than traits, of the employee
- gets specific about what the employee said or did
- cites specific incidents as soon as possible after they occur
- quantifies the frequency of the behaviors (if related to the feedback); and
- uses 'I'-language qualifiers ("what I observed"; "what I heard").

Avoid Value-Based Judgments

Using value judgments emphasizes an impression that an employee is making, but clouds the behaviors the employee is doing.

So if the value judgment is negative, it can come across as a personal attack to the employee. That's because in essence, it is. Here are some examples of value judgments and how to restate the same message in a concrete, objective way:

Avoid: "You're being ridiculous."

Use: "I think you're overreacting a bit."

Avoid: "You're not experienced enough for this."

Use: "You may need a little more training in this area."

Avoid: "You don't seem to have what it takes."

Use: "I need to know if you're up for this challenge."

Avoid: "Your heart's not into it."

Use: "I'm not convinced you really want to do this job."

Avoid: "You're not cutting it."

Use: "At this point, you're falling a little short of goals."

Avoid: "You're not listening."

Use: "Try to pay more attention to the material in our training meetings."

Stick To Performance Messages

Performance feedback is aimed toward changing behaviors. It gives employees something tangible to work on or change, so they can think of practical ways to make it happen. For example:

To combat the tendency to use generalized language (“You’re always late”), create an evaluation that discusses trends, indicators and tendencies (“You were late once this week and twice last week.”)

Performance-based language has two purposes.

a) **It hedges against absolutes.** The first message above is too general; it’s easy for an employee to think, “He thinks I’m always late, which isn’t true.” Instead, with the second message, the employee thinks, “I need to stop this trend” or “I’ve got to turn around this tendency.”

b) **It’s easier for an employee to fix.** Rather than try to turn around an employee from being “always late” to being “never late”, it’s easier to reverse a trend or tendency to be late, by making small steps (for example, leaving for work 10 minutes earlier).

Try this Exercise

Label each of these statements as behavior-based (BB) or non-behavior-based (NBB):

"I learned that this morning you spoke in a forceful tone to a client."

"You arrived late this morning."

"I heard you tell someone 'I don't care what you think.'"

"Your report missed some elements."

"On three occasions, we have reports of you yelling at customers."

"You skipped a step in following the procedure."

"You said, 'I hate you' to the customer."

"At the meeting this afternoon, I saw you put your head down on the table."

"Your schedules are always turned in late."

"You made eye-contact with everyone in the room when you first started your presentation."

"I've heard you say 'I can't help you' three times in the last month."

"You haven't really contributed much in our last few meetings."

"I observed that you came in late in each of the past three days."

"I saw that you set up the presentation in advance."

See answers on the next page.

Answers

"I learned that this morning you spoke in a forceful tone to a client."

Behavior-based (BB)

"You arrived late this morning." **Behavior-based (BB)**

"I heard you tell someone 'I don't care what you think.'" **Behavior-based (BB)**

"Your report missed some elements." **Non-behavior-based (NBB)**

"On three occasions, we have reports of you yelling at customers."

Behavior-based (BB)

"You skipped a step in following the procedure." **Non-behavior-based (NBB)**

"You said, 'I hate you' to the customer." **Behavior-based (BB)**

"At the meeting this afternoon, I saw you put your head down on the table."

Behavior-based (BB)

"Your schedules are always turned in late." **Non-behavior-based (NBB)**

"You made eye-contact with everyone in the room when you started your presentation."

Behavior-based (BB)

"I've heard you say 'I can't help you' three times in the last month."

Behavior-based (BB)

"You haven't really contributed much in our last few meetings."

Non-behavior-based (NBB)

"I observed that you came in late in each of the past three days."

Behavior-based (BB)

"I saw that you set up the presentation in advance." **Behavior-based (BB)**