

Tips on Giving Effective Performance Feedback

by Roz Turner

Especially in today's difficult and challenging environment for construction companies, with lay-offs and a slimmed down staff, it's important that each employee gets ongoing on-the-job feedback. Employees need to know what they are doing well and what they need to improve. That means observing employees in action and communicating often—not just during the annual performance review.

SOME BASICS FOR GIVING FEEDBACK

At heart, giving feedback needs to come from the commitment to another's development, not from the place of being critical. If feedback is approached from this place, then the boss and the employee will benefit from the feedback process. A supervisor's intentions need to include:

- Staying open to become aware of the employees perspective or point of view.
- Helping the employee to better understand his/her strengths and development needs.
- Giving useful feedback and keeping the employee's self esteem intact.
- Creating a sense of partnership with the employee.

WHY THERE'S NOT ENOUGH FEEDBACK

As a manager or leader, giving and getting feedback are important factors in the managing process. Yet in our consulting practice, time and time again, we find that managers and leaders fail to give effective feedback. And a lack of feedback can result in lower productivity and overall performance. Remember that when people don't receive feedback—they "interpret" that what they are doing—or not doing—must be working out okay. Then they are surprised when they finally get the feedback that they need to change.



So why aren't more managers and leaders providing consistent feedback? In our experience, most managers and leaders say "I know I needed to tell John or Susan about the problems with XYZ, but I just haven't had the time to sit down and have a face-to-face conversation with him/her." It's known that managers and leaders are busier than ever before, but talking with employees about their performance is part of the job—not "extra." The real reason there isn't more feedback may be that managers and leaders are just uncomfortable giving it.

Some possible reasons why people are uncomfortable giving feedback:

- Managers may not really want to be straight and say what

ABOUT the AUTHOR

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needs to be said because they want their employees to like them.

- Another reason might be that the manager may not know how to fix what the person is not doing well. Please remember that the goal is not to “fix” anyone, but by sharing what is seen, the manager and the employee can be in a dialogue about possible solutions.
- A manager might also be afraid of the employee’s reaction to hearing job performance feedback. Though in a position of leadership, many people do not like conflict and perceive that giving feedback will lead to conflict. Some leaders erroneously believe that “it’s not that big a deal” and “maybe if I don’t say anything my employee will figure it out for him/herself.” That’s why so many situations that begin small end up as big problems.

HOW TO OVERCOME THE CHALLENGE AND GIVE EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK

1. First, don’t give feedback on the fly. Take the time to really think about what the employee needs to “start, stop, or continue” doing.
2. Next, work on “sticking to the facts” and personal observations. If there’s a need to give feedback regarding interactions or performance that has not been directly observed, be sure to fully understand the situation before feedback is given.
3. Clearly understand the impact that the employee’s behavior and/or performance is having on the organization and the impact that it could have on the employee’s career.
4. Finally, follow the 5 steps outlined below.

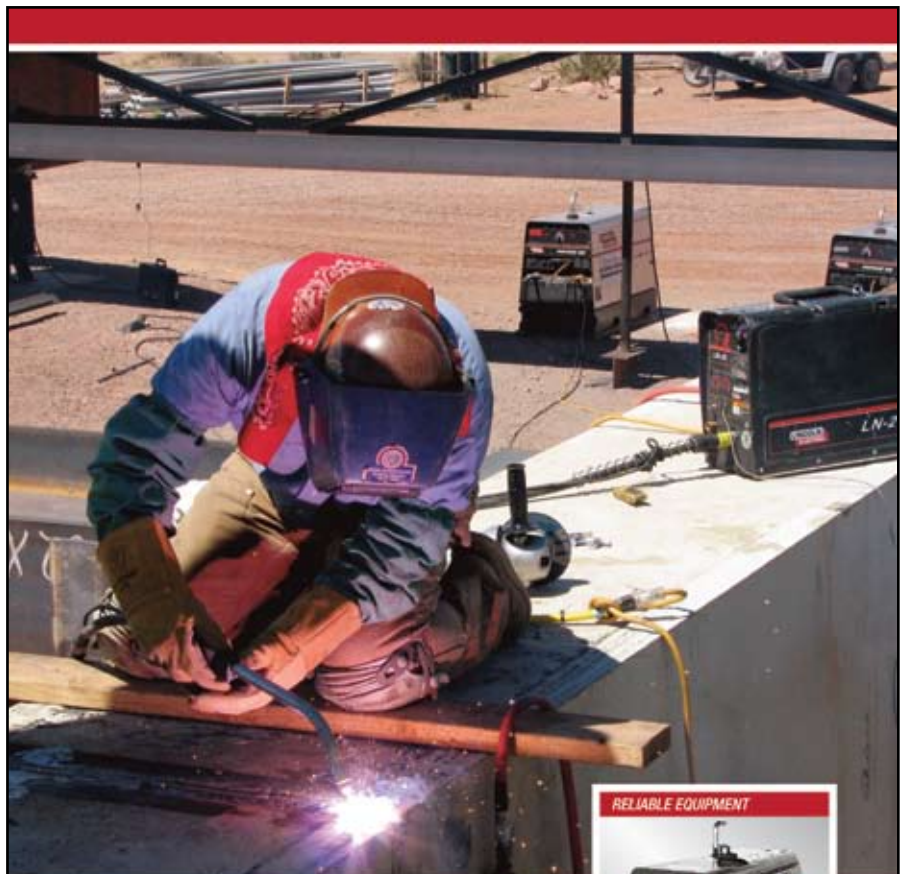
5 STEPS FOR GIVING FEEDBACK

1. **Focus on behavior.** Be specific. Describe behavior in concise and observable terms. Use behavior descriptions that create a clear picture of the issues. Avoid generalities.
2. **Describe the impact.** Explain the tangible effects of that behavior being addressed.

3. **State the expectations.** Clearly state the behavior or actions expected.
4. **Create an Action Plan.** Involve the employee in creating an Action Plan and ask for their commitment to this plan.
5. **Follow-up and reinforcement.** Be sure to take the time to follow-

up with the employee to reinforce expectations and acknowledge their results.

Be a contractor that takes the time to give honest, developmental feedback on a regular basis. That way, employees can become the best they can be and can avoid having situations explode into bigger problems down the road. ■



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