

Elements of Effective Feedback

by Holly Eckert-Lewis, Sr. Archbright University Consultant

All supervisors and managers want employees who get the job done correctly, on time, with good interpersonal and customer service skills. Feedback is crucial tool to achieve this top performance.

I'm not talking the feedback given once a year at the formal performance appraisal, though that is important as well! In this article, I mean the short, daily communications given to staff to get them and keep them on the right track. (Extended conversations to improve performance will be covered in the coaching section of this leadership program.)

Sometimes supervisors and managers delay bringing up performance issues or avoid difficult conversations altogether. Here are three common objections we hear to giving corrective feedback, and how you can overcome them to give effective feedback and achieve top team performance.

Objection #1: The employee will take the feedback personally.

Yes! An employee will take the feedback personally if you communicate the feedback using your judgments, interpretations, and opinions to describe what you'd like them to change. You get into the danger zone when you say things like, "You don't seem to be working very hard," or "You have a negative attitude." Often, we know that this message won't be accepted well, so we avoid the conversation altogether, which is even worse!

Remedies: Be Specific and Objective.

Rather than sharing your overall impression of the employee, share one or more specific instances where you noticed the concerning behavior or action. Rather than "You have a negative attitude," you could say, "Already in the first five minutes of this conversation, you told me that you hate Wednesdays, you can't believe how unreasonable the patients are being today, and the new SOP is never going to work."

Instead of saying, "You don't seem to be working very hard," try, "I saw you on your cell phone three times today while you were on the clock. I also saw you drop a paper towel on the floor in the break room, look down at it, then walk away."

That's not going to be the entire conversation, but it is important to start with specific, objective facts, so the employee understands the behavior you want them to change. Specific, objective facts are also helpful for documentation purposes. In case the behavior is not improved, you will want a time- and date-stamped log of examples to share with HR when considering disciplinary action.

Objection #2: The employee will think that I don't like them.

True! If we speak only of the employee's poor quality, disrespectful interpersonal skills, or lousy attendance, they probably will get the impression that you don't like them!

Remedy: Be Supportive.

While I don't recommend "sandwiching" corrective feedback in the middle of two compliments, it is important to balance corrective feedback with positive feedback at other times. Compliment them in areas where they excel and congratulate them for improvements made. It is also important to show support by making sure that the employee has the tools, time, information, and training to make a change for the better.

Objection #3: The message is going to demotivate the employee.

Absolutely! I would be demotivated if my boss told me things I was doing wrong then left the conversation.

Remedy: Be Actionable.

After discussing the employee's actions that need to change, discuss what you would like the employee to do instead. You can simply tell them, such as, "If a patient is not co-operating, ask how you can make them more comfortable." You can also ask your employee about their ideas, such as, "What would be some other options when a patient is not co-operating?"

The next time you have a staff member who is not quite meeting standards, think of how you might approach the conversation with SOSA—being Specific, Objective, Supportive, and Actionable. And while it might be tempting to let the behavior slide, hoping it will improve, think about the impact your inaction will have on the rest of the team. If you've noticed it, they've noticed it. If you do nothing, you run the risk of the behavior spreading to others and bringing down team performance and morale. Addressing the behavior as soon as possible will often lead to it being corrected easily before habits become ingrained or contagious!

Effective feedback is:

Specific

Objective

Supportive

Actionable

Specific Behavioral Examples

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When giving corrective feedback, it is vital that we give specific behavioral examples, so the employee understands what behavior we'd like them to change. If the behavior continues or worsens, we'll also want a documented log of examples that we can share with HR when considering disciplinary action.

Vague feedback can often worsen an employee's behavior and strain your relationship with them. Even though you might be thinking, "Your communication skills are terrible!" or "I wish you would shut up and listen for once!" that type of message is unlikely to give the information or motivation necessary for the employee to make a change.

Instead, use the "When-Where-Saw-Heard" model.

When: When did one specific instance of the behavior occur

Where: Where did you observe it

Saw: What you noticed in factual language, taken in through looking

Heard: What you noticed in factual language, taken in through listening

Below are several examples of how supervisors and managers have transformed their vague feedback (and documentation) into clear, credible statements. (Sometimes you will use both "saw" and "heard;" other times you will just use one of them.)

Vague: You are stubborn.

Specific and behavioral:

When	When we were discussing the new SOP
Where	at the last three meetings,
Saw	I saw you roll your eyes and whisper to the person next to you at least twice each meeting.
Heard	I also heard you say that the implementation timeline is at least six weeks too fast.

Vague: Not accountable

Specific and behavioral:

When	This morning around 10 am, when you were discussing teamwork with your supervisor
Where	in your 1x1 meeting,
Saw	

Heard	I heard you say that it is not your job to restock supplies if they run out.
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Vague: Not engaged

Specific and behavioral:

When	At the end of your shift yesterday
Where	as you were getting some water in the break room,
Saw	I saw you talking with Mo,
Heard	telling him, "This is a piece of sh** place to work anyway."

Vague: Aggressive

Specific and behavioral:

When	This morning around 10:30
Where	on the clinic floor,
Saw	I saw you remove your gloves, throw them on the floor, and walk away from your patient without telling her where you were going.
Heard	

Vague: Needy

Specific and behavioral:

When	Just now, for the fourth time this week,
Where	
Saw	
Heard	you have asked me to check your documentation according to the new SOP.


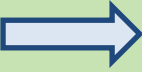
The specific, behavioral example is an important part of any feedback message. However, it is not the whole feedback message! Please see the other documents in the feedback section of this leadership program to put the specific, behavioral example into context of giving effective feedback.

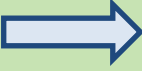
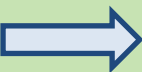
Use this 3-step model for feedback when you want to give show appreciation, compliment an improvement, or acknowledge a job well done.

Positive Feedback Template	
1. Topic	<i>I'd like to talk with you about ...</i>
2. Specific example	3. Impact
<i>I noticed ...</i>	<i>This resulted in ...</i>

Positive Feedback Example	
1. Topic	<i>I'd like to talk with you about</i> (alternative: <i>Thank you for ...</i>) <i>your help in welcoming Serena to the team.</i>
2. Specific example	3. Impact
<i>I noticed</i> <i>every day this last week, you have offered her help in learning our processes and procedures. I've seen both of you smiling during these conversations!</i>	<i>This resulted in</i> <i>a reduced likelihood of errors or inefficiencies as well as a positive start to her career here. Thank you!</i>

Feedback: When you need an employee to make a change, use this 5-step model.

Change Feedback Template	
1. Topic (neutral)	<i>I'd like to talk with you about ... (usually one word)</i>
2. Specific example (when, where, saw, heard) 	3. Impact (negative)
<i>I noticed ...</i>	<i>This resulted in ...</i>
4. Expected behavior (a consistent standard) 	5. Expected impact (positive)
<i>Instead, I'd like you to ...</i>	<i>This will result in ...</i>

Change Feedback Example	
1. Topic (neutral)	<i>I'd like to talk with you about patient interactions.</i>
2. Specific example (when, where, saw, heard) 	3. Impact (negative)
<i>I noticed your 2:00 patient telling you that you looked "extra hot with gray hair," and you responded by laughing and patting him on the shoulder.</i>	<i>This resulted in patient thinking this type of flirting is okay, and it may escalate with you or other center staff.</i>
4. Expected behavior (a consistent standard) 	5. Expected impact (positive)
<i>Instead, I'd like you to respond to these types of comments by saying, "We need to keep conversations professional around here" or something similar.</i>	<i>This will result in clear expectations for the patients and a safe and comfortable environment for our staff.</i>