



Leadership Insights & Actions

"Coaching News That You Can Use"

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The Right Way to Deliver Tough Feedback

6 Simple Strategies To Encourage Positive Change

by Thomas J. Haizlip, M.A.

One of the most difficult, but most important things that you will have to learn to succeed as a leader is to deliver frequent, specific, and actionable feedback that your employees can use to improve their performance.

Most employees are desperate for more frequent feedback. They want to know how they are doing and if they are meeting their manager's performance expectations. Managers need to hold poor performing employees accountable and work with them to improve their performance. Unfortunately, far too many managers do not know how to confidently deliver tough feedback in a supportive and constructive manner so that it's well received and actually encourages employees to want to make positive changes. Here are 6 strategies that you can use that actually engage and encourage employees to improve their performance.

1. You Must Make Feedback a Daily Process - Not Just a Yearly Event

Forget about yearly performance reviews and start practicing daily performance management. Your motto should be, "all feedback, all the time." For feedback to be most effective, it must be used at every opportunity. Every time you see someone doing something right, you have an opportunity to reinforce good performance.

The worst mistake you can make as a leader is to ignore good performance and focus only on poor performance. Far too many leaders spend 80% of their time trying to improve the lowest performing 20% of employees. This leaves the good performers often feeling ignored, unappreciated, and unmotivated, despite their solid performance. It also leaves leaders feeling drained, angry, and exhausted because they are spending all their time and energy trying to manage the lowest performing employees.

2. Make Sure High Performers Get More of Your Attention

Whenever I am doing leadership coaching I have one magic question that will always sort out the average leaders from the exceptional leaders. Here's the question: **"Can you please tell me what happens around here when your employees do things right?"**

Nine times out of ten, I just get this look of dazed confusion. "Well, that is what we pay people for. I only recognize performance that goes above and beyond. My job is not to be a cheerleader around here." Those are always the average leader responses.

Now, compare that to what I hear the exceptional leaders say when I ask them the very same question: "Well I make it a point to personally thank the person everyday for their performance and contributions. I try to write them a thank you card at least once a week. I will write up a formal commendation for them at least once a month. I will let them go home an hour early if we are having a slow day. I try to give them a small gift like a \$5 vending machine gift card so they can buy snacks and drinks in the break room. I ask the Department Director to come by and personally recognize and thank the employee for their performance." Those are the exceptional leader responses.

By focusing on the 80% of people who are already doing things right, these exceptional leaders boost performance, productivity, and create an engaged workforce. As a leader, they feel positive, energized, and excited because they value and appreciate their employees and their employees return the sentiment. So, if you were an employee, which of the two leaders described above would you rather work for? Now, you just have to learn how to become that second kind of leader!

3. Ask Your Employees to Identify Their Own Challenges

Stop thinking that performance feedback is where you talk and your employees listen. That is parenting - not leadership. You need to talk less and listen more. Invite your employees to assess their own performance strengths and weaknesses. This will help you identify areas to target for coaching and training as well as behaviors that you can recognize and praise to reinforce things that your employees are already doing well.

Make it safe for your employees to feel safe enough to talk with you about their weak areas. Make sure they do not feel like they are being judged or that you will hold it against them later. You need to say something like, "Pete, I want you to know that I am 100% committed to your success and that I cannot succeed as a team leader unless you're succeeding. But if I am going to help you improve your performance, then we have to be able to talk honestly and openly about what you are doing well and what you need to do better. I know that development is a process, not an event. I don't expect you to change overnight, but I do expect you to commit to a performance improvement process. I want you to be an active partner in creating your own professional development plan that will allow us both to monitor and measure how well you are doing compared to the performance expectations for your position."

4. Provide Specific, Concrete, and Actionable Steps

Employee behavior can only do four things: start, stop, increase or decrease. If you have managed someone for any length of time you have formed opinions about their performance and what they need to do to improve. But, do not let your personal opinions derail your feedback.

Never say something like, "Tom, you have to learn how to act more professional." This is a sure-fire recipe for a feedback disaster. This kind of feedback is likely to be perceived as a personal attack on someone's character, provides insufficient information to the employee on why their behavior is interfering with their job performance, and it does not offer any specific or actionable steps the employee can use to improve.

To improve their performance, your employees must know what specific behaviors they need to change, how that behavior impacts their performance, and what new behavior you expect them to do. For example, instead of saying, "You need to act more professional,"

you could say, "Tom, you are being judged by how you dress as well as how you perform. Everyone knows you are a great technician, but when you wear jeans instead of khakis, people, including me, tend to perceive you as less professional. I want you to be seen as someone who is both talented and professional. So, here is what I want you to do: I want you to wear clean, well-ironed, navy blue, tan, or brown khaki pants Monday through Thursday. Friday is a casual dress day, so if you want to wear jeans on Friday, that is absolutely fine as long as they are clean, don't have any holes, patches, or frayed hems. I know that you are a casual dress person, but others are judging you on how you dress as well as how you perform your job. I want you to move up in this organization and if you want me to be able to advocate for you most effectively, then I need you to make it easy for me by changing the way you dress at work. Believe me, Tom, I may not be a jeans person, but I am not crazy about wearing a tie everyday myself. But, I know that a tie and jacket just look more professional and if wearing them makes it easier for me to be seen as a high performer, then it's something I am willing to do to achieve greater success."

That was an example of difficult feedback that was delivered exceptionally well. It was specific, concrete and actionable. It was even delivered with empathy in a non-judgmental way. It provided a clear business reason about why the behavior change is needed and how it will benefit the employee. Wonderful!

5. Accept That You Might Be Part of the Problem

Do not assume that just because you see someone's behavior as a problem that everyone else does. Giving tough feedback that produces a positive result is more than just getting your facts straight before you meet with your employee. The real challenge is not just in delivering the feedback in a tactful and professional manner, it's also about being able to honestly talk about and resolve conflicting views, feelings, and values.

Change is the goal of feedback. But, remember part of what might need to change is you. You need to go into all your feedback meetings with an open mind and a willingness to be influenced by what you hear. Make sure you ask, "Have I contributed to this problem in some way? Did you feel like I was fully available to you if you needed any advice or counsel? How can we figure out a way so that this does not become a problem for us again?" Questions like these will help you create a supportive atmosphere in which your employee can discuss and explore alternative strategies that might produce better results.

The more you can get your employee to think about how they can improve their performance, the more committed he/she will be to making it happen. At the end of any feedback session, ask how you did and what you can do differently to be more helpful.

6. Follow Through by Providing Ongoing Support

Because so many novice leaders dread talking about employee performance, they like to think that once they have actually had the conversation, they're done. Sorry, that's not the way successful leaders do things. There is a world of difference between making an employee aware that they need to change and helping them actually make the changes they need to improve.

Employees need regular and consistent support to assure they move forward and do not regress back toward their old level of performance. You and your employee need to establish target dates and specific metrics that will help you both recognize that things are moving in the right direction.

Set up a series of monthly or, at least, quarterly meetings to monitor your employees progress. Remember, as a leader, you should be a role model for how to give and receive feedback. Recognize that your own actions can be a powerful catalyst to help your

employees receive feedback in a way that still makes them feel valued and appreciated while helping them develop new skills and competencies to further improve their performance.

Executive Summary

- Make sure that you make feedback part of your daily routine instead of an annual event if you want it to have maximum effect.
- Focus more time and energy on what people are doing right instead on what people are doing wrong.
- Effective feedback should provide your employees with specific, concrete, behavioral steps they can use to improve their performance.
- Be aware that your own actions and reactions during a feedback session can make things either easier or tougher.
- Try to do more listening and get your employee to come up with some of their own improvement strategies to maximize their level of commitment.
- Schedule regular meetings to monitor your employee's progress and provide ongoing support.
- Finally, remember to offer praise, recognition, and encouragement anytime you see your employee moving in a positive direction.

How Are Managers and Leaders Different?

Understanding the Roles of These Two Vital Functions

b.y Thomas J. Haizlip, M.A.

Great management is no substitute for great leadership. Unfortunately, many professionals are often very unclear about the differences between managing and leading. Many incorrectly assume that leadership and management mean the same thing. I have seen many of my own clients return from a Leadership Training Program without being able to answer one simple question: "What is the difference between a manager and a leader?"

Managers Focus on Task Success

Great managers are essential for everyday organizational success.

- They are the technical experts who know how to solve day-to-day problems.
- Managers assure that workplace goals and objectives are met.
- They create systems and processes to assure a smooth work flow.
- They know how to allocate people and resources to maximize operational efficiencies while simultaneously reducing costs and overhead.
- Managers acquire formal power from their position and they have clearly defined scopes of responsibility and authority.
- They use concrete metrics to gauge and measure success.
- Managers add value to the organization by maximizing established policies and procedures to make sure things get done right, on time, and within budget.

Leaders Inspire Others to Work Together to Achieve Mutually Beneficial Goals

- Leaders often lack formal authority, but are able to motivate others to follow them by creating a compelling vision of success.

- They work to actively engage others. Leaders exert influence through their personal reputation of integrity and their close interpersonal connections.
- Leaders are constantly working to establish and maintain high levels of trust and credibility with key business players and decision makers.
- Unlike managers, their success is rarely measured by production metrics. Instead, successful leaders are measured by the level of passion and alignment they create across their team or organization.
- Leaders are often willing to modify policies or procedures, take bold risks, and challenge the standard operating procedure if it helps unite people and moves the organization forward.
- Leaders add value by creating a clear vision of success that actively inspires people to work together to achieve that vision.

12 Tips: How You Can Be A Better Leader

Behaviors That Distinguish Top Level Leaders

by Thomas J. Haizlip, M.A.

1. Learn to practice self-management and self-control
2. Model the values you hope to inspire in others - practice what you preach
3. Develop the interpersonal skills needed to build close, long-term relationships
4. Learn the difference between acting aggressively and acting assertively
5. Surface and debate issues in a way that preserves the dignity and ego of others
6. Make your own success dependent upon the success of others
7. Manage your stress, ask for help, and give up trying to appear perfect
8. Practice humility by being the first one to admit your own mistakes
9. Pay attention to people when they do things right
10. Practice forgiveness and always be willing to try and rebuild burned bridges
11. Frequently express gratitude and appreciation to others
12. Actively seek out and welcome feedback at every opportunity

Great Management Is No Substitute for Great Leadership

About Thomas J. Haizlip, M.A.

Since 2000, I have helped transform great managers into great leaders. My experience and training as an expert in human behavior allows me to quickly assess and analyze why you are not succeeding and what you need to do differently to move forward. Over 50% of my clients have been promoted after working with me and learning how to become a more effective leader. Please, give me a call so I can help you move from where you are to where you want to be as a leader.



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