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How Successful, Effective Feedback Improves Performance Results and Business

By Marjorie M. Mauldin

Great teams are the heart and soul of any business – especially teams who learn and grow together. One game-changing opportunity for 2018, to nurture teams and better work relationships, is the willingness to give timely and effective feedback to your colleagues.

We probably all give subtle hints and even downright direct comments when needed; but giving meaningful feedback is a skill that can be learned and developed by you and your team. How often is best? This feedback should be ongoing, not just one or twice a year to stimulate productivity and to eliminate any surprises. After all, who wants to go to a meeting that both employee and supervisors are dreading!

Whether in a formal, scheduled "review-like" setting, or in a spontaneous conversation, feedback contributes to improvement, productive changes, effectiveness, clear direction and, ultimately, success. Candid feedback can be critical and difficult, but it also sets a positive tone for both personal and professional growth which is pivotal for ongoing improvement.

I recently worked with a business that was trying to create a trustworthy culture for ongoing feedback. They requested that each manager schedule a coffee break twice a month with every member of their team. The first few sessions were a bit awkward, as the managers and the employees learned the skills and process for creating a safe, trusting relationship.

One particular manager, Anne, was not very confident in her ability to give feedback. When she

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expressed her doubts about a good outcome, we developed a checklist or roadmap for her to follow. As the schedule became more routine, Anne gained competence and both parties looked forward to the meeting. The results were increased understanding and a deeper work relationship.

How did Anne and her employee achieve this outcome? She shared the following five steps with her team, so that they had an understanding of the process.

1. Create and nurture your feedback zone — a specific state of mind, attitude, understanding and outlook that prepares you to develop and deliver the most effective feedback possible.
2. Think before you give feedback. Think specifically, engaging your empathy and intuition, as well as your managerial skills and business/employee goals by preparing and rehearsing (in your mind) the feedback you will be giving.
3. Learn the language of effective feedback. The language and words you will use, as well as the tone, will determine the effectiveness of your feedback message.
4. Ask permission before giving feedback. Effective feedback is a conversation and a dialog, not a lecture. By asking permission, you are showing respect and an implied invitation for the employee to participate in the feedback conversation.
5. Feedback involves both follow-up and follow-through. Unlike annual performance reviews and other static employee communications and interactions, a genuine feedback process doesn't stop as soon as the initial feedback conversation is ended. Effective and worthwhile feedback is virtually always a starting point.

What was the result of this effective feedback? Anne became a proud and successful manager by simply learning a process and

sharing it with her employees. She moved closer and closer to her goals until she had the highest-producing team of the year! There were other factors, of course, but she credits her dedication to a consistent, scheduled conversation with each team member with their collective success.

Feedback is about support and improvement, and a high-energy, positive work environment sets a dynamic tone and culture for employees and retail customers alike.

As companies look for and test different approaches to replacing the traditional performance evaluation, they're embracing effective two-way feedback skills and creating cultures that understand how to give and receive. Every step of the feedback process sends signals that the culture of your organization is changing and becoming more open and innovative.

Feedback is an important part of a collaborative and effective culture. A feedback culture builds morale and retention by improving the culture even more. However, for feedback to work, it must be delivered on a personal level, which also helps build a stronger, more personal culture. And to personalize those conversations, it's also important to consider the generation of the employee and, most importantly, to embrace different styles of thinking from each generation.

From the Millennial to the Veteran generations, following is insight on how they best receive feedback, as well as tips for employers to best deliver generational-targeted feedback:

Millennials

Be specific with all feedback, and get to the point quickly. Use Millennials' impatience to your advantage, setting up goals and deliverables that can be achieved quickly. Conversely, use your feedback sessions to show them that in some cases, slow and steady can also be effective.

• Use Millennials' technology comfort levels to your advantage and to the advantage of your feedback. Email, text messages, video chats and PowerPoint presentations can be effective with this generation.

• Make lists and summaries of feedback, and have the millennial employee do the same. Then compare lists.

• Add humor and, if appropriate, irony, to your feedback session. They appreciate a good laugh!

Generation X

Generation X employees love challenges, so make sure their work (and your feedback) includes stimulating projects and thought-provoking responsibilities. Find areas where flexibility and nonstandard approaches to tasks can be implemented. Consider that Generation X employees are likely to resist responsibilities that limit their family time, so negotiate the balance that best suits your employee's family concerns with your business goals.

• Provide a printed copy of their evaluation, something tangible they can take home.

• Offer further training if you feel – or more importantly, if they feel – that their potential is not fully tapped.

• Reward positive performance quickly – don't wait.

Generation Jones

Generation Jones' employees have reached the stage of their careers where they are willing (and determined!) to be discerning. Be prepared for pushback or negotiation when offering new responsibilities. They are used to having plenty of choices, so structure your feedback sessions, when possible, and offer different options.

• Tailor your feedback to include appealing incentives.

• Discuss the type of options that might appeal to them, such as a flexible schedule – which could be worth more to them than a raise.

• Bring big questions to the feedback session, such as long-term goals, security and late-stage career growth.

Baby Boomers

Boomers are an extremely diverse group. They are willing and eager to experiment with innovation and creativity. Big goals are super important to Boomers, who are eager to make sure that they have "made their mark." Your feedback sessions should be aimed at determining the employee's goals.

• Be aware that retirement and financial security is top of mind for Boomers, so feedback sessions should include acknowledgement of planning, strategizing and reaching goals.

• Listen to the employee, as Boomers have both opinions and the experience to back up their options.

• Learn from the employee, as their feedback can be invaluable for your business, as well.

Veteran Generation

These 65+ employees are aware that they are in the latter stages of their careers and have insightful thoughts to share. While their physical energy might be less, their interest and concern for the company is more.

• Don't be condescending, don't raise your voice and don't simplify your language, because of the employee's age.

• Ease any concerns they fear about being "put out to pasture."

• Be honest and also delicate, maintaining the employee's self-respect and value to the company.

The best way to bridge generation gaps is to bring them together, depending on the generational composition of your team. Embrace different styles of thinking, as well as different ages.

A positive feedback culture is about talking, listening and, of course, sharing feedback. And, the feedback outcome is a more productive and collaborative culture, crossing all generations.