

Gaining in confidence through feedback

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You will no doubt have read many articles or attended training courses at which the principle of feedback was presented and explained.

Do you in fact use this wonderful tool? Have you discovered its different facets and how beneficial it can be? I'm going to give you a concrete example and share some thoughts on this subject.

Definition

Feedback is a comment made intentionally and verbally to a person concerning their behaviour and its effects on themselves and/or others.

Practice

When first giving feedback or having a discussion with someone, I always consider three factors:

1. In what ways are we similar?
2. In what ways are we different?
3. What makes the other person unique (or, as I see it, why is the other person unique, what has made them unique)?

Why this exercise and this introduction to the subject?

- Similarities will enable you to form connections and will open doors. For instance, if both of us love Gregorian chants, or support FC Bulle, or have had similar career experiences, all I need do to start a conversation is touch on this subject and a door will open.
- Differences, on the other hand, enable us to see how we might complement each other. I view differences in a positive light. They will enable us, on the one hand, to better understand the other person and, on the other, to highlight the fact that we are stronger together. We complete each other. If I have a question on a topic that the other person has a good knowledge of, for instance, I can consult him or her and so find a solution, and vice-versa.
- Finally, the "unique" dimension of the other person is an opportunity to show that we value them. The fact that we put into words and appreciate the other person's unique characteristics is a gift we are giving them. We are putting them on a pedestal. The person feels valued and this boosts their self-esteem. They are unique as a person, not because they work hard or achieve good results. It is the person him or herself that I am valuing, not their performance. Subsequently, of course, they can also be valued for their performance.

A concrete example

I remember supporting a claims adjuster who had been given responsibility for an agency and a region. He had 15 employees working under him. During the first two weeks, I asked him to do some preparatory work and, for each of the 15 employees, to work out the various similarities and differences, and what made each of the employees unique. He did what I asked.

And do you know how he went about it: he observed them, asked questions, took an interest, listened, spoke with them, and took time over it.

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Then we reviewed the feedback he was going to give to his employees, to ensure that the way he had formulated his comments was correct and positive.

Finally, he had a session with each person, during which he not only presented the various points (similarities, differences, unique aspect), but also explained his values (on this topic, see my article: [Leadership assumes awareness of one's personal values](#)).

What was the result?

The employees were surprised in a positive way. They realized that their boss was interested in them, had spent time with them and knew a lot about them. This laid an excellent foundation for trust and cooperation. Obviously, he had to back this up in the days that followed by demonstrating his integrity and authenticity, and setting a good example.

Positive feedback as opposed to constructive feedback

A good boss gives two types of feedback: positive feedback and constructive feedback (regarding areas that need to be worked on or changed).

Let's begin with positive feedback.

We don't do this often enough. It is important to realize that, psychologically, it takes four or five positive comments to make up for one negative one.

So it is vital that we give positive feedback. It is not enough just to say "thank you" (though that is a good start!). You need to point out:

- a) the time and circumstances in which the person did something positive;
- b) exactly what the person concerned did;
- c) what impact this had on you;
- d) depending on the circumstances, the impact/effect it had on others.

In this way, the person receiving the feedback understands exactly what they did right and, above all, is able to repeat their behaviour. In other words, positive feedback has a medium and long-term impact.

Constructive feedback

In the case of positive feedback, you need to proceed in similar fashion, but formulating your comments in a way that is not judgemental and will not hurt the person concerned. One of the most effective ways of doing this is Marshall B. Rosenberg's "nonviolent communication" method. I would particularly recommend his book entitled "Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Compassion".

By the way, if you start by giving positive feedback, then shift to constructive feedback, please don't use the word "BUT". That is like pressing the "DELETE" key on your computer: everything that had gone before risks being erased where the other person is concerned, and he or she will focus only on what is to follow. Use the word "AND" to make the transition. You are then adding something that does not take away from what went before.

So, if you decide to give a person some feedback: Begin by asking yourself what similarities you have with this person and what makes you different.

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Then, look for an aspect that makes the other person unique. Share what you have discovered with the other person.

Remember to give detailed positive feedback (don't just say "thank you") and, if you need to add something constructive, do it in a "non-violent" way, using the word "AND" to make the transition.

This will boost your employees' self-confidence, as well as creating trust in your relationships with them.

Self-reflection

- When did you last ask for feedback for yourself?
- What do you find easier: to give or to receive feedback?
- Why?

Quotation

"Feedback is the breakfast of champions." (Ken Blanchard)

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