

## leadership instalments

### Feedback as the DNA of Team Development

By Dan Gaynor

**IN MY WORK HELPING LEADERS TO SHARPEN THEIR SKILLS** I always start with their feedback habits - it's the fastest way to improve leadership relationships and get performance moving in the right direction. Developing strong feedback habits should be a priority for every leader, almost all can improve in this area.

When I ask employees about the feedback they receive, over 90% consistently reply that they do not receive anywhere nearly as much as they would like. I'm never surprised; the relationship with the boss is an important one. People want to know where they stand. This does not necessarily suggest that leaders who don't provide enough feedback are poor leaders, it does indicate that the easiest way for virtually all leaders to improve is to provide more and better quality feedback. Employees crave it. Feedback is so important that I've come to see it as the DNA of team development.

DNA has been described as the molecule of life. It determines what we look and function like, everything from the color of our eyes to the way our hearts beat. It is the blueprint for the development of our bodies, cell by cell. Feedback plays much the same role corporately, developing the team by developing each member. Each time you give someone feedback they should learn more about their role and how to perform it more effectively. One person at a time, daily and weekly feedback installments help you to build the entire team. Just as DNA instructs the way our bodies grow and develop, feedback instructs the development of the corporate body.

There are two basic varieties: encouragement and correction. Both are essential. Effective leaders build on success by noticing and commenting on it - this is encouraging feedback. They also correct shortcomings by noticing and commenting on these - this is corrective feedback. In both cases, they help people see what led to the success or the failure, and then help them learn from the experience.

The best feedback is always specific to the individual's needs. So effective leaders develop an eye for the areas of each team

member's work that need attention - both strengths and weaknesses. Whether correcting or encouraging, skilled leaders use feedback to build people up - to strengthen them.

The most effective feedback comes as many brief installments. Think about it like the many small steering adjustments you make while driving. You don't make one big one each half hour. If you did you would soon be in the ditch. Without regular feedback employees can also get way off track.

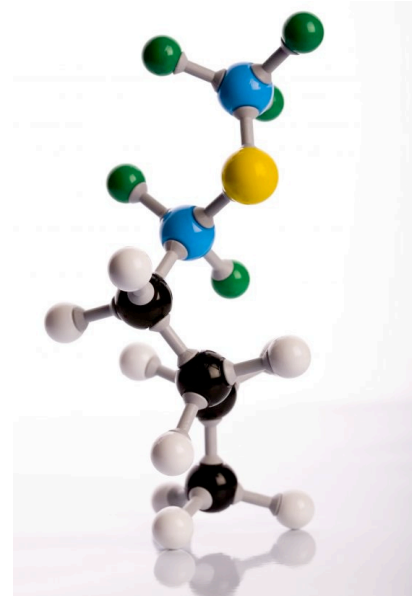
Instead you make an almost constant series of small adjustments and this is precisely how good feedback works - more like a continuous series of small corrections and encouragements than a big one every now and then.

These frequent installments serve another important purpose: they give leaders the experience they need to get comfortable providing feedback and followers the time they need to get comfortable receiving it. While most leaders know they should provide more feedback and most employees crave it, both also fear it. Feedback draws everyone into conversations about performance and this takes a little getting used to. We don't get used to it without experience and repetition, so frequency becomes important. Make frequent feedback a part of your daily routine and you'll be surprised by how much team development will unfold as each member learns more about his or her role and how to perform it even more effectively.

#### Discussion questions:

1. What would your team say today? Would they say they receive as much feedback as they would like?
2. What holds you back from providing as much feedback as you could?
3. Do you tend to provide both encouragement and correction or do you tend to provide only one type?

*For more on feedback or other essential leadership skills check out our e-books, they may be the best investment you make in your development as a leader.*



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