

leadership instalments

The Four Outcomes to Feedback

By Dan Gaynor

FEEDBACK IS SUCH AN IMPORTANT LEADERSHIP

SKILL that I often describe it as the DNA of team development. Whether you are correcting a problem or praising a success, each installment helps people see how they are doing and how they can improve - building on strengths and improving weaknesses. In most cases it should be fairly brief; three to 10-minute discussions are typical. Feedback only takes more time when someone wants an elaboration or resists what you have to say. Each time you provide feedback you should reach one of four conclusions. You don't need to voice them but each has a correct response:

1. The individual understands and accepts what is expected and is meeting or exceeding those expectations:

This is the most satisfying feedback – a time to encourage successful members of the team – to recognize the work of achievers. This is among your most important feedback. Encourage and support these people. They power your team forward and encouragement leads to more power. Make sure you affirm their contributions. Underscore the reasons behind their success and tell them you appreciate their work. Help them see exactly why they are successful and encourage them to build on their talents.

2. The individual understands and accepts what is expected but is not succeeding:

This is a trigger for coaching. Your first response should be curiosity. Look more deeply into the reasons behind the shortfall. Schedule some fieldwork to watch these people perform then diagnose and coach. Sometimes coaching will solve the problem, at other times it will reveal a shortfall in talent - the raw material. When this is the case the only solution is a different job. All the coaching in the world would not make me into a capable accountant. I don't have the right raw material. Some people have the talent but lack the motivation. When this is the case you only have two choices: accept the shortfall or make a change.



3. The individual did not understand what was expected:

Sometimes people will tell you that they did not know what was expected. Be careful, this can quickly turn into excuse-making. Pass the response through a test of reasonableness. Ask yourself, "Should he or she have reasonably known what I expected?" When the answer is no, as it may be at times, revisit expectations making sure you reach a common understanding. When the answer is yes dismiss the excuse and tell the individual why you believe he or she should have known, then get back to the issue and the accountability. Don't get into a debate. Your opinion is the one that matters in these situations. Make this clear if need be.

4. The individual did not accept the expectations:

At times you will discover the problem is with the fundamentals of the employment relationship. Some people understand what is expected but simply don't accept it. Sometimes this is because they disagree with your decision. Sometimes they just don't know how to follow. You won't always know why. Dysfunction and conflict are always the outcome. Rarely do they openly declare their resistance but it is evident just the same. In these cases you must restore the relationship or end it. Be clear about the conditions you and they must satisfy - you assign the work the team needs and they complete it. If they still won't cooperate end the relationship. People who refuse follow should have no place on the team.

Discussion Questions:

1. How often are you providing feedback?
2. How do you tend to treat excuses?
3. Which of the four responses can you improve in most?

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