Using feedback to enhance motivation and performance

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Abstract

Giving your team feedback on their performance is your most important job as a supervisory leader. Your team won't know how they are doing unless you give them feedback that they can understand and use. Even worse, without good feedback, employees who are performing badly might think they are doing great, and employees who are excelling might think they are failing. In either case, feedback is powerfully connected with motivation, either to improve substandard performance or to continue improving already strong performance.

Key words: practice management, motivation, employees

Résumé

Fournir à votre équipe des retours sur leur performance est votre tâche la plus importante en tant que chef d'équipe. Votre équipe ne saura pas comment elle performe sans que vous lui donniez des retours qu'elle peut comprendre et utiliser. Pire encore, sans de bons retours, les employés qui ne performent pas bien pourraient penser qu'ils font de l'excellent travail et les employés qui excellent pourraient penser qu'ils ne répondent pas aux attentes. Dans les deux cas, la rétroaction est intimement liée à la motivation soit dans le but d'améliorer un rendement insuffisant ou soit de continuer à améliorer un rendement déjà solide.

Team Feedback Options

Your team members need feedback to tell them how they are doing so they can make adjustments. You have 4 options for effective feedback.

1. **Praise**. When a team member does well, tell them about it! Praise good performance and the specific behaviors that led to the good results. Praise motivates people, builds up their confidence, and helps them perform even better. It's a win-win that you simply must practice.
2. **Redirect**. Sometimes a team member gets off track and they need feedback to get back on. If they are not following procedure, point that out and explain why the procedure is important. Get their agreement to change. End by looking ahead and sharing your expectations for their behavior going forward.
3. **Ignore**, or choosing to not give any feedback. Think of a brand new person learning a job, you need to give feedback on the important tasks, but some of the unimportant little steps they can figure out on their own. However, silence is not golden! Don't ignore the important stuff! Choosing to not give feedback is an option, it sends a message that the person's performance on that task is unimportant. Unfortunately, many supervisors ignore team member's performance on important tasks. That's a very wrong message, one that leads to confusion and discouragement for team members.
4. **Punish**. Most of us don't like to give or receive punishment, but supervisors need to know when and how to use it. When a person *knowingly* breaks a rule or violates expectations, the supervisor needs to respond to head off that behavior. The punishment might be a simple verbal reprimand, or it might escalate to more severe consequences for repeat or serious offenses. One key point, don't punish a person learning a new task or job, just redirect when they mess up.

The SCORE Method

Remember the acronym SCORE to give effective feedback; SCORE stands for specific, credible, on-time, relevant, and ends looking ahead.

Specific and to the point. Focus your feedback on behaviors and tasks that can be named, not just general observations. For example: "You did a good job cleaning that equipment today, thanks for doing such careful work." Not just, "Good job."

Credible. Team members need to believe the feedback, be sure you understand the work enough to recognize good and bad performance. If you have computer information systems gathering feedback for employees, make sure they understand what the numbers mean. Supervisors need to interact with their team members in order to be a credible source of feedback. Get onto the production floor or out in the field with employees. Even the night shift needs to see you sometimes!

On-time and frequent. Feedback gets stale over time! Give feedback as soon as possible after you observe performance, don't wait for planned meetings like an annual review. It doesn't matter if the feedback is praise or redirection, give it as soon as possible after the observed performance.

Relevant. Give feedback on behaviors that directly affect performance. Focus on tangible items like following procedures, but don't overlook less tangible things. If keeping a positive attitude is important for your team, then give redirection when you see behaviors that reflect a negative attitude. Focus on behaviors, not the person.

End looking ahead. Always end your feedback with a look ahead. Talk with your team member about how they can do better in the future. End your redirection feedback on a positive note by coaching the person on what they can do better next time. No one can go back in time to fix poor behaviors, but looking ahead helps your team member feel like they have another chance to do better. Even praise can end looking ahead, coach your employee on how they can continue to improve on their already strong performance, bring up other areas of knowledge that will help them to become an even stronger performer.

Your Approach Matters

When giving feedback, keep the lines of communication open both ways. Do this by first sharing your performance observations, then asking for your team member's perspective. Listen carefully to your team member's input, often it will change how you respond. Share the rest of your SCORE feedback, especially the "end looking ahead."

For example, let's say you saw an employee cutting a corner to save time on a standard operating procedure. You approach the employee and share the facts that you observed. She then responds to tell you that she did hurry through the procedure because another employee nearby needed her help on a task that takes 2 people, so she was rushing to go help. Your response and coaching might be entirely different now that you understand her point of view. You might still reinforce the need to complete the procedure thoroughly each time, but you can also coach her on what to do in such a situation in the future. Coaching an employee who is trying to help a team mate is different from coaching an employee who was just trying to cut some corners on her work.

A New Habit

Giving feedback becomes a habit for effective supervisors, they are constantly analyzing results and observing performance in order to give effective feedback to their team members. Ideally, you should give feedback to every employee every day; more practically, you should give feedback to most employees at least once a week. Like all habits, SCORE feedback is learned. Figure 1 shows an example SCORE feedback worksheet that you can use to develop your feedback habit for leading your team. Make a similar worksheet or note system that you can complete every week for each individual that you supervise. Use the "strengths" column to note positive items, use the "growth" column to note things that they can improve upon, use the "look ahead" column to note any suggestions to help your employee to continue learning.

Of course, you can give feedback more frequently than once a week. This process is to help you build a habit of giving feedback *at least* once a week. Save your worksheets and refer back to them. You will see growth and progress in your team members if you give them feedback diligently.

Conclusion

Feedback is 1 of the 3 essential tasks of every effective supervisor, along with clarifying expectations and developing employee skills. Feedback is a powerful tool that you should use frequently, at least weekly for most employees, to shape performance and direct them toward continual improvement.

Team Member	Strength Notes	Growth Notes	Look Ahead Notes
Ernesto	Set personal record for accounts opened. Great job handling confused customer.	Still struggling with shipping dept. Needs to learn shipping process and build relationships there.	Visit shipping next Tuesday to learn process.
Kate	Mastered procedure for feeding operations. She learned quickly in her first week.	Wants to attend training on livestock health.	Keep focus on feeding and relate how her work affects herd health.

Figure 1. Example Weekly SCORE Feedback Worksheet.
Week of: June 12, 20XX
Feedback should be: Specific, Credible, On-time, Relevant, End looking ahead.