CSUMB Performance Evaluation
Job Aid: Feedback That Works*

Developing Effective Feedback Skills

Capture the situation

"On Tuesday in the breakroom with Dusty and Robbie…" rather than "A couple days ago at work with some people…"

Describe the behavior

"Dusty was rude" not as specific as "Dusty was interrupting Robbie and raising his palm to Robbie's face"

"Robbie seemed bored" not as specific as "Robbie yawned, rolled his eyes and looked out the window"

Points of Delivery

- When you approach someone to offer feedback, use a phrase such as "May I share an observation with you?" It eases anxiety and sets the scene for a conversation, not a confrontation
- To create more openness, ask for permission to give feedback, say something positive, ask if the person understands what behavior you're talking about, then stop talking and walk away. This positive approach can ease the fear many people have when they hear the word "feedback"
- Acknowledge the uneasiness or discomfort you may feel when giving a person feedback. Call it out. "As I'm telling you this, I'm aware of how uncomfortable I am." This honors your experience and can minimize the perceived threat of the feedback experience from the receiver's perspective.

Deliver the Impact

The impact you want to focus on and communicate is your reaction to a behavior.

Example:

"When you told me in the meeting that my concerns about the deadlines were "overblown" I felt belittled."
The focus is on the person's behavior, what the other person did or said AND how it impacted you.

When you did/said … I felt …When you interrupted me in the meeting to poke fun at my choice of words, I felt disrespected and my message was lost. Also, the group went off on a tangent for 5 minutes based on your interruption, and we lost productive time in the meeting.

Maintaining the Message

1. If you back out of the feedback, the receiver will lose your message. "You interrupted me, which made me feel frustrated, but the more I think about it, it was pretty hectic at the time…"
2. If you pull in your own experiences, you take ownership away from the receiver. "I remember when I did that…"
3. If you cushion your feedback, the receiver may shut down and will be less open to your message. "You're not gonna like hearing this…"
4. If you label your feedback, you could create some anxiety and the receiver may not hear your entire message. "I have some negative feedback to give you…"
5. If you give advice with your feedback, the receiver may think you have a personal agenda. "Let me tell you what you need to do…"
6. If you judge the person and not the behavior, the person hearing the feedback will likely become defensive and resentful. "You were disruptive today…"
7. If you delay in giving feedback, your memory of the event might not be clear enough to be specific, and the receiver might wonder why the conversation didn't occur sooner if it's so important to talk about. "Last month…"

Ten Common Mistakes to Avoid

1. **The feedback judges the individual, not the actions.**
   Saying "you're abrasive" is judging what you think is right or wrong and puts them on the defensive. Try "I noticed your team shuts down when you give directions during busy times, and they do not perform. Can we discuss other approaches that could work?"

2. **The feedback is too vague.**
   Saying "You did a good job this week" is very different from "You handled that difficult group this week with great professionalism. I appreciate how you initiated contact to ensure their stay was exceeding expectations from the beginning, and your follow up daily with evening and day teams to ensure their special requests were executed made this group a success. They left me a note of appreciation, specifically mentioning you by name as a great employee."

3. **The feedback speaks for others.**
   Saying "People say you give too much work" isn't helpful, it sets the person on the defensive and they wonder who is talking behind their back. It's best to give specific feedback from an individual that has given permission to share. "I heard two of your team mates talking in the lunchroom and they were both talking about the new procedure you implemented and they were confused. It might be helpful to follow up with your team to make sure everyone understands the new procedure and who to go to for questions and clarification."

4. **Negative feedback gets sandwiched between positive messages.**
This is a very tempting and common approach, but what it does is it diminishes the positive "bread" and highlights the negative "meat" and that's all the person focuses on. And they question your sincerity in the positive messages. No one likes that sandwich.

5. **The feedback is exaggerated with generalities.**
Avoid using "always" or "never." Hearing these gets people defensive as they go into litigator mode and object, stating many instances where they did or didn't do/say what you exaggerated. They miss the whole message because of your choice of words.

6. **The feedback psychoanalyzes the motives behind behavior.**
Telling someone, "I know you have been making mistakes because of your recent break up" is ineffective because you may or may not know their intent or motive. This will tend to cause resentment. Instead, you can try a sincere approach, "I noticed you made a few mistakes and you typically don't do that. Is something going on you want to discuss?"

7. **The feedback goes on too long.**
Sometimes we don't know when to stop – we're human, we want to give advice, personal stories, etc. Remember, people need time to digest and assimilate the info they've received.

8. **The feedback contains an implied threat.**
Telling someone they could lose their job creates lack of trust. Unless it's coaching a specific "oops" moment you are correcting, there is always the "or else" threat from a manager to employee.

9. **The feedback uses inappropriate humor.**
If giving feedback is uncomfortable for you, you may be tempted to use sarcasm as a substitute for feedback. By saying "good afternoon" to a colleague who is ten minutes late for a morning meeting doesn't tell the person how their behavior affected you or provide reasons to change it.

10. **The feedback is a question, not a statement.**
Phrasing feedback as a question, "Do you think you could attend a meeting without looking at your phone?" is indirect and can be condescending. The response will likely be defensive or indifferent. If you rephrase as a statement, "I'd like to have us all leave our phones out of view during our next meeting so that our focus is 100% on the conversation at the table," is much more clear and provides expectation and the reason why behind it.

The Dozen Do/Don'ts Effective Feedback

DO	DON'T
☑ Be specific when recalling the situation	☒ Assume
☑ Be specific when describing the behavior	☒ Be vague
☑ Acknowledge the impact of the behavior on you.	☒ Use accusations
☑ Judge the behavior.	☒ Judge the person
☑ Pay attention to body language.	☒ Pass along vague feedback from others
☑ Use verbatim quotes	☒ Give advice unless asked
☑ Re-create the behavior if appropriate	☒ Psychoanalyze
☑ Give feedback in a timely manner	☒ Qualify your feedback by backing out of the description
☑ Give your feedback, THEN STOP TALKING	☒ Use examples from your own experience
☑ Say "I felt" or "I was" to frame your impact statement	☒ Generalize with words like "always" or "never"
☑ Focus on a single message	☒ Label your feedback as positive or negative
☑ Be sensitive to the emotional impact of your feedback	☒ Sandwich your feedback messages with words like "but"