

## **Creating a High Performance Culture through Effective Feedback**

Written by Administrator

Monday, 21 February 2011 11:42 - Last Updated Friday, 25 March 2011 16:23

---

It is generally accepted that an effective manager creates a work climate where individuals feel able to give of their best, to learn and develop to their full potential. An important way managers can create this environment is by reinforcing helpful behaviour in individuals and challenging less effective behaviour. Yet all too often managers fail to provide effective feedback to individuals in their team or if they do so, fail to balance the amount of supportive and challenging feedback that they give. In this article Sarah Cook looks at the barriers to giving effective feedback and the steps that managers can take to overcome these.

### **Creating an environment which promotes high performance**

Experience of working with a wide number of managers across many industry sectors shows that those who are most successful demonstrate an appropriate mixture of reinforcing and questioning behaviours, according to the individual.

Reinforcing behaviours include:

- Offering positive feedback
- Listening
- Empathising
- Providing assistance, guidance and back up for others
- Helping with resources or
- Giving their own time and effort

Questioning behaviours are:

- Offering formative feedback
- Challenging others to do better by requests made and setting targets
- Asking them to rethink their actions and decisions by questioning and offering alternatives
- Confronting issues assertively

When a manager uses a highly questioning but low reinforcing style the environment which is created is often stressful and task focused. A manager who uses high reinforcement but low challenge creates a 'cosy' environment, where the emphasis is on maintaining relationships but not necessarily getting things done. An environment of low challenge and low support can lead to apathy and low morale. A manager who uses a high questioning style but also high reinforcement is most likely to create a motivating, high performance culture

## Creating a High Performance Culture through Effective Feedback

Written by Administrator

Monday, 21 February 2011 11:42 - Last Updated Friday, 25 March 2011 16:23

---

Rather than feeling stretched and supported, comfortable with the need for change, open to possibilities and ideas, the long-term effect on team members of working in environments where there is an inappropriate balance of reinforcement and questioning can be a mixture of unhelpful behaviours such as people acting as:

'Yes men':

- Reluctant to get involved / take risks
- Comfortable to watch from the sidelines
- Anxious and lacking in confidence

Or 'Cynics'

- Rebellious, determined to block change they do not own
- 'Right' and angry at the world for ignoring them
- Overly confident in their own ability

Or 'Victims'

- Unhappy and / or depressed
- Overwhelmed by work
- Feeling powerless, fearing mistakes

### **The link to feedback**

Creating a high-performance is underpinned by the ability to give effective feedback. As the purpose of feedback is to improve performance and to keep people on track, providing feedback on performance should be a regular part of a manager's role. So why do many managers neglect this

important skill or leave it to the once yearly performance review? Here are some of the possible reasons.

Some people hold back from giving motivational feedback because:

- They think that compliments are inappropriate, because the staff member is only doing what

## Creating a High Performance Culture through Effective Feedback

Written by Administrator

Monday, 21 February 2011 11:42 - Last Updated Friday, 25 March 2011 16:23

---

they are paid to do

- They feel too embarrassed



- They believe that the person receiving the feedback may relax and take it easy
- They believe that the person receiving the feedback may be suspicious of their motives
- They think that the feedback may be misinterpreted as a ploy to fish for compliments in return
- They don't like receiving motivational feedback themselves

Some people hold back from giving developmental feedback because:

- They worry that they might upset the receiver
- They are concerned that the receiver may reject them/reject the feedback
- They are concerned that the person might retaliate with developmental feedback themselves
- They are concerned that it may end in a confrontation that would be difficult to resolve and might damage future relations
- They think that the issue is too trivial, and that it would be better saved up for something more substantial
- They don't like receiving developmental feedback themselves

### **Beliefs about feedback**

Fundamental to being able to give effective feedback is the belief that feedback is a helpful, healthy and positive communication between two people. The purpose of feedback is to maintain and improve performance - it therefore should have both a positive intention and impact. Consequently it is vital that the whole feedback process, whether giving motivational feedback, (what has gone well) or developmental feedback (where the individual can improve) is conducted in a positive and constructive way.

10 tips for giving effective motivational and developmental feedback.

## Creating a High Performance Culture through Effective Feedback

Written by Administrator

Monday, 21 February 2011 11:42 - Last Updated Friday, 25 March 2011 16:23

---

Do :

1. Prioritise your feedback - don't over-load the receiver
2. Feedback on observed behaviour - what the individual has said or done, don't make subjective judgements.
3. Be specific - use examples - don't make generalisations.
4. Give motivational feedback before formative - don't start on a negative when you have a positive to offer too.
5. Do separate motivational from formative feedback - do not link the two with BUT or HOWEVER as this negates what has gone before.
6. Be clear about what the individual did well and what they could do to improve, don't use a positive, negative, positive sandwich such as -the first part of your presentation was well structured, but the second part was not as clear. Overall though you did really well', as this leaves the individual with the impression that everything is OK.
7. Ask questions when giving feedback - don't make the conversation one sided, ask the individual what they think they did well, where they think they can improve.
8. Time your feedback - say it while it is fresh, don't wait till a long time after the event.
9. Own the feedback - don't feed back on behaviour which you have not observed but which

## Creating a High Performance Culture through Effective Feedback

Written by Administrator

Monday, 21 February 2011 11:42 - Last Updated Friday, 25 March 2011 16:23

---

has been reported to you by someone else.

10. Have a positive intention when you give feedback, don't use feedback to 'get at someone'; the purpose of feedback is to help the individual.

### **Dealing with reactions to feedback**

In delivering feedback, the giver needs to be conscious of the reactions of the receiver. Ideally people should be receptive to feedback and see it as helpful. When receiving feedback the individual has a choice whether to accept what they are told or not. However in order to ensure that they understand the feedback, they need to listen and avoid rejecting what has been said, arguing or being defensive. Asking questions to fully clarify and seeking examples is useful. The receiver of the feedback should also ideally acknowledge the giver and show their appreciation; the feedback may not have been easy to give.

In reality a wide variety of reactions often occur. People may:

- Deny what has happened. This reaction often accompanies the initial shock of feedback.
- Show emotion. Be upset, angry or go quiet as the message sinks in
- Justify their actions and find excuses for their behaviour

These reactions can occur when given motivational feedback as well as developmental e.g.

'I like your briefcase'

'Oh, this old thing' (blushes) 'I got it cheap in a sale'

A manager giving feedback needs to be aware of potential reactions and take appropriate courses of action to help people accept feedback. Some tips are:

## Creating a High Performance Culture through Effective Feedback

Written by Administrator

Monday, 21 February 2011 11:42 - Last Updated Friday, 25 March 2011 16:23

---

- If the recipient is in denial: re-iterate the facts, what you saw or heard
- If the recipient shows emotion: listen actively, empathise. You may need to postpone any further discussion until later
- If the recipient of the feedback goes into justification: refer the individual to the standards expected of them, ask them what they could do differently to prevent the situation happening again.

### Summary

Feedback can help a manager maintain and improve their team members' performance and, when well delivered, can play an important part in creating a high performance culture. Our experience is that managers do benefit from receiving training and coaching in effective feedback skills. However, like any skill, unless it is practised regularly it can become difficult to apply. Managers need to be aware of people's reactions to feedback and deal with them appropriately in order to support change.

Sarah Cook, The Stairway Consultancy

Sarah Cook is Managing Director of Stairway Consultancy who specialise in Leadership and Customer Focus. Sarah is also the author of Feedback Skills by Fenman.

{loadposition copyrightmessage}