Feedback



I've been prompted to write this having seen numerous posts concerning how to give negative feedback and criticism.

Feedback may be the breakfast of champions, but if it is poorly prepared it will be indigestible.

In my, humble, opinion, feedback should NEVER be negative; the behaviour under discussion may be negative but the feedback itself should only ever be positive or constructive and, again, NEVER, criticism.

Telling someone that their presentation was great, may give a warm feeling but it's not really very useful; likewise, telling someone their presentation was terrible isn't much use either – leaves the person feeling bad and they don't know what to change!

Here's my view on how to give positive, constructive feedback:

Step 1 – talk about what happened; stay focused on the "event" and remain concrete and factual. Avoid judgemental comments such as "you were very emotional", "you became very angry" and "you stormed out of the room" try instead, "you interrupted me on at least 3 occasions", "the volume of your voice increased" and "you left the room without saying anything".

Avoid sweeping statements such as "you are always creative", "you are always late", "you are never prepared", "your presentations are always great", etc. be as specific as possible.

Step 2 – talk about what you “thought” about what happened; use ”I” statements: “I thought you were disinterested”, “I thought you didn’t care”, “I thought you were annoyed” – own your thoughts

Step 3 – talk about how you “felt” about what happened; again, use ”I” statements: “I felt shocked”, ”I felt not respected”, “I felt angry at your reaction” – own your emotions

Don’t talk about how others felt – unless you know for sure how they felt and have concrete examples; “Joe told me that he felt very surprised by your reaction”, for example.

Step 4 – talk about what you feel should be changed or continued; if the behaviour was positive, reinforce positive behaviours and if the behaviour was negative identify alternative behaviours for next time.

Also, avoid the “but”; “you weren’t prepared for the meeting, but you had some good ideas”. Not being prepared and having good ideas are two different things, one doesn’t compensate the other; give feedback on the not being prepared and then give feedback on the good ideas.

Following the above will help to avoid the SAR of the famous SARA syndrome and get more effectively to the A and, hence, make the feedback more digestible.

“We all need people who will give us feedback. That’s how we improve”

Bill Gates