

Effective Leadership – Giving and Accepting Feedback

Giving Feedback

Whether you recognize it or not, as a leader you are constantly providing feedback to your members. How you provide that feedback will often spell the difference between member success and failure.

Silence - When you give no response to your member's work you aren't maintaining the status quo, but are actually encouraging a decrease in both their performance and confidence over the long-term. They don't know if their actions are appropriate. Silence can create paranoia.

Criticism - When trying to stop unwanted behavior or results you may criticize a member. This often hurts the relationship you have with them. Their confidence decreases, they may start to avoid you and other "good" behaviors of the member are affected. This can overpower all other feedback given.

Advice - When you tell a member what behaviors or results you want and how you would like them done, you improve the member's confidence and your relationship with them. Increased performance will be the result.

Positive reinforcement - This takes the advice feedback one step further by identifying how much you would appreciate the member's assistance in reaching the desired behaviors or results. This kind of feedback will give you the best results by increasing the motivation, confidence and performance of your member.

Advice and positive reinforcement should be the only types of feedback you give to a member. Try relating your feedback to the action, behavior or result you want, not to the personality of the member. Consider your timing. Try to give feedback before the event in the form of advice, or afterwards in the form of positive reinforcement.

Accepting Feedback

Knowing how to accept feedback is another leadership skill that will teach you a lot about your leadership style. Resist the temptation to resist the feedback. Don't explain, defend or deny. Listen silently to try to understand clearly what the other person is saying. You don't have to agree with the feedback you get, but be receptive to getting the feedback.

Listening

The ability to listen well is a cornerstone of good leadership. To listen well:

- Stop talking. Before you speak, remember people are more receptive to your input if they feel you have a clear understanding of their situation.
- Watch for nonverbal clues. Most of the meaning of our messages is in the vocal and visual components. Sighs and slumped shoulders may mean depression. Animated expressions and gestures usually mean excitement. Ask yourself. "Do the non-verbal clues match the words?"
- Give visual feedback with non-verbal expressions and gestures (e.g., nodding). These let your speaker know that you are listening and understanding what they have to say.
- Be patient. Our desire to provide quick fix solutions to the problems of others puts up roadblocks. "You don't have to finish, I know what you are going to say," is a sure way of letting the speaker know that you have little time or confidence in their ability to solve their problem.
- Don't mentally argue. If you are developing arguments in your mind as the speaker talks you are probably missing much of the message.

- Use reflective listening skills. Use paraphrasing to let the speaker know what you have heard.
- Acknowledge their ideas. This doesn't mean you agree with the speaker, but it does mean that you feel their ideas are worth listening to.
- Keep alert. Effective listening requires energy and concentration. Avoid distractions.
"I not only use all the brains I have, but all I can borrow." Woodrow Wilson