



SAY IT TO MY FACE

FIVE STEPS TO HIGH PERFORMANCE THROUGH EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK EVENTS.

The value in providing feedback to employees and team members remains one of the most contested topics in HR practice. Opinions are as varied as performance feedback methods, which range from the stagnant to the startling. Netflix culture shuns performance improvement programmes demanding straight up sharing of harsh truths, while managers at retail giant Gap, using GPS (Gap Performance System), take their employees out of the office once a month and have an informal chat over a coffee.

Fault lines in performance feedback systems generally centre around a handful of concepts. Does the manager really know more about the employees' performance than they can recognise for themselves? Is the manager comfortable with giving feedback or will their discomfort mean they avoid controversial performance gaps? With what frequency is the feedback provided? What is the structure of the feedback event, does it emphasise historic actions or future attainments?

Ultimately, employees must receive feedback if they are to improve delivery standards and reach their potential. The challenge with effective feedback, once a manager is properly prepared, lies in the delivery of the message rather than the message content. Often not being clear and specific, leaving the change need open to interpretation or only focusing on the behaviour and not the consequences it

leads to. It also sits in the non-delivery of certain messages, critical constructive feedback for example. Managers who fail to address shortcomings, reasonably leave the employee to believe their performance is at least acceptable in those areas. Truly effective performance growth demands feedback and here we set out five essential steps:

- 1. To ensure objectivity, feedback must be rooted in evidence.** This also enables both parties to get to the root cause of underperformance or a basis to ensure continued high performance. Relying on opinion and observation alone leads discussions down a rabbit hole. Even if the employee is not outwardly arguing against the performance assessment, they may inwardly be withdrawing from the event process and important messages can be missed.
- 2. Feedback frequency should never exceed two months.** Beyond this it ceases to have any live coaching value. Annual programmes do more damage than good, by going stale and not being kept current. Most quarterly programmes simply try to cover the same range as annual programmes making them condensed and confusing for the employee.
- 3. Don't cover too many areas at once.** Consider setting two areas for improvement, two areas for sustained high performance and two areas for learning

and development at each event, with a half year summary review. Change the headings under which items are selected at each event, if the goals have reached agreed progression milestones.

- 4. Treat your high performers precisely as you would all other employees,** they have the same need for feedback. Your best executives and leaders have a stronger understanding of the need for employee performance and expect to be challenged in this area. In general, this is better spent time than that allocated to time with underperformers.

- 5. Include future goals and objectives in your discussions.** While goals are longer term, they are best achieved when broken down in to sets of deliverables that can be achieved in two month and six-month periods. It is important to balance short term operational effectiveness with a window into longer term success and attainment.

When you consider the changes that have occurred in many aspects of our lives to influence our decisions around what we buy, where we stay, where we choose to work and many other daily decisions, it becomes obvious that frequent feedback is essential in our organisations. Don't however, mistake frequent for informal. Effective performance is a direct product of effective performance feedback processes.