



Trademarks of a great boss: Make feedback a constant experience

By [Joel Garfinkle](#) on June 16th, 2014 |

You look at your calendar and realize it's performance appraisal time. Dread sinks like a rock into the pit of your stomach. It's a tossup as to who hates performance appraisals more—the giver or the receiver. So here's a radical idea: ditch the performance appraisal altogether. Instead, **make performance appraisal an ongoing activity**, and focus on coaching and training rather than critique or criticism. Here are three tips for **growing your people** through more **effective feedback**.

- Make the mind-body connection
- Be on time
- Avoid the but

1. Make the mind-body connection. This means making sure that your body language is in sync with the message you are delivering. If you're telling Bridget that she's doing a good job while your frown lines are getting deeper, Bridget is not buying it. If you're saying, "Great job, Jim," and not looking Jim in the eye, he won't believe a word of it. Your mind and body have to be on the same page for feedback to be effective. And your opening lines have to set the stage in order for coaching to take place.

2. Be on time. To be effective, feedback must be timely. That's the whole idea behind skipping the periodic performance appraisal in favor of the coaching approach. Continuous feedback leads to continuous improvement and that's what you're after, isn't it? As a coach, you are responsible for the ongoing process of **guiding, developing, and improving your employees' performance**. This makes coaching is a daily responsibility, not a sporadic activity. And sometimes that can be pretty uncomfortable. You will have to have **difficult conversations**. Do you know how to work with a poor team player? Start by asking him what he needs from you in order to improve.

Can you shift a negative attitude? Next time you catch her on a downer, ask her to verbally change her negative statement to a positive affirmation. And always be alert for opportunities to praise your people in order to capitalize on their strengths. Open communication is the key to coaching through feedback. However, the natural tendency is often to avoid these conversations. And without consistent feedback, performance improvement is not likely to happen.

3. Avoid the "but." How you say something is often as important as what you're saying. The conventional wisdom says you should combine negative input with positive, in order to soften the blow or make criticism more palatable. This may not be the most effective technique.

"George, your staff reports are looking great lately but your people skills need some work." One of two things will happen. George will hear either the first half of the message or the last half. He won't hear both. So he will either focus on the positive ("Hey, I'm doing a great

job with my reports”), or he’ll hear the negative (“Bad people skills? I guess people just don’t like me”).

The solution? Congratulate George on his great staff reports when he delivers them. Do it in front of other people, if that’s possible and appropriate. This reinforces his behavior and makes him want to do even better. Give him private feedback on his people skills immediately after you notice an example of poor behavior. Perhaps he was curt with a customer or put down a co-worker in staff meeting. Ask him for some commentary on the event. “Do you think you might have handled Mrs. Halsey’s complaint differently? What could you have done better? Is there a way you could have reacted to Nancy’s idea more positively?”

Feedback like this makes George feel he is part of the solution rather than the problem and he’ll be more motivated to create his own change strategy.

And here’s a bonus takeaway: we’ve been discussing feedback from the perspective of you as a manager **providing feedback** and coaching to your subordinates. In top-performing companies, feedback is delivered up, down, and laterally. Not only should you be coaching your subordinates on a regular basis, you can also provide feedback to your boss that can improve your working relationship. You can have conversations with coworkers that **build a better team**. And the good news is that the techniques we’ve described work equally well in almost any situation.

What to do now: Spend some time this week evaluating your current feedback and performance appraisal strategy. Decide what to keep and what to throw away or change. Each day remind yourself to look for opportunities to deliver both positive and negative feedback in a way that motivates poor performers to improve and great performers to be even better.

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