



# Teaching Managers How to Have Tough Conversations with Employees

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# Agenda



- The role of the manager
- The role of HR
- Preparing to give feedback
- The basics of giving effective feedback
- The tricky situations
- The tough conversations

# The Role of the Manager



The only job a manager has is to drive performance from the team to achieve the organization's goals.

It's so simple and yet so complex.

“My main job was developing talent. I was a gardener providing water and other nourishment to our top 750 people. Of course, I had to pull out some weeds, too”.

~ Jack Welch



# The Role of Human Resources



- To train managers in the basics of giving effective feedback
- To train managers in the basics of employment law so they know what they don't know
- To ensure that the organization is free from discrimination and retaliation
- The champion of the programs and systems that support the companies most valuable resources, people.

*“Those who build great companies understand that the ultimate throttle on growth for any great company is not markets, or technology, or competition, or products. It is one thing above all others: the ability to get and keep enough of the right people.”*

*~ **Jim Collins***

# Teaching Managers the Basics



- **K.I.S.S. – Simple is best**
- **Steps are easier for people to remember**
- **Practice makes perfect**
- **There are three important things to remember**
  - Prepare for the meeting
  - Deliver the feedback
  - Follow up
- **Know the “triggers” to consult with HR**
  - Absences – leaves – medical conditions
  - Whistleblower protection – claims about the company
  - All claims of unfair treatment based on protected class

# Preparing to Give Feedback



- Take notes – so you can provide specific examples
- Gather facts/opinions when appropriate
- Choose a quiet, private space
- Make time for employees
- Give employees time to prepare themselves without giving too much notice



# 4 Easy Steps to Effective Feedback



- **Step 1** – Ask if you can give feedback
- **Step 2** – Describe specific behavior
- **Step 3** – Describe the impact of the behavior on self or others
- **Step 4** – Next steps

# Step 1 - Ask



**“Communication is what the listener does.”**

**Peter Drukker**



- Respects the individual, and their situation
- If someone says “No” twice, then the ask turns to “I need to talk to you.”
- Starts with: “May I give you some feedback?” or “Can I share something with you?”

# Step 2 – Describe Specific Behavior



- Descriptions should be about behavior not the person
- Descriptions about behavior need to be as specific as possible
- Starts with: “When you ...”
- Avoid starting with: “I think ...”, “I feel...”, or “I’ve noticed...”



## Step 3 – Describe the Impact of the Behavior on Self or Others



- Describe the consequences (positive or negative) that result from the action
- Impact could be on self or others – focus on the one that is most impactful to the individual
- Starts with: “Here’s what happens ...”, “The impact of your actions are ...”



# Step 4 – Next Steps



**Feedback is about the future, not the past.**

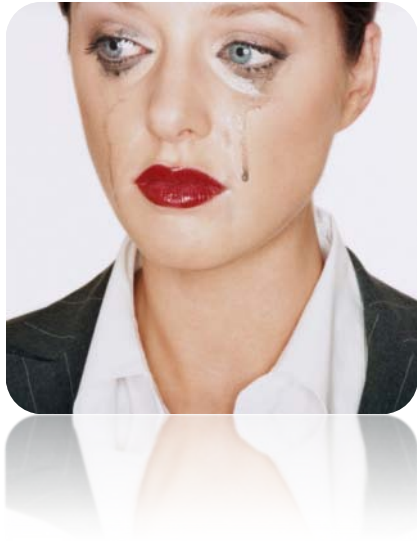


- This step is the most critical. What is it that you want the person to do differently?
- The solution should come from the individual, not the manager.
- Starts with: “What can you do differently?” or “Thank you, keep it up!”

# 4 Easy Steps to Effective Feedback



- **Step 1** – Ask if you can give feedback
  - ✦ Starts with: “May I give you some feedback?”
- **Step 2** – Describe specific behavior
  - ✦ Starts with: “When you . . .”
- **Step 3** – Describe the impact of the behavior on self or others
  - ✦ Starts with: “Here’s what happens when . . .”
- **Step 4** – Next steps
  - ✦ Starts with: “What can you do differently?” or “Thank you, keep it up!”



# What Do You Do If An Employee Reacts With:

- Tears
- Anger
- Blame
- Gunny sacking
- Claims of discrimination

# The Tough Conversations



- Talking with your “not meeting performance expectations” employee
- Talking with your “you’re not getting along with your co-workers” employee
- Talking about pay with the “I found a salary report on the Internet” employee
- Talking with your “top performer who gets a 3% increase” employee



# Talking With Your “Not Meeting Performance Expectations” Employee



*This is the most common difficult conversation to have with employees, and most employees will have this conversation at some point in their career.*

- **Step one – Ask if you can give feedback**

“Mary, I need to give you some feedback about your performance. Can we do that at our meeting scheduled for 2 pm?”

- **Step two – Describe the specific behavior**

“Mary, I need to talk with you about your performance on the latest marketing proposal that you sent out. I have concerns, because the sales rep told me that your report missed our internal deadline, and therefore it had to be sent out without an internal review. After the fact, the proposal was reviewed and some errors were found in the calculations on page 4 as well as some spelling and capitalization errors.”

- **Step three – Describe the consequences**

“Mary, this is important to the company because without an internal review we could lose a deal for looking unprofessional or we could inadvertently state some promises that we are not able to live up to. These simple mistakes could have big impacts on the company”.

- **Step four – Next steps**

“Mary, what can you do differently so that this doesn’t happen for the next proposal?”

# Talking With Your “You’re Not Getting Along With Your Co-workers” Employee



*In this situation, the employee may be performing well, but they are not getting along with their co-workers and it could be causing conflict in the office.*

- **Identify the issue**

“Ben, I need to talk with you about your ability to work well with our team”

- **Give the evidence**

“Ben, I’ve been given feedback from various members of our internal team as well as external vendors that working with you is difficult because you give the impression that you aren’t listening to others by interrupting people, and speaking too quickly without listening to what others are saying. In addition, on the Collins project your team members said you ended the brainstorming session early and assigned tasks without any input.”

- **State your expectations**

“Ben, I expect that as the Project Manager you have the respect of your team members. I also asked you to lead brainstorming sessions so that the group could come to consensus on how the project would be accomplished.”

- **State the consequences of the employee’s actions**

“Ben, your reputation has spread among this office and to our external vendors that you are difficult to work with. Therefore, building a team that is willing to work with you is more difficult. If I can not find a team to work with you, I won’t have as many projects for you to act as the PM”.

- **Ask the employee what they can do differently**

“Ben, this needs to be corrected immediately.”

“What ideas do you have for making this situation better?”

# Talking About Pay With the “I Found a Salary Report on the Internet” Employee



*In this particular difficult conversation you have an employee who is constantly wanting to discuss their pay, especially as it compares to the person down the hall or the employees down the street. This person has brought you every Internet report that exists on how much money they should make.*

- **First, start by acknowledging the person**

“Jenny, thank you for bringing this to my attention. I know that you’ve spent a lot of time doing research. I also know how important this is to you.”

- **Second, explain the company position**

“Jenny, you know that the company is experiencing difficult economic times. With the limited resources that we have available I have made the best decisions possible about increases based on performance and information that I have about market competitiveness.”

- **Third, explain the basics of the company’s compensation program**

“This company takes great care to ensure that we stay competitive with the market. We maintain a salary structure based on a bi-annual market study. Every effort is made to stay competitive with the market within the limits of our budget. I know the HR department takes great care to find market data that is representative of what is happening in our market.”

- **Deflect any discussions about other employees or employees down the street**

“Jenny, it would not be fair for me to have a conversation with you about how much Bill makes or the decisions that were made to arrive at his pay. What is important for you and I to discuss is your salary and performance.”

“Jenny, I don’t know the particulars of the salary structure at XYZ company. I also do not know the specifics of the position responsibilities there. I can tell you that our HR company does maintain our salary ranges with the market in mind.”

- **Find a positive way to end the conversation that focuses on the future**

“Jenny, now that you understand how my hands are tied regarding additional compensation, let’s talk a bit about your career goals over the next 3 years. If we can focus on the growth opportunities that exist and how you can prepare yourself then that might be the best way to get additional compensation.”

# Talking With Your “Top Performer Who Gets a 3% Increase” Employee



*One of the most difficult conversations to have at this time of year is the conversation with your top performer who is only going to get 3% based on the budget for increases.*

- **Start with a summary of the person’s accomplishments**

“Sam, as I think back to what you’ve accomplished this year, I am amazed. When you were hired here 11 months ago, I had no idea that you were going to be able to roll out the new product ahead of schedule and under budget. I didn’t expect that all our procedures around procurement would be documented and that you would receive such wonderful feedback from your team members. You have far exceeded my expectations for performance this year.”

- **Second, talk about the company position**

“I don’t think it will come as a surprise to you that despite these great accomplishments and many others by our team, that the company is experiencing economic distress. Our board of directors has decided to reduce our cash spend as much as possible to preserve cash.”

- **Third, acknowledge what it means for Sam**

“As a result, the maximum amount of increase that I am authorized to hand out this year is 3%. I know that this dollar amount is not reflective of your outstanding performance, but I hope you understand that budget was the limiting factor this year.”

- **Fourth, focus on the future**

“Sam, I am limited in what I can give you in terms of cash compensation, but I am committed to rewarding you for your outstanding performance. What are some ways that the company can show its appreciation for your accomplishments?”

“Sam, I am committed to helping you achieve the professional goals you have for your career, let’s talk about where you’d like to be in the next couple of years in your career, and how I can help you get there.”

# The Fifth Most Difficult Conversation



Viewer's choice – What is the most difficult conversation your managers have to have?

# Questions??



Thank you for attending!

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