

## Ensure that constructive feedback is truly constructive

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What is the first word that comes to mind when you hear the following two words: “performance evaluation.” Dread?

If so, you’re not alone. In fact, many managers and supervisors dread giving feedback to employees. In two surveys conducted by leadership development consultancy Zenger/Folkman, each of nearly 8,000 managers, 44% of managers reported that they found it stressful and difficult to give negative feedback. One-fifth avoid the practice entirely. Even more surprisingly, nearly 40% of leaders admitted that they never give positive reinforcement to their employees.

Likewise, a lot of employees don’t like receiving feedback when it’s given within the shadows of constructive criticism. This ilk of feedback often stings and conveys a notion of what author Eric Berne coined, “I’m OK; you’re not OK.” Many employees unconsciously reject any constructive criticism that walks, talks, or even resembles the slightest hint of “Not OK.”

Another plausible reason some of employee don't respond well to constructive feedback is that the feedback is not actually “constructive.” Rather, many companies and organization utilize the three “Cs” of feedback -- candid, consistent and critical - to tell employees what supervisors think of their past performance rather than on future improvement. It’s not surprising that this type of feedback can invoke less-than-warm feelings and subsequent disengagement from employees.

Worst yet, criticizing employees with a recap of everything they did wrong during the past 6 to 12 months does not enhance their ability to learn to perform better. According to research conducted by Richard Boyatzis, a psychologist and professor at Case Western Reserve University, people brains respond differently to critical feedback versus positive feedback. Critical feedback activated brain

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circuitry for anxiety. Thus, people respond to critical feedback regarding as a threat which will make it harder for a person to change and learn new creative and productive behavior.

Richard Boyatzis' research indicates that pushing people into discomfort by focusing on their blunders during their performance evaluations may diminish a person's desire to learn new skills. On the other hand, constructive feedback that focuses on an employee's positive goals and dreams activates brain centers that energizes a person's ability to focus better – which can lead to better performance on the job. As Daniel Goleman, best known for his work on emotional intelligence, "Bottom line: don't focus on only on weaknesses, but on hopes and dreams. It's what our brains are wired to do."

A recent article in the Harvard Business Review, by Marcus Buckingham and Ashley Goodall, highlighted a constructive feedback technique that was utilized by legendary Dallas Cowboy Coach Tom Landry to help his initially struggling team learn to excel and win more football games. "While the other teams were reviewing missed tackles and dropped balls, Landry instead combed through footage of previous games and created for each player a highlight reel of when he had done something easily, naturally, and effectively. Landry reasoned that while the number of wrong ways to do something was infinite, the number of right ways, for any player, was not. It was knowable, and the best way to discover it was to look at plays where that person had done it excellently. From now on, he told each team member, "we only replay your winning plays."

Basically, when applied to the performance evaluation, this feedback technique highlights an employee's strengths that can help generate a sense of accomplishment and motivation. Employees go back in time to recognize and become reacquainted with their personal and unique pattern of excellence and the reality of what it looks like. As a result, employees can learn, repeat and even focus more on how to improve their personal version of excellence to become even better.

Today's job market is red hot for workers. Yet, this reality is not a valid excuse for avoiding or not giving performance evaluations. For businesses and organizations to achieve success and thrive, employees need to commit to the pursuit of

excellence at work. Constructive feedback is imperative to helping every employee and business prosper.

So here's a suggestion, the first word that should pop in your mind the next time you hear the words performance evaluation, is this —thrive. Done properly performance evaluation can reap tangible benefits to an organization and to the employees. And remember, some of world's most ever influential and successful people were former employees made mistakes at work – and sometimes more than once or twice. As the saying goes, “Making mistakes is better than faking perfections.”