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Providing quality feedback
a good practice guide



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Introduction

It has long been recognised that feedback can be a powerful motivator - encouraging goal accomplishment, influencing behaviour, and helping to continually improve performance.

Opening our minds to observations made by others can also assist us in self reflection, altering our perspective of a situation, and thereby enhancing our capacity to change, grow and develop.

Thus, giving and receiving feedback is an integral part of developing productive workplace relations and providing continuous learning for both managers and staff.

Furthermore, being able to provide both positive and developmental feedback that will be accepted is an integral part of good day to day management practice and therefore an essential skill for any manager.

This guide outlines some important principles and provides tips on techniques for maximising positive outcomes in giving and receiving feedback, as well as making links to other relevant resources and information that you may find useful.

It provides a valuable addendum to the Quick Guide for Managers on 'Developing Professional Staff at UniSA'.

I encourage you to use the Guide and welcome any feedback you may have on the usefulness of this new resource, so it may be continually expanded and improved for the future.

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Key Feedback Principles

- **Make it regular.** Like performance development and management, giving and receiving feedback will have limited benefits, if it is a once a year event. It needs to be frequent, ongoing, and cover both good performance and areas of performance to improve.
- **Do it immediately.** By giving feedback as soon as possible after an event or during project milestones, it will have greater impact. You will also find it easier to be specific as you will more readily recall the event or circumstances on which you want to give feedback!
- **Be specific and clear in your communication.** Avoid generalisations. Tell the person specifically what they did, or didn't do. Remember to describe and focus on the behaviour or action. Don't judge the person, as this is likely to cause a defensive or angry reaction and your feedback will not be heard.
- **Location is important.** Make sure the setting is appropriate for giving feedback. Avoid a few rushed moments in the corridor. Take the time it deserves to give feedback without interruption and in a setting that is private. This way you and the staff member can discuss and learn from the feedback.
- **Positive before negative.** Where you are seeking to improve areas of performance, don't concentrate on what went wrong. Rather, acknowledge the positive aspects and focus on what can be improved. Ask them for their view and suggestions to encourage ownership.
- **Practice makes perfect!** It's easy to overlook good work or extra effort, or to take it for granted. Make it a habit to give positive feedback regularly. This promotes good performance and a positive work place. Equally, some managers find it difficult to give feedback when performance is not on track. Make it a habit to give developmental feedback as soon as it's needed. Don't keep the staff member 'in the dark'. You can't expect them to automatically know that they need to change or improve their performance.

Types of Feedback

Positive Feedback

This applies where the person has performed well. You use it to highlight why or how the job was done well, how it linked to expected outcomes or behaviours. Use it to reinforce good performance.

Developmental Feedback

This applies where a person has not performed / behaved in line with expectations. You use it to highlight where and why performance was not up to expectations and explore how they might do it better next time. Use it as a positive way of improving future performance.

Self Reflection and Self Preparation

- What are your strengths in giving and receiving feedback?
- Are there areas you could improve?

These are useful questions to ask yourself in thinking about how, overall, you might be performing in the area of giving and receiving feedback, so that you are facilitating improved productivity and good workplace relations in your area of responsibility.

- Consider the following questions.
- Reflect on the questions to which you answer 'No' and identify areas you may need to work on.
- Areas for me to work on are:

- Do you tell people when they are doing a good job?
- Do you give credit to people for their ideas?
- Do you praise achievement of outcomes and expected behaviours?
- Do you positively acknowledge creativity and improvement ideas?
- Do you compliment people on their strengths?
- Do you explain clearly and non-judgementally where a person's performance is going off course? Do you do this in a timely manner?
- Do you coach people to facilitate them in finding creative solutions to their work problems?
- Do you encourage your staff to give you feedback, so you can continually learn and grow as a manager?
- Do you actively listen and consider if there is some merit in the feedback you are receiving from staff? Or do you react defensively?
- Do you acknowledge what other people are trying to say to you with paraphrasing or summarising? Do you seek to understand?

Preparing Your Self for a Feedback Session

- Be focused and well prepared for any feedback session. De-clutter your mind of everything else!
- Have all the facts to hand and be clear.
- Consider the individual, their context, their feelings and opinions. Go into the session with an open mind.
- Control your own emotions – don't lose your cool. Talk when you are calm and objective.
- Choose a time when you are at your best and you think the staff member will be most receptive. Check you both have time to give your full attention to this feedback session.
- Take leadership and ownership of the feedback you are about to give. Use 'I think' openers, rather than 'You are' statements.

Process for Giving Feedback

Positive Feedback

Your focus: to talk little and listen lots! Lead the process by asking a range of open ended questions.

Your purpose: to encourage the staff member to talk about their good work and for you to reinforce it, in order to keep the good performance going into the future.

The process:

- State and describe in specific terms what the staff member did well. Describe the actual behaviour and actions.
- Indicate the positive impact of their behaviour/actions.
- Ask the staff member for their input e.g.
 - what do you believe contributed to the excellent performance?
 - what do you believe you did particularly well?
 - what did you learn that could be applied to other work or projects in future?
 - how can you share your experience/ learning with others in the team?
- Explore and reinforce their suggestions. Set some goals and describe the positive consequences that will result from them following through on the goals.

Developmental Feedback (refer Appendix 1)

Your focus: to describe, be clear, and be specific (not judge, blame or accuse). Lead the process as a positive, coaching experience where you show interest in rectifying the performance issue (s) to the benefit of the individual as well as the broader team/organisation.

Your purpose: to raise the person's awareness and understanding of the issue in a way that they will take responsibility for improving. You want to enable them to commit to a change in behaviour or outlook and commit to taking action to improve their performance.

The process:

- State and describe the concern in specific and objective terms. Focus on actual behaviours / actions, not the person.
- Ask for the staff member's view. Give them the chance to share with you their thinking on why the problem exists.
- Indicate the negative impact created as a result of their behaviour/actions on them, the team, the organisation.
- Describe what you would like to see happening instead.
- Problem solve ways to improve the performance to meet those expectations. Ask for, and listen, to their ideas.
- Propose a solution and set some goals.
- Coach them to help them achieve the goals.
- Review the achievement of goals and acknowledge improvements.

Useful Techniques

Reframing

Reframing is about:

- Enabling the staff member to view an issue or situation in a new way
- Raising the staff member's awareness of different perspectives
- Facilitating 'insight' and changing perceptions
- Enabling the staff member to take responsibility for finding and implementing solutions
- Trying to gain commitment to a change in behaviour and/or outlook
- Not 'buying into' defensive behaviour or resistance.

Reframing entails:

- Reflecting back / empathising (to show you have heard what the staff member has said)
- Asking open ended questions based on How? or What? (to move the staff member towards a solution).

Examples of Reframing

Staff member: "We've tried that already and it didn't work"

Manager: "I'm glad to hear you've had previous experience of this (reflects back). What would we need to do to make it work this time?"

Staff member: "It sounds great – but it will be very expensive..."

Manager: "Yes, it is a great idea (reflects back). How do you think we can make it more affordable?"

Staff Member: "It's a fantastic idea, but I reckon Executive will not agree to it..."

Manager: "Yes, it is a fantastic idea (reflects back). How do you think we can get Executive to see it that way?"

Staff Member: "I don't want to / can't do that"

Manager: "I hear what you are saying (reflects back). What would have to happen for you to feel you can do this?"

Facilitative Questioning

Facilitative questioning is about:

- Helping the staff member reflect on what they have done and/or learned
- Exploring underlying beliefs, assumptions and values
- Inviting interaction
- Encouraging exploring together
- Keeping the conversation going
- Not closing down the conversation by confronting directly
- Not 'buying into' defensive behaviour or resistance.

Examples of Facilitative Questioning

- Tell me some more about
- Help me to understand by giving me an example of that
- How did / do you feel about this?
- What is another way you could interpret that?
- What assumptions do you think you are making here?
- How important is this to you?
- Can you please describe for me
- What would happen if you were to make this change?
- How do you think this might look for you?
- How about we brainstorm together the pros and cons of this?

Dealing with Resistance to Change

A useful model for working through resistance with staff is to apply the Stages of Change concept. The model plots categories along a continuum of motivational readiness to change a behaviour. There are 5 stages from Pre-Contemplation to Relapse. Each stage is listed below with suggested strategies for working through each one.

Stage	Strategies
<p>Pre-Contemplation</p> <p>At the pre-contemplation stage of change - a person is unaware that there is a need to change.</p> <p>Often they are oblivious that there is an issue with their performance and are not conscious of the need to improve. This could be for a number of reasons including: nobody has told them that they need to improve, or they have no interest in improving.</p>	<p>General Principle: Raise awareness.</p> <p>Ask:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “In what way would this change make things better for you...?” • “What would happen if you were to make this change?” • “How do you see the impact of your behaviour on the team that you have said you like being part of?”
<p>Contemplation</p> <p>At the contemplation stage a person is thinking about changing, but they have not yet acted upon these thoughts. The primary characteristics of these people is ambivalence and uncertainty.</p> <p>At this stage, it can be easy to become impatient and try to force the person in to change. However, pushing the person too hard now is likely to increase their resistance to change.</p>	<p>General Principle: Get them to take responsibility.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not confront resistance rather reflect back. You may hear hesitant confirmation, “Yes but...”, “I don’t know”, “I’m not sure”, shoulder shrugging, silence. • Simply reflect the person’s feelings, perceptions or disagreements. “You feel unsure? Let’s talk about that” • Use exaggerated reflection; “So what you’re saying is that you’ll never...” • Use double-sided reflection: Reflect back both sides of their ambivalence – “So, on one hand you feel..., but at the same time you feel...”
<p>Preparation</p> <p>At the preparation stage a person is making the first small steps towards a change. At this stage they are still likely to be unsure and unskilled as to how to achieve the necessary change.</p>	<p>General Principle: Develop commitment and take small steps towards getting them to take responsibility.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get agreement and statement of commitment to action from the person. “So, what will you do?”, “What do you see as the next steps to take?” • Develop a range of options of achieving the goal. “What are the options?” • Explore the skills or information required to reach the goal. “What support do you need?”, “Who can support you to achieve your goals?” • Develop and agree on an action plan. “How can we keep track of your progress?”

Stage	Strategies
<p>Action</p> <p>At the action stage a person is starting to take regular action to change their behaviour.</p> <p>They are growing in confidence and are able to see the concrete benefits of change.</p>	<p>General Principle: Regular actions, monitor progress to embed change.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure regular actions to embed the new skills in the person's every day work practices. "Why don't you do XXXX, then you can try out your new knowledge / skills on this project?" • When a person is at the action stage keep in touch with them, and guide them towards setting more stretching goals. "How are things going?", "What goal are you now focusing on?"
<p>Maintenance</p> <p>At the maintenance stage a person is getting results and is feeling good about the changes they've made.</p> <p>They've taken ownership of the change and are moving forward.</p> <p>For most people it takes about 3-6 months to reach this stage depending on the context of change.</p>	<p>General Principle: Try to ensure no relapse once you see some success</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set new stretching goals to keep the person invigorated and engaged in the process of change. • Celebrate successes "You've made huge progress on (be specific)". "What stretch goals do you now need?"
<p>Relapse</p> <p>Unfortunately, most attempts at change don't work straight away. Most people relapse a few times before being able to fully transform their behaviour.</p> <p>On average most people take about 6 attempts before they actualise long-term changes.</p>	<p>General Principle: Normalise and move back into action.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Reframe' relapse as a normal part of change process. "I feel like I'm going backwards" > "It can seem like that sometimes. What 'wins' have you had so far?" • Look for past successes and build on / reinforce those.

Adapted from the CPRC Transtheoretical Model,
www.uri.edu/research/cprc/transtheoretical.htm

Receiving Feedback

As a manager, you are also likely to be receiving feedback from your manager and, if you have positive working relationships, from others, including your staff.

The key to responding in an open and constructive way is to acknowledge that you could learn from the feedback, be it positive or developmental feedback.

Remember to:

- Check for understanding by summarising back if needed
- If you are unclear, ask for specific details. It is important you understand what is being said.
- Deal with any reaction you may be having or feelings you are experiencing in your own mind or openly with the other person if you can. “I’m not sure about what you’re saying...”
- Explore what you are hearing with an open mind – look for the lesson.
- Consider the feedback as another perspective that could be worth considering in making some changes to future practice or behaviour.
- Consider the value of taking some time to reflect on the feedback before you respond, particularly if you are struggling with seeing its usefulness. “I’d like some time to think over what you’ve said...”
- Discuss the feedback with someone you trust and respect, maybe a colleague or a coach – they may be able to help you put the feedback in perspective and help you manage it constructively.

Building Positive Relationships

Feedback and coaching will be most effective where there is a good working relationship between you and your staff. Hence, the importance of building relationships with your staff based on collaboration, trust and mutual respect.

Role modelling and practising every day the behaviours that build relationships based on these principles is core to being a manager, so remember to:

- Get to know your staff as individuals. Seek to understand, ‘What makes them tick?’ ‘What do they find motivating?’ ‘How do they like to be recognised?’
- Be reliable – do what you say you will.
- Be consistent in what you say and what you actually do. Actions speak louder than words!
- Allow your staff to ‘speak up’ without fear. Listen, acknowledge, and explore differing points of view.
- Communicate clearly, often and in different ways your vision, the direction for the work area, the performance expectations.

Other Resources

University of SA internal resources:

Performance Development and Management Web site
www.unisa.edu.au/hrm/employment/performance/pm.asp

Quick Guide for Supervisors of Professional staff
www.unisa.edu.au/staffdev/guides/supervision_quick.pdf

Quick Guide for Developing Professional Staff @ UniSA
www.unisa.edu.au/staffdev/guides/developing_professional_staff_quick_guide.pdf

The Art of Supervision – an action learning toolkit
www.unisa.edu.au/staffdev/guides/art_of_supervision_guide.pdf

Manager as Coach – A Good Practice Guide
www.unisa.edu.au/staffdev/guides/manager_as_coach.pdf

Professional Development Starter Questions for Career Conversations
www.unisa.edu.au/staffdev/word/StartQuestCareer.pdf

Providing Quality Feedback: A Good Practice Guide
www.unisa.edu.au/staffdev/guides/good_practice_guide_to_providing_quality_feedback.pdf

External resources:

Blanchard K., Zigarmi, P. and Zigarmi, D (2004), Leadership and the One Minute Manager

Grant, A (2003), Solution Focused Coaching

Grant, A and Greene, J (2005), Coach Yourself: @ Work

Winter, G (2008), Think One Team

Scott, S (2002), Fierce Conversations

www.mftrou.com

www.managementhelp.org/commskls/feedback/feedback.htm

Appendix 1: Giving Developmental Feedback - Ineffectively

This is a debriefing session between a manager and a staff member following completion of a project that went fairly well, but the manager feels there are some areas where things could have been handled more effectively.

Manager: So, how do you think it went?

Staff Member: I thought it went quite well

Manager: It wasn't too bad

Staff Member: What do you mean?

Manager: Well, I don't want to upset you, but in fact there are some issues we need to talk about..."

Staff Member: Issues? What sort of issues? I did a good job. What do you mean upset me?

Manager: Well, OK, we do need to talk about this, but you may not like what you hear

Staff Member: Hang on, you didn't talk to me about any issues before

Manager: Well, I didn't want to distract you at the time

Staff Member: But you should have told me earlier if you had problems with me

Manager: No, I didn't say I had problems with you

Staff Member: What then?

- What is happening here?
- What are the reasons for the conversation escalating in to a confrontational meeting where the feedback is not heard and taken on board?

Appendix 2: Giving the same Developmental Feedback - Effectively

- Manager: So, how do you think it went?
- Staff Member: I thought it went quite well
- Manager: It wasn't too bad
- Staff Member: What do you mean?
- Manager: I liked the way you handled the planning, and you engaged the project team very effectively, they were right on board and knew what they had to do when. That's often tough to achieve. I think if you had engaged the union earlier on, that would have been helpful and saved us the delay later on. I'm wondering how you think their engagement could have best been done?
- Staff Member: I think I should have suggested talking earlier about the project in more detail at the staff/union consultative meetings. I probably didn't develop a clear enough communication strategy from the outset to identify the needs of not only the union, but a number of other stakeholders. I seemed to work that bit out as I went along.
- Manager: That's a good point and I should have probably asked about the communication strategy earlier too. How do you think we can best learn from this project experience?
- Staff Member: I was going to convene a debriefing with the project team, so we could all look back and think about what we might do differently next time.
- Manager: That's a great idea. Brainstorming with the project team is a great way to share some learnings. Is there anything you need from me in that debriefing process?
- Staff Member: Actually, if you have time, it would be good if you could come along to the meeting.

- What is happening here?
- What are the reasons for this conversation turning into a collaborative discussion where the staff member engages and takes on the feedback?