Feedback

Feedback is a specific form of communication. It is the process used either formally or informally to transmit information about behaviour.
Because the focus is on behaviour, giving and receiving feedback demands well-developed interpersonal skills.
When presenting feedback it is necessary to provide both positive and negative feedback. Some people actually feel uncomfortable giving praise, fearing that it may come across in a patronising manner or result in complacency. Others worry that giving negative feedback will result in conflict or argument.

Positive Feedback

It is very important to give positive feedback. References to what people do well help to reinforce positive behaviour. It is extremely unlikely that there will be no positive feedback to provide. It may be a cliché but it is true that everyone is good at something. Having said that it is important not to invent positives for the sake of balance.

Tips for giving Positive Feedback

- Introduce the topic for discussion
- Be specific about behaviour - give specific information and factual information
- Explain the impact of the behaviour - help the individual to recognise the benefits of the behaviour
- Encourage continued use of the behaviour - explain the need to continue
- By being specific it is clear to the person receiving the praise that it is genuine

Negative Feedback

Many people fear giving criticism because of the risk that the person they are criticising will criticise back or become angry or upset.
We have to get in the right frame of mind about negative feedback. Giving negative feedback is necessary to improve performance and it should be a constructive exercise.
Pointing out inappropriate behaviour offers greater respect than ignoring it because it suggests that the person has the potential to improve.

Constructive versus Destructive Criticism

Constructive Criticism	**Destructive Criticism**
Concentrates on behaviour	Concentrates on attitude or personality
Strengthens relationships	Damages relationships
Is solution focused	Is problem focused
Is specific	Is vague
Is unemotional	Is emotional

Constructive criticism is specific about behaviour and seeks solutions.
Destructive criticism is personal, damages relationships and leaves issues unresolved.

Unfortunately criticism is often presented destructively. If it is perceived as a personal attack, the receiver becomes defensive and feels vulnerable and threatened. The response will be fight or flight. Those who fight will become angry and argumentative while those with a tendency towards flight will deny or abdicate responsibility. The outcome will be unsatisfactory and no solution will be found to performance/behaviour problems.

Tips for giving negative feedback

- Introduce the topic/s for discussion
- Use minimum muscle – most people are very sensitive to criticism
- Use "I" messages e.g. "I feel, I'm concerned, I'm worried" rather than "you" messages that can sound blaming. "I'm concerned about the standard of your dress" sounds better than "Your standard of dress is not good enough"
- Criticise the behaviour not the person. For example, " It's not like you however you made a number of typing errors" rather than "You are a useless typist"
- Be specific about the behaviour under review and give specific information and factual evidence. For example, " I'm concerned as you were 10 minutes late on Monday and Friday" rather than "You are habitually late"
- Explain the impact of the behaviour i.e. help the person to recognise the consequences of their current behaviour
- Seek a solution. Ask for suggestions to bring about change or offer a solution
- Agree on an outcome. Summarise the main points of the discussion; be specific about actions required and gain commitment to action

Receiving Negative Feedback

It is inevitable that some people will interpret negative feedback as criticism and most people feel uncomfortable when criticised. We need to be able to receive negative feedback as constructive criticism, which can aid our development.

- Actively listen to the person giving feedback
- Reflect back the criticism - check understanding
- Seek clarity - ask for specifics and more information
- Ask for or offer a solution - ask for suggestions