



Keyword: Feedback

# Three Techniques for Giving Better Feedback And One Big But

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by Kevin Eikenberry

Feedback is something we all need, and at least in some instances something we all want. And yet for many leaders, giving feedback is something we aren't comfortable doing, or don't feel we do successfully.

This article is designed to give you some techniques to help make this valuable and important process more effective both for you (the sender of the feedback) and the feedback receiver as well.

## Three Techniques

**Get people to talk about their own performance (first).** While there are some times that people know or understand how they need to improve, even if they are in denial about a major behavioral gap, they always have an opinion about their work or performance. Before diving into the feedback you have for them, ask them what *they* think. This approach does a number of things (each of which could be worthy of an article in itself). Getting the other person talking about their performance:

- Engages them in the process and reduces fear or apprehension they might have.
- Helps them practice the habit of reflection, a skill critical to optimal learning.
- Reduces their defensiveness and resistance because people can't argue with their own information.
- Provides you with valuable information on their perspective and what they see as most important in their performance (which can improve the feedback and coaching that you then give them).

**Share your observations.** Of course feedback is about giving people the information you want to communicate. This technique relates specifically to your personal observations. This means giving feedback based not on hearsay, or third party feedback, but based on your personal observations. Notice too that when I call it a personal observation it helps us realize that our feedback is our perception. Recognizing this will help you as well.

More than once I have given feedback based on my assumptions or interpretations, rather than my direct observation. When we provide feedback based on our assumptions or interpretations, not only can we be wrong, but we create a situation where defensiveness and denial can increase. If you must interpret behavior, or surmise the "why's" for



## Three Techniques for Giving Better Feedback and One Big But (continued)

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people's behavior, explain that you are interpreting and do that after you have shared actual observations first.

**Look at both sides and all perspectives.** A great way to avoid or reduce your dependence on interpretations and assumptions is to consciously look at other people's perspectives, or consider other issues related to people's behavior or performance. This is where the input and feedback of others can help you in giving a complete and balanced picture of feedback to someone. The approach of a 360° feedback approach – where people receive feedback from peers, their boss, customers and more – is based on this fact.

You do not need a formal 360 feedback process to take advantage of this approach. Ask others for their input. Survey Customers and peers. Then use that information when giving feedback. (Note this isn't in conflict with the technique above, it is simply a different approach – and the feedback that comes from others should be shared as such, as opposed to being shared as personal feedback.)

You can put these three techniques together in a sequence, or you can use any of these techniques individually – any or all will help you give feedback that will be received, heard and (hopefully) applied more effectively. There is however, one big but . . .

### The Big But

The big but is that in the end, giving effective feedback can't be about the technique, it must be about the other person. Yes, the techniques will help, especially as you get more comfortable in using them. But you cannot rely or lean on a process or technique and lose sight of the real purpose of the feedback.

The purpose of the feedback should always be to communicate caring, support and encouragement for the other person. In other words, our intent must be pure; our intent should be to aid or assist the other person in reaching personal or organizational goals and objectives through more effective performance.

Learn and use the techniques, but keep your intent clear and in mind. When you combine genuine intent with the techniques described above, your results will skyrocket!



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