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## GIVING AND RECEIVING FEEDBACK

### Guidance Notes

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Giving and/or receiving feedback is a two way experience. It can appear as a threatening or worrying prospect to managers. As a result they may struggle to do either effectively. Conducted properly it can however be one of the greatest skills a manager can develop. It can also be a means of helping staff to consolidate or change behaviour and achieve individual or team goals.

Feedback can also enable people to see things about themselves they may not have recognised. It can provide information to help them enhance their positive qualities and focus on areas that need to be changed. Highlighting and rewarding good performance is just as important as pointing out where people are going wrong. Even if someone is performing well, without feedback they may be unaware of it and lose motivation as a consequence. By explaining how individual actions affect others and by comparing past and present performance feedback can create a sense of accomplishment. This can itself then lead to further improvements in performance.

**Giving and receiving feedback well can be one of the most important skills a manager develops**

### How to provide effective feedback

Prior to giving any kind of feedback it is important for managers to establish what the employee thinks about their work. This will provide a basis for dialogue and send out a message that the exercise is thorough even if some of the feedback is critical. It is also essential that you prepare in advance and know precisely what you want to say as well as what you want to achieve.

For feedback to be effective you should

- Pick an appropriate time and place
- Speak in plain English and be specific, descriptive and non judgemental about the action or behaviour in question. Give detailed examples and focus on the actions rather than the individual
- Give feedback in sequence and don't confine it to the annual review. It is most effective when delivered on an ongoing basis
- Don't base feedback on hearsay or gossip but on supporting facts or evidence
- Consider the needs of the recipient. Feedback can be destructive if it only takes your needs into account
- Check to ensure you are communicating clearly. Ask the person to rephrase what you have said to see if it is what you meant and has been understood
- Balance negative feedback with positive comments as this way it is more likely to be accepted. Take any recent changes or improvements into account
- Get feedback on your feedback-your impression of your performance and of the effectiveness of the session may not correspond to the recipient's. It is necessary to get their view of what you did well and where you could improve

## Handling negative feedback

Negative feedback can be the most difficult to give and receive but is a critical part of the process of two way communication. Ways to make criticism constructive rather than destructive may include the following

- Explain *why* what you are discussing is important
- Be specific and give examples-particularly important with negative feedback
- Describe rather than evaluate. Concentrate on the facts-what happened in a particular situation and what were the consequences of the person's actions
- Make the tone and pitch of your voice as measured and neutral as possible so that valuable information is not perceived as 'the usual moaning or complaint'
- Direct your comments to specific skills, actions or behaviours which can be modified rather than to obscure personality traits - real or imagined. The employee can do little or nothing to change such traits and even if they could may not see them as problems in need of attention
- Seek solutions. Rather than attributing blame focus on the way forward - make and listen to suggestions for improvement
- Don't put it off - delay can only make matters worse

## Summary

Managers may find giving feedback an alarming prospect and perhaps something to be avoided. Properly handled, giving constructive quality feedback is one of the quickest and easiest ways of improving motivation, performance and relationships.

Managers skilled in giving feedback will in general terms be able to

- Establish better working relationships due to their good interpersonal skills
- Develop the performance of their staff as part of a virtuous circle of quality. This has a positive effect on performance whereas sub standard feedback may have the opposite effect
- Become more credible as leaders as a result of improvements in individual or team performance.

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