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I'm OK. You're OK.: 10 Best Practices for Giving and Receiving Feedback

**"Feedback is the breakfast of champions."
~Ken Blanchard**

I'm OK. You're OK. That's the title of a popular self-help book written in the late 1960's. But now, in 2010, those words remind me of the ultimate goal of effective feedback: an experience where each party leaves the conversation feeling "OK" and focused on moving forward.

I know it's a lofty goal. The feedback process is often a challenge for both the giver and receiver. As an Executive Coach, one of my most important roles is to provide constructive feedback to my coaching clients. And providing that feedback, while supporting and encouraging my client, is a delicate dance. In your role as leader, you face the challenge daily as you work to develop the technical and leadership skills of your direct reports.

But feedback, both positive and negative, is a form of communication that is integral to our learning and development regardless of whether we are on the giving or receiving end. And at its roots, giving and receiving feedback is a skill that great leaders must continually practice and work to perfect.

When done right, providing constructive and useful feedback to someone else can pave the way to their outstanding performance. The result of the experience is instructive to the receiver's learning and growth. You are communicating to the receiver, *YOU* are "OK," but maybe your behavior, actions or technical performance are currently not.

One of my clients shared the positive results when he confronted the disruptive behavior of one of his employees. He had previously laid the groundwork of trust and a culture of respect and accountability so his feedback was favorably received.

When the feedback is botched, however, relationships are strained and productivity tanks. If you're the giver, you lose the opportunity to motivate and develop your staff. If you're on the receiving end, you're turned off and tune out.

Because the feedback process is a critical element to our role as leaders, I've compiled a list of 10 "best practices" for giving and receiving feedback.



For the Giver

1. When preparing yourself for the feedback conversation, tune into your skill of empathy. Imagine that you are on the receiving end of your comments and craft your message accordingly.
2. Set the stage for the feedback conversation so your employee is mentally prepared for it. For best results, set a location that is private and power neutral.

Try this: "I'd like to have a conversation with you about the meeting today. Will this time work?" Or just simply, "When you have a minute, I'd like to give you some feedback on the report you submitted."

3. State the behavior, observation or situation objectively. Be as specific and factual as possible. Avoid making inferences or stating opinions which are easily debatable and less useful for the listener.

Try this: "When you came late to the meeting...." Or, "I noted 4 errors on this spreadsheet."

4. Communicate the significance of the situation. Share the impact of your employee's behavior, error or actions on your stakeholders, team or organization.

Try this: "The customer was disappointed the project was delivered late." Or, "Others on the team felt disrespected." Or, "The errors cost a loss in confidence in the quality of the total project."

5. Dialogue with your staff about possible solutions to the situation. Ask for their perspective on how they could resolve the situation.

Try this: "How can we prevent this from happening again?" Or, "How do you see this?" or, "What thoughts do you have on this situation?"

6. Express your sincere interest in your employee's development and confidence in their abilities. Ongoing feedback, especially positive feedback, is crucial for his or her development. It is one of your fundamental responsibilities as a leader.



For the Receiver

7. Remember to approach your overall role as one of a continuous learner. This attitude will set you up to welcome the feedback process with open arms. We all have skills, behaviors or technical expertise that we can improve.
8. Listen to the feedback and consider the possible truth in what you are hearing. Avoid defensiveness at all costs.
9. Clarify what you're hearing. If you're not sure what you're hearing, ask for specific examples or clarification that will help you understand the feedback you're receiving.
10. THANK the giver. We know it often takes courage to speak candidly. Remember, without feedback, we operate in a vacuum and cut ourselves off from our own growth and development.

Giving and receiving feedback should be a regular habit and not just a semi-annual or yearly event. Establishing a culture of trust, respect and connection is the starting point for the feedback conversation and your "communication" in these areas happens daily. The result is a mutually positive relationship where both parties feel "I'm OK and You're OK."

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