

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



817 6 Steps to Effective Corrective Feedback

Yesterday, we talked about making all critical feedback in private. I'm Jerry Roberts and today, we'll break down what works best when you get that privacy. That's up next, on The Extra Point.

Okay, you follow smart management practice in never jumping on a worker when other workers are around. You make sure that all such encounters are handled in your office, or the conference room. Good for you. Score a point for good decision making.

Now, you're faced with what to do when you sit down with the worker. How is this meeting going to play out? Will it end on a positive note? Will some learning take place? Can it be motivational? Will it improve or detract from our working relationship? The good news is that if you're actually walking through these questions ahead of the meeting, that's already a positive thing.

Let's get one point out of the way. Most managers have no concept of how to deliver what everybody likes to call "constructive criticism." It's almost always criticism, but rarely constructive. I'd like to think that the majority of managers really would like the session to be constructive, not a power play, so we'll assume that's the case.

Second, we're not talking here about serious administrative issues, where termination or other disciplinary considerations are on the table. This is a simple issue of you wanting or needing to provide some correction to the employee.

Let me lay the foundation. Effective feedback is a key leadership tool, even when it's negative feedback. You can think of it as a reset button. We're a bit off-track. Mistakes were made, maybe emotions got a little out of whack. We want to spend a few minutes to put everything back in order, and send a

productive worker back to the job. How do we do that? I've got six steps you can use.

1. Make them comfortable when they get into the room. They may be feeling some tension, particularly if they're worried over what could be coming next. Make sure that you're not tense, or unsure what to do, or the worker will likely pick up on that — and it won't help. Don't call them in until you're emotionally set to go. Since this is corrective in nature and not disciplinary, tell your face. If you look grim, that's going to intensify the fear factor.

That said, if your relationship is already good, with trust built up, that should help to calm some of those worries for both of you. Offer a cup of water.

2. Take your time and don't rush into what happened. If there's a decent relationship, play off of it. A little small talk can reduce the temperature in the room, and get the person talking. They know you'll get around to the business at hand, but may appreciate some personal interaction ahead of that.

3. Transition to that business easily. "George, you're doing a good job and I'm happy with your work. You know, I did notice something that I feel could improve. Are you open to some feedback?" Or, following an argument with another person, maybe you say, "George, your work is good. You're a solid performer. I was surprised that you and Mary got into it this morning. Tell me what happened."

Hear them out. Don't interrupt and don't start formulating your judgment while they're explaining their position. You need to be an active listener. Make notes, as necessary. When they finish, read back what they said in your own words, and ask if your understanding is accurate.

(Con't.)

4. Provide the correction. The individual has to understand the impact of certain actions and behaviors, and your take on how to do it better. Make it a discussion, not a one-way shoving of the rules down their throat.

5. Let them summarize the key points and importance. Big Ed, my first boss, taught me this. After the correction, he'd have the individual summarize the meeting in their own words, along with what was learned and why it was important. I've used that in my own management dealings.

First, you'll be sure they got the point and understand. Second, the final words on the topic are theirs, not yours. It's almost like they're correcting themselves. Do you get that?

6. If you've been meaning to discuss personal development with the worker, and you feel you're now ending the corrective phase on a high note, you can transition to chatting about the next step in their growth plan.

Or, simply reaffirm your opinion of their value to the team, and let them go.

Corrective feedback doesn't have to be traumatic, for either party. It works best when there is a solid relationship in place, so work on that and build it.

That's The Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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