

The distasteful sandwich

Have you been taught to "sandwich" constructive criticism between two positive statements?

Example: "Barb, you are a wonderful communicator, but the last three meetings you've dominated the conversation and even interrupted others while speaking. I'd appreciate you being more aware and giving others a chance to contribute. And by the way, your recent report outlining team goals was well-written."

I think this is a distasteful way of delivering feedback and here's why:

- 1. "But" is an eraser word.** We all have been taught that anything that follows the word "but" negates everything said prior. The positive information gets discounted.
- 2. The message doesn't sound sincere.** Since too many of us are familiar with this technique, it screams technique, which lowers trust and believability.
- 3. It destroys the truth behind the positive messages.** Most of us walk away from the "sandwiched" approach only hearing the critical feedback. We focus on the meat and completely miss the positive messages. It's better to save the bread for another time to reinforce someone's talents.

What to do instead?

1. Share the specific event, behavior or performance that concerns you.
2. Explain how this creates a challenge.
3. Ask for the desired behavior change.
4. Be supportive and listen.

In the above example you would simply say, "Barb, the past three team meetings I've noticed you spoke the majority of the time and interrupted others. Others end up not contributing and we could be losing out on some great input. During our meeting later today, I'd like you to be more aware of your communication style and allow others the floor. I still want your input today. The team needs you and values your contribution. Can I support you in this in any way?"

You may think, "Hey, that was just an open-faced sandwich!" It was a sincere way to help Barb understand that she is valued. And the comment is also specific to the issue at hand.