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7-step approach to giving feedback

Managers regularly provide feedback to their employees, but bosses aren't the only ones who can use this important skill.

That co-worker whose procrastination just put your project in peril could also use some direct feedback, as could the newly hired admin who is as green as they come.

Giving negative feedback requires you to counsel and criticize in a way that alerts a co-worker to where the problem lies and what must be done to solve it. Follow this seven-step method:

1. Tell it like it is. Don't sidestep the issue; be straightforward and tell the co-worker exactly what your concerns are.

Example: "I'm troubled by the way you're handling your portion of our joint project."

2. Provide feedback immediately. Feedback is most useful when given at the earliest opportunity after a particular incident. Effective feedback allows the recipient an opportunity to correct behavior right away.

3. Paint a specific picture of how you view the situation. Describe what you see happening by using objective details, not subjective opinions.

Example: "When we planned the timeline for this project, we agreed on certain milestones. You've been late on three of the milestones so far."

4. Present the lowdown of the outcome. Make sure your co-worker understands the connection between his behavior and the negative results. This lets him know that he can control the consequences.

Example: "Because your portion of the work has come in late, I've had to reschedule other work in an effort to work around you. The lateness has a negative impact on this project and on other work, as well."

5. Give credit where credit is due. Signal the right actions to repeat in the future, and let him know you appreciate his effort.

Example: "I know it can be frustrating, but I was happy to see that you reorganized your schedule last week to catch up and hit one of our deadlines."

6. Get his verbal buy-in.

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Example: “Do you think you could make the same effort to hit our last two remaining milestones on this project?”

7. Put the feedback in writing. After your conversation, send a follow-up email reviewing what you talked about. It helps reduce misunderstandings and leaves a paper trail.

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