Delivering Employee Feedback

1. The following information provides useful information for delivering employee feedback about their performance to ensure the feedback has been heard, appreciated, and used.

2. Stay connected with employees. Know enough about their work to know when feedback is needed.
   a. When possible, engage in face-to-face communication, with remote employees, this would include video conferences.
   b. Try not to check in too often. Decide on a minimum number of check-ins that can provide insights about an employee’s performance without becoming a micro-manager.

3. Plan for providing feedback. Even if there is a need to speak up quickly, pause and think about the comments first. Take a note or two to capture the major bullet points, and then engage.

4. The goal is to deliver effective feedback to ensure the employee really hears what has been said.
   a. Consider who should deliver the feedback. While the supervisor often delivers the feedback, there may be times when a colleague is better positioned to deliver the feedback and actually be heard.
   b. Consider when to deliver the feedback. It is usually best to deliver the feedback as soon as possible, as well as get to the point quickly.
   c. Consider where to deliver feedback. Try to find a private place to show respect to the employee.
   d. Consider what feedback to give. Give an amount of feedback that will not overwhelm the employee. Provide feedback that is specific and detailed so as to be helpful, but frame it as supportive, and not overly critical. While critical feedback is sometimes needed, err on using a kind and positive perspective.

5. Be sure to follow-up and close the loop. Do not assume the employee heard and agreed with the feedback to begin implementing communicated changes. Follow-up by staying connected after the feedback has been delivered to ensure things are going as expected.

6. Types of feedback.
   a. Standards-Based Feedback – Letting an employee know whether they did or did not meet set standards and focuses on the outcome. It may not be as helpful as it could be if it does not provide actionable items to help an employee improve their performance.
   b. Informational Feedback – Addresses skills and behaviors underlying the outcome in question.
7. Characteristics of effective feedback:

   a. Specific – specificity helps the employee hear the feedback and makes the words used actionable.
   b. Descriptive and Helpful – ensure feedback is descriptive and helpful, to move past simple evaluation or criticism and on toward good coaching.
   c. Personally Owned – the individual providing the feedback should acknowledge that the feedback is coming from them, and not someone else or other team members.
   d. Addresses Issues – address issues and not people; talk about the issues that matter and not the individual.
   e. A Reasonable Amount and Well-Timed – give employees the right amount of feedback at the right time. The right amount of feedback will vary depending on the respective employee and how much feedback they can typically handle. Remember to deliver feedback as soon as possible, but consider if it may be best to wait just a bit if the employee is extremely busy or stressed.
   f. A Dialogue – make the feedback a dialogue instead of just talking to the employee, which involves asking for input and asking questions, including whether the employee understands the main points discussed.
   g. Includes Follow-Up – do not forget to follow-up on the feedback provided to determine whether performance has improved. Follow-up at least once or twice to check-in and ensure the message has been received and acted upon.

8. If an employee becomes defensive to the feedback, begin by validating the point they have made. Then restate or clarify the initial feedback and offer some encouragement. If they remain defensive, be assertive to ensure control. Additional thoughts include:

   a. Resist interruptions by politely indicating they will have a turn to speak.
   b. Try to confirm understanding by asking if there are any questions regarding the feedback given.
   c. Actively listen to the employee’s comments and/or concerns. Be open, focus on the employee, and try not to interrupt them.
   d. Try to understand what the employee is saying instead of prematurely judging them or forming a response while they are still talking. Show empathy.
   e. Once the employee finishes talking, offer a concise summary to show effective listening and understanding have taken place.
   f. Try to control reactions to any strong emotions from the employee and remain calm. Acknowledge their emotions and frustrations, but be clear repeated outbursts are not constructive and will not be tolerated during conversation. Pause the conversation if need be and set up a time to continue the dialogue at another time.
9. Observe employees on a regular basis, including their interactions and substantive work products. Take notes of the following to include in feedback:

   a. Positive Behaviors – value-added behaviors that are worthy of praise. These might include task-oriented actions or interpersonal actions.
   b. Negative Behaviors – may include flawed work products or unproductive interpersonal exchanges and must be addressed through feedback.
   c. Lack of Necessary Behaviors – address good behaviors that are not seen but are needed for advancement.

10. Prepare to deliver feedback effectively. Organize and clarify thoughts to be conveyed.

   a. Write down the action, behavior, or characteristic that prompted the need for feedback. Be clear, brief, and very specific.
   b. Clearly state the reaction to the behavior. Explain why it is potentially unproductive and worthy of discussion. Make specific notes of this.
   c. Think about consequences and write them down. Feedback should reveal the issues, as well as provide clarity regarding what might happen should the situation not improve. This helps with accountability, as the employee needs to understand the potential repercussions of their behavior.
   d. Choose the right time and place to deliver the feedback. Choose a time when the employee is not busy and a place that is private to show respect to the employee.

11. Understand, the more difficult or critical the feedback needed to be delivered, the more difficult it will feel. While it may be challenging, delivering critical feedback is essential. Here are some tips for delivering critical feedback that may involve difficult conversations:

   a. Follow the above-mentioned steps for delivering effective employee feedback.
   b. Address one issue at a time for more difficult conversations. Mentioning multiple issues takes more time, can confuse the person, or might leave them overwhelmed.
   c. Embrace respectful candor and focus on delivering one unique, clear, and honest message the employee will be able to hear and digest.

12. Additional tips to keep in mind:

   a. Encourage team members to embrace the feedback process, even if other leaders in the organization have failed to do so.
   b. When change initiatives are involved, be sure to confront the past, including past mistakes, why they existed, and why they are no longer acceptable.
   c. Keep feedback in confidence and encourage others to do the same. Confidentiality helps build strong trust, more genuine conversations, and more effective feedback.

13. Ask trusted employees or colleagues for their input on the feedback process, including how it can be improved, including what can be done differently. Strive to improve over time.