How to Give Negative Feedback to Senior Colleagues

1. The following information provides helpful tips and tools for giving negative feedback to senior colleagues, including direct supervisors and anyone with more of a senior title.

2. Consider whether the person is the right person to whom should be given the feedback.
   a. First, be clear on the reason for giving the feedback and consider what will happen once the feedback is given or is not given.
   b. Second, ideally, feedback should be given directly to the individual causing the concern or engaging in the negative behavior.
   c. Third, try to determine whether the individual will be open to receiving the feedback.
   d. Fourth, the feedback should come from a kind, respectful place that ultimately will benefit the person.

3. Decide on the best time to provide the feedback.
   a. Ideally, give feedback within 48 hours of observing the behavior or event. The sooner feedback is given, the better chance there is that everyone involved can remember the event or behavior clearly and are able to talk about the situation.
   b. Feedback that is provided weeks later may be questioned or dismissed.
   c. Recognize that providing immediate feedback when emotions or strong feelings are present may not go well.

4. Plan for delivering feedback in a calm conversation.
   a. Plan for the conversation by taking some time to reflect on what happened. Perhaps write down some thoughts and read it out loud without the emotion.
   b. Afterwards, determine whether the feedback should still be given.
   c. Use AID (Actions, Impact, and Desired) to plan out and structure the conversation.
      i. Actions – write down what happened, the actions that occurred.
      ii. Impact – write down the impact the actions had on one or more individuals.
      iii. Desired – write down suggestions for what could be done differently in the future.
      iv. The individual providing the feedback should use “I” statements to focus on their feelings, as it is their feedback and their perspective that is being provided.
      v. Practice the conversation a few times before actually delivering the feedback to ensure the tone is respectful, kind, helpful, and comes from a good place.
5. Prepare for delivering the feedback or message.
   
   a. Generally, feedback should not be delivered via email. Even emails sent with the best of intentions can still be read completely in the wrong tone.
   
   b. Feedback delivered face-to-face or via video conference call is best, and the feedback should be delivered in a private place or space and one-on-one as well. Plan the meeting in advance. Book a conference room or set up the video conference call so interruptions will be less likely.
   
   c. Plan to provide specifics and get to the point sooner rather than later.
   
   d. Avoid making assumptions about what the other person believes, thinks, or feels. Instead, the individual providing the feedback should focus on what they know, think, or feel.
   
   e. If there are concerns the other individual may not readily receive the feedback, ask the other individual for advice on the best way to communicate with them and provide them feedback so they understand.

6. What if the supervisor or senior leader asks for feedback?

   a. Ask for the specifics regarding what area they are seeking feedback.
   
   b. Ask for their preferred structure in delivering the feedback to them, such as a conversation or report for example.
   
   c. Confirm a suitable timeframe for providing the feedback.
   
   d. Show gratitude for having been asked to provide such feedback.