

# Providing Constructive Feedback – A Critical Component in the Manager’s Toolkit

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Several weeks ago, a former Manager colleague of mine sent me an email from his boss that provided him with glowing feedback about his performance over a period of many years. Among other things, she highlighted his ability to form and manage high-performance Teams that always achieved departmental goals and objectives that contributed to the firm’s immense success. In addition, she cited several of his direct reports who advanced in their careers to assume senior leadership positions in the organization, as a result of his guidance and support.

Since we both worked for his boss at different times during our careers, I was immediately surprised by her positive feedback since she was not known as a Manager who provided basic performance feedback, let alone constructive feedback. When my former colleague and I spoke, we both wondered what motivated her to alter her normal approach toward providing feedback. Although we are confused by this abrupt change, we are hopeful that it signals her new attitude toward the importance of providing meaningful feedback.

This recent conversation caused me to reflect on the many Managers I have worked for over the course of my career, including those who developed their employees by providing effective constructive feedback. These are the same Managers who were most admired by their Teams and were highly respected by the entire organization.

## **How does constructive feedback rank within the primary responsibilities of Managers?**

Managers play a critical role in the success of all organizations, and the best ones are normally groomed for leadership roles once they have honed their management skills and have proven their value.

Most experts agree that the primary responsibilities of Managers include the following:

- Recruiting and hiring associates with the right culture fit and job fit for the Team
- Establishing performance objectives for their employees that support organizational goals
- Providing a positive, transparent work environment where employee performance can flourish
- Supporting professional development through coaching and development programs – including training
- Managing workflow and distributing tasks and assignments that help to build employee skill sets
- Evaluating performance and providing constructive feedback that enhances the value of each employee to the organization, and enables career advancement
- Administering the company’s compensation program in a fair and equitable manner

While I agree that all of these duties are vital to the Manager’s ultimate success, the most critical component in the Manager toolkit is providing constructive feedback that enhances the value of each employee to the organization. The reason for this is that it aids employee development so they can add real value to the organization while they advance in their careers.

### **What are the best practices for providing constructive feedback to employees?**

Successful Managers employ many diverse approaches for delivering constructive feedback to their employees. While some are preferable to others, the ones that achieve the most return on their investment are as follows:

- Establish performance goals and objectives at the start of each year so the employee knows how their performance will be measured. In addition, invite the employee to share their personal objectives with you so you can understand their career aspirations and interests – both short-term and long-term.
- Make feedback a routine part of the Manager / Employee relationship so it becomes part of the ordinary course of business. It should be expected and anticipated by the employee since it is a valuable component of the ongoing relationship.
- Be direct, transparent and clear with your employee so they understand what you are suggesting and the reason why it is important for the employee’s professional development. If the employee is going to incorporate your feedback into his / her overall work effort, they need to comprehend what you are recommending and understand how it fits within the plan of development.
- Relate the feedback back to their role in the organization so they know how their improved performance translates to both individual and organizational success.
- Commit to joint ownership so the employee knows that the Manager is working in partnership with the employee to achieve mutual success. This entails appropriate levels of support, as needed, so a “Win / Win” approach can be effectuated.
- Invite others in the organization to participate in the process so the employee gains insight from those who offer unique and diverse perspectives. Carefully select associates who have achieved career success, and who are willing to share their knowledge and expertise with your employee so you can maximize the return on everyone’s investment of time and energy.

## **What is the impact of effective constructive feedback?**

The Manager's investment in providing constructive feedback is important since it yields numerous benefits to both the employee and the organization. In my experience, it is well worth the time commitment and the effort on the part of the Manager, and pays significant dividends. Among other things, the positive impact of constructive feedback includes the following:

- Enhances self-awareness so employees understand their strengths and areas of improvement
- Strengthens Manager / Employee relationships that foster trust and partnership
- Improves employee engagement, focus and performance to achieve goals and objectives
- Increases motivation to excel in the role played by the employee at the firm so he / she can add value
- Augments the organization's ability to attract and retain talented employees who strive for success
- Contributes to a positive corporate culture where staff are comfortable engaging in difficult conversations to address important issues and concerns
- Helps create a positive cycle where candid feedback fuels professional growth, and growth supports improved business outcomes that impact the bottom line

## **The Challenge**

In conclusion, the ability to provide constructive feedback is a critical skill in the Manager's toolkit that needs to be acquired by all Managers as they perform their important role in the organization. Instead of making this a once-a-year ritual during the annual performance review, it should be a routine practice throughout the year in order to reap the benefits articulated above.

If you are a Manager who has not mastered the competency of providing constructive feedback, what is stopping you from taking steps to improve this important Manager skill?

If you are interested in enhancing your managerial performance to achieve better business results, please contact me at [jeff@17gormanadvisors.com](mailto:jeff@17gormanadvisors.com) so we can discuss approaches that may work for you.