

How to Tell Someone They Are Wrong

By ATCEN

Learning how to give feedback takes a lot of discipline, control and gumption. Giving feedback is not just about going to a person and telling them what we think of them, we should go through a systematic thinking process prior to giving them feedback.

Let's learn the 9 steps to giving feedback based on the following scenario. Joe, a new colleague of ours has just completed his first corporate sales presentation to a client. Things went smoothly in the presentation but there were a few areas that we felt Joe could improve in. So let's apply the 9 steps of giving feedback.

- 1. Timing:** Feedback should always be given as soon as possible after the incident has happened. A good time to give Joe feedback would be on the ride back to the office.
- 2. Be clear and be specific:** Be clear what we want to say and be able to give specific examples to establish our point. Example: Joe mumbled 3 times during the presentation- whenever he came to slides related to the company history.
- 3. Purpose of giving the feedback.** If the purpose for us giving the feedback is vindictive in nature and its about making us feel better then the feedback should never be given. However if the feedback is about improving Joe or enhancing the relationship between us and Joe or Joe and another party then the feedback serves a good purpose. In this scenario it is to improve Joe's presentation skill.
- 4. Prepare the person for feedback:** Never launch into feedback immediately. Always set an expectation that allows the listener to know what to expect. A good suggestion here would actually be asking the person whether they would like to discuss the incident:
Example: "Joe, can we discuss on how the presentation went just now"
- 5. Emphasize on the positive:** When giving feedback if possible it should always begin by emphasizing on the positive. This will ensure that they listen carefully.
Example: "You did a good job at the presentation just now, the clients were impressed. However I felt you could have been even better."
- 6. Own the feedback that you give :** Notice the word "I felt" above; or other words such as "I notice" or "I saw". Show that the feedback is coming from you and it is based on your own observation and judgment. Remember you are not to evaluate or criticize what they did rather bring it up as how you perceived the situation.
- 7. The Behavior not the Person:** Focus on the behavior of the person rather than the attitude or personality of the person, be specific and clear when stating this.
Example: "Joe, during the presentation there were several occasions when I could not hear you clearly. All I heard were a series of mumbles, especially when you were explaining the parts related to the company history. On several occasions the clients were even looking at one another and giving each other looks. Did you know you were mumbling?"
- 8. Focus on things that can be controlled:** Whenever we give feedback make sure that it is on things that

can be controlled. Likewise whatever Joe's reason is for mumbling, make sure it is focused on things that he can control, not things that cannot be controlled. The above feedback on the mumbling can be rectified by Joe but the constant disruption during the presentation by the client's telephone cannot be controlled by the two of you.

9. Be solution focus: Whenever a feedback is brought up, we must make sure that we are willing to seek a solution with the person. In overcoming the problem or resolving the issue.

Example: Joe: "You know what, I have been in this organization for only 6 days and I have not had the time to go through the history of the company thoroughly. Well I suppose the mumbling was just a way of hiding my nervousness."

You: "Its good that you brought this up, is there any way I can help you in learning the company's history"

Feedback is a way to let people know how effective they are in what they are doing, how they affect us or others. Giving feedback to someone helps them become more effective and in turn it supports us and others to become more effective and build better relationship. So let's start giving feedback. Help them help themselves and help us help ourselves.