



Feedback is a gift

By DR. LARRY COLE

THIS TITLE is not an oxymoron.

I'm writing this article for two critical reasons: First, feedback is required for us to improve performance. Second, most supervisors cringe at the thought of providing performance feedback to employees. And it gets worse. I've talked with numerous employees from multiple dealerships who have not received a formal evaluation during their years of employment.

We use feedback so silently every day that we fail to recognize its importance. Without using feedback, you would not be able to leave your house and arrive at your dealership. Actually, without using feedback you wouldn't be able to leave the house. You would be in a constant state of "I don't know where I am." We've all been lost in strange places and it's not a comfortable feeling. Feedback was not telling us where to go.

Let's consider the fact that the number one responsibility of a supervisor is to develop their talent. Let me ask you: How are you or your people going to improve without feedback? It's not going to happen. I'm committed to improve my golf skills and I keep several metrics throughout every round. I want to see my progress.

Here's part of the problem. I've asked literally thousands of people if the word "feedback" has a positive or negative connotation? The overwhelming response is negative. We are hard wired to avoid the negative. Therefore, if a leader believes it's negative, well... you know the rest of the story.

Now this is an oxymoron. Literally thousands of supervisors have told me they want their people to grow and to be even better than the supervisor, which is being a people-smart leader. Do you think those employees are going to improve their performance in a vacuum? Obviously not.

Controlling one's destiny

Employees who are passionate about improving their performance should take control of their own destiny and keep their own scores as I do with my golf game.

The leadership shadow is another issue that needs addressed. Over time, employees acquire the characteristics of their supervisor without being aware of it. If you're the kind of supervisor who is reluctant to provide real-time feedback, then what are you teaching your people? The fact is supervisors need to look in the mirror in an effort to see what they are modeling to their people on a daily basis.

I'm addressing four additional facts before providing you a few tips to improve giving real-time feedback.

First, I want to emphasize that not providing performance feedback is simply not fair to employees or the dealership. The dealership's performance is dependent upon its employees' performance. Remember, your dealership's performance is only going to improve when your people improve.

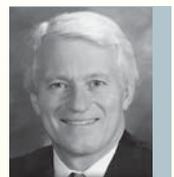
Second, I've heard from many employees who say they only get feedback when they do something wrong and their supervisor becomes upset. This is not something you want to hear.

Third, according to participants in the WEDA seminars I've conducted, the number one reason supervisors fail to effectively provide feedback is the fear of not wanting to hurt anyone's feelings. There should be no intent to hurt anyone's feelings – you are helping them to improve their performance.

Fourth, providing real-time feedback shows your employee you care about them. Wanting to be "cared for as a person" is a universal human characteristic.

Five tips to providing real-time feedback.

1. To begin with, you have to understand the importance of real-time feedback and believe that providing feedback is a gift to help develop your talent. You're reprogramming their thinking to focus on the positive characteristics.
2. Focus on what you want the employee to do correctly instead of crucifying them for their actions. In other words, mistakes are teaching moments to help your people grow.
3. Note that a blindfolded marksman can hit a target. To do so, that marksman needs 1) real-time feedback from an observer and 2) the specific measurement their effort missed the target. The same is true for employees.
4. Instead of telling them (being told automatically creates resistance) how to improve the performance, put your suggestion in a question, "Have you considered doing it this way?"
5. I had the pleasure of working with a supervisor who introduced sensitive performance conversations with, "It's time for an ugly baby conversation." This worked for her. You can generate your own introductory statement and it can be as simple as, "Let's use this situation as a teaching moment."



DR. LARRY COLE

is a lead trainer for the Western Equipment Dealers Association's Dealer Institute.

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Let me leave you with this last thought:

It is well-known the most effective leaders seek performance feedback from every source.

They listen to understand and put what they hear to work to improve performance. Additionally, these leaders want to know what is not working versus being told how good they are for the very fact that the former is richer with improvement opportunities than the latter.

The point is this: Just imagine if everyone in your dealership considered feedback as a gift and it became a positive characteristic of your dealership's culture. Such a dealership would truly be a university of learning.

You can make that happen within your sphere of control by showing your people that their feedback is a gift.

1. Share your leadership improvement strategies with direct reports to model your intent to improve performance.
2. Ask them to serve as your accountability buddy and provide you real-time feedback.
3. Consistently ask for their feedback to improve both your performance as well as that of the department.
4. Use the feedback offered.

The most effective supervisors are comfortable with being uncomfortable for they know the more frequently they do what is uncomfortable the more comfortable it becomes. **WED**

LARRY COLE, Ph.D., is a lead trainer for and consultant to the Western Equipment Dealers Association's Dealer Institute. He provides onsite training and public courses to improve business leadership effectiveness and internal and external customer service. Please send questions and/or comments to Larry at teammx100@gmail.com.



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