

## How to Create Champion Performance

My sporting background has taught me that feedback is critical to performance. When I was rowing, I became so conditioned to receiving feedback, that it really was the staple diet that created a great performance. My coach would be continuously assessing my performance against specific criteria. He would then give me ongoing, live feedback that I could take immediate action on. Each training session had a purpose and I always knew where I was at with my development. This is essential for an athlete as it is very easy to plateau when you do not see regular improvement.

For the last 10 years, I have been working within many organisations where feedback is not part of the culture. I have met many managers who do not understand the process of giving feedback and therefore do not do it. Obviously, not giving feedback has a significant impact on staff engagement. Having conducted specific training programs on how to give feedback, I thought it would be useful to share these strategies. If you find these suggestions useful, then feel free to give me feedback!

### Model for Feedback: The Sandwich Model

This is a simple to apply method. It can be used formally or informally. I encourage managers to use informal feedback regularly and in a timely manner.

**Step 1:** Begin your discussion by giving a positive opening statement on your staff member's performance. Be specific. Be relevant. This shows that you have genuinely noticed them and this helps to make them feel important. Obviously you must do some preparation to know what you are going say. As well, collect any actual evidence to highlight their performance such as customer feedback sheets.

For example:

Manager: "John, I wanted to thank you for doing a fine job with the Omega Project. In particular I thought it was excellent how you finished the project three days ahead of schedule and \$5000 under budget. This impressed our client and already they are talking about doing future work with us."

There is always something positive to say about someone. It is your job to find it. If there work was not a great standard, at least praise their efforts or the fact that they even finished the work.

**Step 2:** Identify Points For Improvement (PFI). Regardless of how well someone did a job, there can always be ways to do it better, different, more efficiently next time. Try to come up with between one and three elements that your staff member could improve. Do not overload them with PFI's. If you can not think of any, it is a good idea to ask them how they could do an even better job next time.

Manager: "John, can you think of how we may be able to improve the way we deliver this type of service?"

OR

Manager: "John, I think if we do a project like this again, it would be useful to be more specific in the questions we ask the client. I noticed that when you questioned the client, you lead them down a certain path. Do you know what I mean?" (What we are aiming to do when giving PFI's is to state the actions the staff member took and then to have them agree that this is what they did and the results this got. Unless we get agreement on their actions, we can not move forward to improve their performance.)

Staff Member John: "Yes, I know what you mean. I did not quite get all of the information I needed. I did not realise I was leading them with my questions."

Manager: "Asking questions is an art form and a skill that can be learnt. There are a few different ways that we could improve your knowledge and skills in this. Would you like to do that?"

John: "Yes I would like to do something. What do you suggest?"

Now the conversation has flowed to the point where as the manager you can suggest methods to improve the staff member's performance. It is critical to note that you can not get to this point without agreement on performance.

It is also important to ask the staff member questions instead of telling them. By asking questions you involve them in their own development and you gain permission to assist them. If you do not have permission, you can not help.

Step 3: The final step is to finish the conversation with an overall positive concluding statement. That is designed to leave the staff member feeling good (self esteem) about the conversation. For example:

Manager: "John, I think that when we next have this type of project we will be able to deliver an even better outcome for the client. Once again, a good job with the Omega Project and if there is anything else I can help you with, please see me when you want."

To summarise, giving feedback is critical to performance. When done well, staff will feel important and valued. Take time to informally give feedback rather than to formally schedule it. Most people enjoy the informal catch up more than the highly structured type. Make it regular and timely.