Gain Perspective Before Offering Feedback on Negative Employee Behaviours

Offering constructive feedback to employees is not easy but it is important. Where there are open lines of communication and ongoing conversations about work, tasks, skills, functions and so on the feedback process becomes part of ongoing working relationship. Ideally this provides consistent and real-time information that allows adjustments to occur as part of the process of working.

However, when the feedback involves behaviours that are not tied to skills or job function but reflective of personal actions it becomes more complicated.

There are generally three types of employee behaviour problems at work

- **work performance**, showing up late, not completing tasks, poor skills, lack of understanding, non-cooperation
- **personal**, such as emotional outbursts, intolerance, bullying, poor manners
- **serious or criminal misconduct** such as harassment, theft, threats, physical violence and so on.

When problems are tied to personal behaviours they can be the very tricky to address. In essence you are criticizing a person not just for what they have done in some ways it is akin to criticizing them for who they are.

7 Steps to providing feedback

Constructive feedback involves a few several fairly straightforward steps

1 – Identify the issue/behaviour you need to provide feedback on

2 – Indicate the purpose of the feedback and ask if the person is willing to listen to your feedback

3 – Indicate the impact of the issue on others/the workplace

4 – Ask the person for their input and perspective – look for signs there are concerns that need to be addressed (health, workplace stress, addictions)

5- Discuss and offer specific suggestions for changing the behaviour

6 –Identify how you will help or how the employee can obtain help to make a change

7 – Identify next steps in the feedback and change process

While the steps are fairly clear how you approach the feedback is going to be very important. To implement effective constructive feedback consider these 3 elements before you begin the conversation.

3 Elements to Consider Before Delivering Constructive Feedback

Consider the Workplace –

A key step in addressing an employee's problem behaviours in the workplace involves trying to determine if there is something in the workplace contributing to the problem. If there is a culture of negativity, inordinate amounts of stress, a toxic manager or co-worker and so on these situations can trigger inappropriate behaviours in employees. This does not excuse inappropriate behaviours but it does offer you a place to begin to address the situation.

Consider the Personal –

It is fair to say that sometimes the origins of a problem are a chicken and egg conundrum. In the case of problem behaviours from an employee it can be difficult to determine the interaction between personal and work related as they may become intertwined. A stressed worker may become stressed at home and vice versa. As part of addressing problem behaviours from an employee you need to consider what is happening with your employee.

Consider the Source –

Considering factors such as demographics, culture, health, disability and experience can help you gain perspective. Some personal behaviours are clearly inappropriate, making derogatory comments, yelling, lying about a co-worker but sometimes personal behaviours are in the eye of the beholder. The actions one employee perceives as inappropriate may not be perceived as such by another person.

In one example a manger complained that one team member was demonstrating 'passive-aggressive body language in meetings'. Criticizing someone for their body language, demeanour or other subjective interpretations can be as much about the person making the complaint as the person being complained about. As another example a millennial worker thought he was being friendly and building a relationship with a co-worker but the co-worker found the conversations offensively personal. Similarly an employee with a hidden disability, perhaps a disability such as Aspergers may appear to be rude or un-cooperative in the eyes of another employee.

It is important to consider what other factors are in play and if they are whether it is the person making the complaint who would benefit from feedback. Sometimes looking at the entire context creates opportunities for the entire team, department and organization to gain new skills and perspective.

Effective Feedback In the Workplace

A key to the managing the conversation with an employee is coming to the conversation with an openness to see the situation from the perspective of another person. Only once you have context and perspective you can really begin to address the a situation.

Feedback is best offered in the spirit of helping and with a collaborative approach. Before offering effective feedback take the time to have a conversation about how things are going, look around a little more and then determine what feedback is

necessary.