

# **Fundamental Supervisory Practices**

## **Center for Public Leadership and Governance**

### **UNC-School of Government**

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#### **Topics covered in today's session:**

- Review a process for giving performance feedback and coaching employees for success.
- Integrate content introduced in previous days and apply learnings in skill practice scenarios.
- Practice having a coaching conversation with a staff member and receive feedback from peers.
- Finalize individual development plan to take back home to assist in the transfer of training from the classroom to the job.

## COACHING FEEDBACK GUIDELINES

A number of guidelines can help make the giving and receiving of feedback effective. Feedback is usually more successful when these guidelines are followed. However, these are guidelines, not rules. There may be exceptions to each one. Don't think of these guidelines as the only way to do it. Think of whether the "usual" guidelines apply in each individual case.

In order for feedback to be effective, the feedback must meet three criteria.

1. The employee must understand what the supervisor is telling him or her.
2. The employee must be willing and able to accept what is being said.
3. The employee must be able to do something about the feedback if he or she chooses.

Following are some guidelines the supervisor can use to help make his or her feedback to the employee more effective:

1. Readiness of the receiver: Give the feedback when there are indications the receiver is ready for the feedback. One way to be sure the receiver is ready is to ask.
2. Focus feedback on behavior rather than the person. It is important that the supervisor discuss what the employee *does* rather than comment on what the employee *is*. For example, the supervisor would say, "the employee talked for 45 minutes in the meeting," rather than saying "the employee is a loud mouth."
3. Focus feedback on observations rather than opinions. Observations refer to what the supervisor can see or hear in the behavior of the employee while opinions refer to interpretations and conclusions made from what is seen or heard. This is the same as saying focus on observable behavior rather than assumptions or inferences about that behavior. In a sense, opinions or conclusions about an employee contaminate the supervisor's observations, thus clouding the feedback. When the supervisor offers his or her opinion, and it may be valuable to do this sometimes, it is important that it be identified as opinion, and check for agreement or disagreement from the employee.
4. Focus feedback on description rather than judgment. The effort to describe represents a process of reporting what occurred while judgment refers to an evaluation in terms of good or bad, right or wrong, nice or not nice. Judgment arises out of a frame of reference or value system whereas descriptions represent neutral reporting. When the supervisor finds it necessary to give feedback based on judgment, he or she should be careful to use the organization's value system and not his or her own personal value system.
5. Focus feedback on very specific behavior and a specific situation. Rather than "you tend to procrastinate too much: a statement that is specific is more meaningful and effective. An example of specific is, "I was late turning in my monthly report because I did not receive the monthly contact data from you until after lunch." Give examples of behavior to support the feedback.

6. Focus feedback on the value it may have to the employee and/or organization, not the value of “release” it provides to the supervisor giving the feedback. The feedback provided should serve the needs of the employee getting the feedback rather than the needs of the supervisor to “punish” the employee. Feedback should be given and heard as a way of being helpful, not demeaning.
7. Focus feedback on the amount of information that can be helpful at any given time. Do not overpower the employee with too much information at any one time.
8. Focus feedback on the appropriate time. The closer the feedback is given to the time the event took place, the better. When feedback is not given immediately, the receiver is not able to be clear on exactly what is meant. The feelings associated with the event still exist so that this, too, can be part of understanding what the feedback means. Excellent feedback presented at an inappropriate time may do more harm than good.
9. Feedback is not a demand for change. Each employee makes his or her own decisions and feedback that is presented in a clear and objective manner is most helpful. The feedback should identify the behavior and identify any negative consequences of the behavior, recognizing that the employee may choose the negative consequences over changing the behavior. It is important to always recognize that the choice on making a change in behavior rests with the employee. The supervisor cannot force change.
10. Make sure feedback is given in a two-way conversation where the supervisor inquires with the employee on his or her understanding of the feedback, his/her reactions to the feedback, etc.
11. Focus feedback on how it impacts the organization/job/coworkers/ customer, not on the supervisor’s demands or needs. “The organization needs you to ...” not “I need you to...”

## **Criteria for Deciding Whether or Not to Give Negative Feedback**

1. How important is the problem to the organization?
2. How long has the problem existed (has it been confronted previously)? Is the problem having an impact on the work environment; on your relationship to the person; on the person's relationship to others?
3. What will happen if the problem is not solved?
4. What is the likelihood that the problem will go away on its own?

## **Preparing to Give Feedback**

Once you have decided to give the feedback and have a clear intent to make this a helpful interaction, the following actions may be helpful:

1. Frame your statement using the guidelines for giving feedback.
2. Choose an appropriate time and a location conducive to quiet uninterrupted talk.
3. Let the person know why you felt it was important to share the feedback and your concerns about what might have happened if you did not give the feedback.
4. In feedback situations where there are direct consequences for continuing the behavior that is the focus of the feedback, the giver of feedback needs to make clear what the consequences will be should the receiver's behavior not change. In this instance, the receiver can choose to make a change, can explore other options, or can choose to accept the consequences of not making the behavioral change. It is especially important in this instance to insure balanced two-way discussion so that each party fully understands the interests and issues of the other party.

## Discuss or Not?

Please place a check mark by the situations described below if you would initiate a discussion with the employee about the situation.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. John is routinely 10 minutes late to work once or twice a week.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Laura tells you that she wishes she had not taken the job with the Town.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Phillip missed an important deadline yesterday because he was out of work sick.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. You overhear Amy saying to a co-worker she is unhappy with the way you manage the department.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Robert (an employee in your department) is having an affair with an employee in another Town department.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Tom has been out of work sick at least one day a month and as a senior employee has a minimal sick leave balance.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Melissa tells you that Brad (one of your employees) keeps pestering her for a date and she does not want to go out with him.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Jim has been exhibiting severe mood swings over the past week, and the other employees are complaining about his temper.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Paula has seemed sad and upset over the past few weeks since her mother died.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Cathy had an error in her presentation last night which caused the City Manager to apologize for the incorrect data in a public meeting.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. Jeff told you he was not going to take the light duty assignment in the office you offered him and told you needed to work light duty outside.

## Coaching for Improved Performance Conversation Model

### Pre-Discussion Steps:

1. Gain agreement to discuss the issue and set a meeting time.
2. Prepare for the discussion:
  - Review previous coaching sessions (if any) and identify specific points for discussion.
  - Write down specific words or phrases you will use to open the meeting and to describe the issue in a way that shows consideration and mutual respect.

### “IDEAL Performance Conversation Steps”

<b>1. Identify what happened to cause the meeting and check for agreement.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Describe the specific behavior/actions that have caused the problem.</li> <li>Check out inferences to gain agreement on the problem.</li> </ul>
<b>2. Describe the impact of the problem and listen to the employee’s perspective.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use “I messages” to explain how the behavior affects productivity, customer service, work group relationships, etc. Describe the performance standard that is not being met.</li> <li>Use active listening skills and ask open-ended questions to gain understanding from the employee’s perspective.</li> </ul>
<b>3. Explore possible solutions to the problem and listen to employee concerns and ideas.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ask the employee for his or her ideas for correcting the problem.</li> <li>LISTEN to all ideas without judgment (Ask questions to clarify ideas if needed.)</li> <li>Offer your suggestions only after the employee has exhausted all of his/her ideas.</li> </ul>
<b>4. Agree on a plan of action to improve performance including a time to follow-up.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review what acceptable performance looks like and evaluate possible solutions based on what will be most effective.</li> <li>Agree on a solution including specific milestones for improvement and use the employee’s ideas whenever possible.</li> <li>Tell the employee in a non-threatening manner the possible consequences for failing to fix the problem.</li> <li>Set a date and time for a follow-up meeting to review the effectiveness of the solution.</li> <li>Document the decisions made in the meeting and provide employee with appropriate documentation of the meeting. <i>(This may be a simple email summary of the meeting and actions agreed to. If a formal written warning or disciplinary action is required, follow your organization’s policies on documentation requirements.)</i></li> </ul>
<b>5. Learn from the Performance Discussion</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>At the conclusion of the meeting, ask for specific ideas of how you can help support the employee to be successful and express your confidence in the employee.</li> <li>Following the meeting, reflect on what went well, and what you might do differently in a future discussion.</li> </ul>

## Coaching Skill Practice

### (Everyone Reads)

1. Janice is a Payroll Technician and you supervise her. She basically enters time sheets, prepares payroll reports, prepares insurance bills, and writes checks for payroll vendors such as credit union, garnishments, retirement, etc. Janice has been late three Mondays in a row and called in sick the other two. She has been employed for two years and her performance is acceptable but not a lot more. In her first six months, she went through a separation and then later a divorce. She needed time off during this time for legal appointments and to work out child care issues. You extended her probationary period by three months, and during this time her attendance was fine and her performance acceptable. You are concerned that her attendance is deteriorating again. You have scheduled a time to talk with her.
2. Jim is a Street Maintenance Worker. He does a good job on everything except getting along with coworkers. There have been two incidents in the last two weeks where he got in an argument with crew members. In one case, Bill accidentally backed into him and he lit into him, cussing and telling him he needed to go to kindergarten to learn how to drive. On another occasion, he jerked the rake out of Sam's hand to show him how to rake the asphalt better. Sam has been on the job only two months and you can tell he has been avoiding Jim ever since. Jim's actions have led to tension in the crew and people giving him wide berth. The sense of energy and joking that normally goes on among crew members has been muted. The crew is normally very productive even though they have fun at the same time. You need to get things back on an even keel and are planning to talk to Jim.
3. You are going to be talking to a Fire Engineer named Allen who has worked for the Town for four years. For the most part, he does a good job. However, you have received complaints from several employees regarding his sloppy housekeeping. He doesn't clean up behind himself when he cooks or works on equipment and does an absolute minimum on the station cleaning required for everyone. Every now and then he makes snide remarks about having to do station cleaning, but you personally went over this requirement with him when he was hired and he knew it went with the territory. You want him to start pulling his share of the station maintenance activities and don't want to hear any more complaints from others about him leaving messes.

## Coaching Skill Practice Role Player

**(Supervisor does not read)**

1. You are Janice and work as Payroll Technician. You have been employed for two years. In your first six months you went through a divorce and needed a lot of time away from work. Your supervisor worked with you and let you work longer on probation to prove that you could be a good employee. You appreciate this flexibility on your supervisor's part. The job is OK, but not really motivating or exciting. You basically enter time sheets, prepare payroll reports, prepare insurance bills, and write checks for payroll vendors such as credit union, garnishments, retirement, etc. And your two kids run you ragged on the weekends, making it really hard to get up on Mondays and go to work. You know you need this job, but it is becoming a real drag. You need something to get you more involved in the organization and with people, like helping employees when they have insurance claims problems, or setting up a new employee orientation program for new employees. These are programs that the Town could use, but no one has asked you to do them. Your supervisor is meeting with you today, and you suspect he/she is not happy with your attendance lately.
2. You are Jim and have worked as a Street Maintenance Worker for the Town for three years. You like your job, but get impatient with the inefficiency and clowning around that goes on. You take your job seriously and don't like to see people wasting time or messing up. The supervisor expects things to be done right, but does not seem to take the crew in hand and lets them get away with horse play and a lax work pace. Your impatience sometimes gets the best of you and you lose your cool. So far it hasn't created any problems, and may have actually helped keep people serious and focused on their work. Your supervisor wants to talk to you today, but you don't know what it is about.
3. You are a Fire Engineer named Allen and have worked for the Town for four years. You love the job and have always wanted to work in the fire service. You love the excitement of not knowing what to expect when the alarm goes off and the team work that allows the staff to work together like a well-oiled machine in emergencies and in training exercises. What you really hate is the custodial work you have to do. Fire Engineers are professionals. Other Town employees don't have to clean bathrooms, floors, etc. Why should you have to do it. It really gets under your skin. You know sometimes you don't really pull your weight on this, but you try to make up for it with cooking (which you love), working on the equipment, and other tasks. On a couple of occasions, coworkers have made a snide comment to you, but for the most part, they don't seem to mind the housework and you have a better use for your time.