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Why Providing Critical Feedback Can Be A Gift

Rarely are managers, in any field, well prepared to deal with employees who need corrective input. In fact, we've heard all too often how the whole idea of being critical strikes a note of "being mean," "acting arrogant," or "hurting someone's feelings."

And yes, being critical can be all of those things when misunderstood or delivered without support, care, and kindness.

But when you understand that life well lived is a journey of growth and expansion, then there have to be teachers along the way to provide helpful input. When left to only our own devices, our own perspectives, our own experiences, we can only replicate what we already know. And that's what causes people to be stuck in a rut, unable to take their work life forward in a manner that is continually challenging and transformative.

So, if you are a manager, a supervisor, in any way someone who has the responsibility and opportunity to help other employees improve, please see your role as a gift.

Magic Words

When you can touch another person's potential—beyond what they currently understand about themselves— you have the opportunity to provide the gift of a larger vision of who they are, of how they can conduct their work life, even perhaps a larger sense of their true identity.

While that may be beyond the scope of your work as a manager, it is not outside the scope of touching someone's life and career.

Sometimes people have to have their hearts broken open in order to receive new value about who they are, what they are truly capable of, and how they are viewed by others. And while this can be painful, even very painful on occasion, it is an essential element for professional and personal growth.

That's why your words of critical feedback and reality messages about the need to improve can be Magic Words, providing the inspiration for your recipient to look beyond what they already know and embrace and actualize what you are suggesting is needed for their improvement.

Steer In Another Direction

You may have someone on your team or in your company who needs a frank and honest wake-up call, explaining how they are not a good fit for the company. When you lay out the specifics with care and respect, hopefully the individual can understand that they would be better off if they moved on rather than feel frustrated and continue to receive less than sterling performance ratings.

Sometimes you can steer the individual in a new direction within the company, but be prepared for this to be met with hurt feelings, skepticism, or flat out refusal. In either case, remember that your honest attempt to help has still been a wake-up call about reality. And that, in the long run, will be a gift whether or not the recipient can accept it as such.

Support, Support, Support

Even if you have to use fairly extreme criticism, putting someone on probation or on a PIP (performance improvement program), as long as you do so from a position of support for that individual's well being, you are still providing the gift of reality.

Too often, people who end up in trouble on the job do so because they are caught up in unrealistic ideas about their talent and ability, their role in the company, or on the other hand fears of putting forth their true expertise. Either way, when you can present them with reality, providing examples of their behavioral problems and limitations, you provide a mirror of reality.

The primary gift of critical feedback, when delivered with respect, including specific examples the recipient can relate to, and ideas for concrete improvement is the advancement of the recipient's grounding in reality. Yes, there's that "reality" word again. Because the delivery of critical feedback needs to always provide support for the individual being more fully grounded in reality. That is the most solid basis for their choices going forward.

What is your experience with receiving and/or providing critical feedback?