# Communication at Work:

## *Keys to Successful Feedback*

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# Distinctions:

- A *Mediator's* use of feedback techniques

- A *Coach's* use of feedback techniques

- ***A Manager's (and Employee's) use of feedback techniques as part of engagement in relation to their relationship, expectations, performance and behavior***

# Some Dimensions of Feedback:

- Responsiveness

- Reframing

- The language of *humanity* (empathy)

- The language of *trust*

- The language of *metaphor*

- Questioning: the art of *powerful questions*

- Narrative: the power of the parties' *stories*

- The language of *negotiation*

# *Responsiveness ("Feedback 101") – What Did You Hear?*

- **Feedback:**

    Repeating back what you heard to show the other person you were listening to what he/she said.

- **Paraphrasing:**

    To say in different words, or by a rewording of the thought or meaning you heard – to show not only that you heard what was said, but that you *understand* (or are trying to understand) what was said.

# *Responsiveness ("Feedback 101")*

- Why do this?

- "Show *and* tell"

- The response to your feedback

- Escaping "what I hear you saying is . . . "

- "One-word" feedback

- A *statement* as feedback

- Dialogue

# REFRAMING

Responding to a speaker while adding a positive element or implying a different but related perspective -- while *staying within the speaker's frame.*

"The art of reframing is to maintain the conflict in all its richness but to help people look at it in a more open-minded and hopeful way." *Bernard Meyer*

# If You Got it Wrong --

- View it as less of a *problem* than as an *opportunity.*

- Apologize (if appropriate); validate their disagreement; and ask for an accurate statement or more information to help clarify.

# The Language of **Humanity**

- People are *emotional* beings, and the workplace is an emotional environment.

- Showing empathy is about showing that you *understand* that others have emotional feelings and needs.  This is *not about* merely being "nice."

- Try to recognize what are the "hot buttons" of other individuals – and your own – and seek positive ways to cope.

- Be yourself, and be real.  Phony empathy may be worse than no empathy.

# The Language of Humanity

"A growing body of research suggests that the way to influence -- and to lead – is to begin with warmth.  Warmth is the conduit of influence:  It facilitates trust and the communication and absorption of ideas.  Even a few small nonverbal signals – a nod, a smile, an open gesture – can show people that you're pleased to be in their company and attentive to their concerns.  Prioritizing warmth helps you connect immediately with those around you, demonstrating that you hear them, understand them, and can be trusted by them."

*"Spotlight on Influence," Harvard Business Review, July 2013*

# The Language of **Trust**

- **TRUST** is "assured reliance on the character, strength, or truth of someone . . . Confident hope."  -- *Dictionary*

- **DISTRUST** is not just the absence of trust.  It is: " . . . negative expectations about someone, signaling fear or dislike of them, a propensity to attribute sinister intentions to them, and a desire to buffer oneself from their conduct."        -- *Prof. Roy Lewicki, Ohio State University*

# Trust-building Behaviors:

Trust-building behaviors and communication practices fall into three categories:

- (1) Behaviors that enhance communication and avoid misunderstanding and rumors

- (2) Behaviors that build faith in character and deter suspicions about motives

- (3) Behaviors that display, value, and grow *competence*

# Trust – (1) Enhance Communication, Avoid Misunderstanding And Rumors:

- To hold people accountable, *be clear on expectations*

- Seek transparency – "what" *and* "why"

- Share info, promote sharing ("up and down")

- Be ACCESSIBLE -- physically (MBWA) and emotionally (EI)

- LISTEN, and use all that good stuff above!!

- Respond timely to concerns

- Look to the *future* and *solutions,* try to escape the past

# (2) Trust:  Build Faith In Your Character And Deter Suspicion About Motives:

- Display honesty, tell the truth – EVEN HARD TRUTHS

- Highlight interests, especially *common* interests

- Be consistent and base decisions objectively

- Make promises *and keep them*

- Remember:  *people's perceptions are their reality*

- Seek the best outcomes for people and your organization, *not merely winning*

- Be *responsive* to others

# (3) Trust: Display, Value, And Grow Competence:

- Be "the first to trust:" *extending your trust to others builds their trust in you*

- Acknowledge what you don't know, ask for help

- Give people room to make mistakes *and learn*

- Give constructive feedback, invite and respond to theirs

- Show gratitude, recognize good work. "Praise publicly, reprimand privately"

- Be respectful in word and deed -- and avoid gossip

- Continuously look for ways to help people grow and learn

# Reading About Trust

- *The Speed Of Trust – The One Thing That Changes Everything,* by Stephen M.R. Covey

- *Trust And Betrayal In The Workplace – Building Effective Relationships In Your Organization*, by Michelle and Dennis Reina

# The Language Of **Metaphor**

- A metaphor is "a figure of speech in which a term or phrase is applied to something to which it is not literally applicable in order to suggest a resemblance." -- *Webster's Unabridged Dictionary*

- Related terms:
  - Simile
  - Analogy
  - Hyperbole
  - Euphemism

# Some Metaphors and Kin:

- Brave as a lion, mean as a snake

- Success has many parents – failure is an orphan

- The war on poverty

- I want my staff to feel like a family

- Stuck between a rock and a hard place

- I don't have a dog in that fight

- My boss barks his orders

- I felt stabbed in the back!

- I have an "open-door" policy

# Why Consider Metaphors?

- Metaphors offer a safe way to discuss difficult subjects, or to express indirectly what can't easily be said directly, or to illustrate meaning vividly

- Metaphors are a window on a person's unique experience and perspective, and give you an opportunity to work *within* that experience *to connect with that person on their terms*

- Metaphors give the listener an opportunity to reframe and explore meaning

# Questioning:  *The Art Of Powerful Questions*

- Basics:  Choose open-ended questions over close-ended questions (to get people talking);  avoid "*why*" questions (they may prompt defensiveness).

- Questions can take us well beyond active listening into the realm of dialogue, exploration, and personal reflection and growth.  They are change agents.

- Curiosity questions linked to a growth mindset are particularly powerful:  *"Curiosity is an antidote to judgment"     (Andrea Young).*

- "A Paradigm shift occurs when a question is asked inside the current paradigm that can only be answered from outside it" *(Marilee Adams).*

# Examples Of Powerful Questions:

- What's important to you?

- What does "fairness" look like to you?  Do you have an example?

- Where do you see yourself in [three] years?

- Is there something not being said that we should explore?

- What change might help you accomplish your goals?  What if that doesn't work?

-  What challenges are we facing and how might we meet them?

- What questions haven't we asked?

- What are your choices?  What's possible?  If you could do it over, what would you do differently?

- What would happen if . . . ?  What's your plan?  Next steps?  And then?

# Reading About Questions

- *Change your Questions, Change Your Life,* by Marilee Adams

- *Humble Inquiry – The Gentle Art of Asking Instead of Telling,* by Edgar Schein

- *Power Questions – Build Relationships and Influence Others,* by Andrew Sobel & Jerald Panas

- *The Art of Powerful Questions – Catalyzing Insight, Innovation, and Action,* by Eric Vogt, Juanita Brown, and David Isaacs

# Narrative:  The Power Of *Stories*

Every conflict involves a story, and until that story is told and understood, the conflict is unlikely to be resolved.

People live their lives thru their stories.  Stories provide "a sense of continuity in life . . . And enable people to have a sense of coherence about who they are."  These "background scripts" contain assumptions about how the world is, how people should be, and how people should respond when the "rules" are broken.

Look for people's stories, the different stories in a dispute, how those stories intersect, and how we can help people deconstruct their stories and envision new ones.

> *-- From J. Winslade and G. Monk, "Practicing Narrative Mediation: Loosening the Grip of Conflict."*

# The Language Of **Negotiation**

Negotiation is a "joint decision-making process involving **interactive communication** in which parties lack identical interests but attempt to reach agreement."  *G. Blum & R. Mnookin in "The Negotiator's Fieldbook",    ABA Section of Dispute Resolution*

- "To get what *YOU* need, help the other person get something *THEY* need"

- "Make it *EASY* for the other person to see things *YOUR* way"

# Bringing It All Together: Communication About Performance

1. **Establish a positive background and baseline,** including –

- An environment of **trust** (see above)

- **Clear expectations** about required and successful performance

2. **Provide feedback related to accountability,** including –

- **Positive and reinforcing feedback** on what an employee has done well – building for the future

- **Bridging questions and dialogue** to encourage self-reflection and perspectives on opportunities for growth and improvement

- **Constructive feedback** on areas where (and how) improvements may be achieved – or are *expected!*

# Communication About Performance

The manager/supervisor has an **obligation** to be open and honest about accountability and performance (good and otherwise) --

-- and the employee has a **right** to receive open, objective, and honest feedback on accountability and performance.

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*Framing their discussion with trust-building behaviors and good communication practices reduces tensions and promotes positive change and growth for both!*