



*Lesson #10*  
**Not S'much.**  
**Giving Corrective Feedback**

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### **This Week's Objective**

This week is about delivering corrective feedback to someone who may benefit from it.

### **Scaredy Cat**

This skill always brings out the chicken in us. (insert clucking sound here, you ol' hen)  
It takes guts, so it is an important step to make sure you are coming from the right place before trudging forward.

And in case you didn't notice, I cleverly renamed "negative feedback" to "corrective feedback," making it sound more productive. Maybe that's a good way to look at it from the start.

### **Pick the right situation**

Actually, before even starting on corrective feedback, revisit the potential benefit of going forward with the conversation. Remember that most of us err on the safe side by not bringing up negative feedback but rather avoiding it and hoping it will go away. Sometimes it does (I call that Procrastination Pays) but most times we are simply avoiding it because of the discomfort. Truly, when done well, it benefits everyone.

And if you are in a leadership position, you are probably witness to performances that really *really* need corrective feedback. It is your duty.

### **Three Easy Pieces**

I learned three characteristics of effective corrective feedback several years ago from Wilson Learning, Inc. Make your corrective feedback:

Direct,  
Specific, &  
Non-Punishing

### **Direct**

Being straightforward is extremely important in corrective feedback. Your message can get weakened if you waffle in your delivery, making the whole interaction tentative and

(more) uncomfortable, and bringing attention to the flux in delivery rather than the heart of the message itself.

To prevent instability in your delivery, prepare your conversation by writing out what you want to say first. This scripting exercise aids in finding the right words ahead of time, and pre-loads your dialog so that you are less likely to say the wrong thing or something that may be misinterpreted. No need to wordsmith the whole interaction. Simply get a line or two that will serve as a positive opener to get you started. I use this technique often in coaching sessions with clients who are facing an uncomfortable conversation - one they are often dreading.

For those of you that have trouble with being too direct .... (no clucking here, just steamroller sounds), may I recommend doing your assignment this week with some attention to your tone and softness. Although direct is good, it can send a message of uncaring and lack of concern for the person at hand. A softened eye contact and pace can alleviate this tendency. Use a friend to get feedback on your approach.

### **Specific**

In a similar fashion as the positive feedback from last week, being specific helps the feedback stick in such a way that the receiver can understand the particulars of what you are presenting. Details set the framework of the feedback and facilitate the recipient in visualizing the actual need for change.

When deciding how to describe the specifics, consider what you saw that was actionable and what you clearly observed.

### **Non-Punishing**

There is no place for judging others when giving corrective feedback. The dialog should be about what was observed, not what you think he or she intended, and not what kind of a person they are. Stay away from judgmental words or ones that carry negative connotations. Obvious ones like *lazy, heartless, sluggish, slow, hateful, brainless*, but also some that may not seem as direct but are still unnecessary like *dawdling, wasted, foolish, uncaring, or uninterested*.

As an example, let's say you see someone as uninterested, and possibly completely apathetic, but would like to stay away from both words. Consider changing the feedback into a question to start off, such as *Where do your real interests lie in this job?* Or a statement like *I would love to support you in finding some energy around getting this project accomplished.*

Those couching statements can be an opener for direct, specific, and non-punishing feedback. The person will understand the context without using strong judgmental words.

### **Your assignment this week**

Think of a situation where someone could use (or really needs!) to be realigned or needs to adjust his performance. He or she does not necessarily need to be messing something up, but an obvious problem with performance will make it easier for you to feel that corrective feedback is appropriate.

### **If you are a supervisor or a manager**

If you are in a position as a supervisor or manager, here is an approach to the conversation that can help. Use it if you find that you dread this dialog and need some guidelines.

- 1) Start by stating the desired performance target that the feedback falls in. This gives the feedback context and keeps it from being taken defensively.

*Ex: Jim, I know you have been wanting to improve your customer service skills and are shooting for 100% positive customer interactions.*

- 2) State your observations. Be objective.

*Ex: Yesterday the interaction with the Jackson contract didn't go so smoothly. Seems there was a little resistance in the answer we gave them.*

- 3) Give the other person a change to state what he experienced then listen. This step can be optional if you want to be more direct.

*Ex: What was your impression of how the interaction went?*

- 4) Give the person a direct statement about what to do next. Do not waffle, and do not hesitate, but use a caring tone.

*Ex: I would like you to change the approach you use with them next time. Work with Diane to evaluate the best course of action for repairing the relationship and run it by me next Monday after the staff meeting.*

### **For non-leader situations**

If you are not in a position as a supervisor or manager, this can be a situation where someone has done something when interacting with you that you would like to reflect upon and let him or her know. This can be inside or outside of work.

- 1) State your observations. Be objective.

*Ex: Yesterday it seemed like we collided on a couple of things we were discussing. I know I became resistive and I felt like I should have cooperated more with you on listening to the situation.*

- 2) Give the other person a change to state what he experienced then listen. This step can be optional if you want to be more direct.

*Ex: Was it just me being overly sensitive?*

- 3) Give the person a direct statement about what to do next, using a caring tone.

*Ex: Let's make sure that when that happens we know to check with each other.*

Notes about how it went:

*Biologically speaking, if something bites you it's more likely to be female.*

~ Desmond Morris

### CHICK CHECK

**A few questions to validate your feminine approach to this week's assignment.**

**What type of corrective feedback giver are you, one who tends to be too blunt or one who tends to over-soften it, or maybe avoid it entirely?**

**What does that say about other areas of your leadership style? (That is, if you are too blunt, do you struggle with wanting less sensitivities in work interactions? Or is your tendency to waffle a little bit indicative of so many other areas where you are too soft?)**

**My Ongoing RINGY-DINGY List**

**Items that come up throughout the course that you want to remember or task for yourself. Your “short list” of things that are working best for you or “AHA”s.**

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