



Effective communication is vital to managing performance and a harmonious working relationship and workplace. This includes all areas of EM&D such as articulating the service's philosophy and goals, expectations of the role, having regular and meaningful conversations about the performance of an employee and their support needs, and can be effectively incorporated into the EM&D process.

Creating an environment of open and honest communication can lead to better outcomes for children and their families by fostering greater understanding between the employer and employee, improving relationships and strengthening collaboration.

Feedback is the most significant way in which an employer can communicate to the employee how their work is being perceived, and is one of the critical roles of the employer. Most employees strive to do their best in their roles and receiving regular, constructive feedback can assist them to understand their performance and how it relates to the goals of the service.

Examples of some of the crucial feedback conversations between an employer and an employee are:

- acknowledging areas of strength in the employee and how their work has contributed to the quality of the service
- articulating the service's philosophy, goals and strategic plan
- creating a safe environment of self-reflection as part of quality improvement
- clarifying the role of the employee and the service's expectations in relation to their employment
- determining goals and priorities for the current year
- determining the employee's individual aspirations and support needs
- regular catch-up (preferably monthly) with the employee to ensure that they feel well supported to perform their role
- providing meaningful feedback about the employee's performance
- discussing any concerns relating to performance as soon as they arise
- conducting formal performance evaluation discussions mid-performance period and annually
- having conversations with the employee regarding their professional development and career aspirations.

When communicating with an employee, employers should ensure the matter being communicated is understood clearly by the employee. Communication that is clear, goal-focused, depersonalised, sensitive and conveyed with empathy is more likely to elicit a positive response from the employee.

Challenges with feedback

There can be a number of challenges associated with providing feedback to employees. Some examples of unclear or unproductive feedback could include:

- employees not receiving feedback from their employer regarding their progress
- employees only getting feedback when something goes wrong
- feedback is delivered inappropriately / insensitively
- feedback is very subjective and comes across as criticism
- employees are told what is wrong but are not provided with sufficient guidance about what is required, what needs to change and how to make these changes.

Some of the challenges may arise from the employer's level of comfort in providing feedback and facing confronting situations. However, leaving concerns about an employee's performance unaddressed may, in the long term, impact on the service and the quality of the service provided. It is also unfair to the employee who has remained unaware of the concern, and therefore has not been provided with an opportunity to address and improve their performance.

Tips for providing feedback

Make both positive and constructive feedback regular and timely (i.e. as soon as possible after the event).

When providing feedback about concerns:

- plan your feedback and make it constructive, i.e. designed to help the employee understand and improve
- provide specific examples i.e. based upon evidence, facts, and the employee's observed behaviour
- engage in dialogue and encourage the employee to participate. Do not make the discussion one-way
- ensure that the employee understands the concerns and expectations, and leaves knowing how to address the concerns
- ensure that the employee understands what support is available and how to access it.



Tips for providing feedback *(continued)*

If there is a follow-up process agreed to, ensure that the employee knows when it will occur, and what they are expected to demonstrate e.g. completion of training and development that has supported improvement in performance.

As with any conversation, building good rapport with the employee will make the conversation easier. Rather than rushing straight into feedback, be sure to take some time to build a positive and harmonious environment first.

Structuring Feedback

There are many models of providing feedback and these can help employers structure the discussion to make it more effective. The following are two examples that can be implemented in a service.

Model 1 – AID FOR FEEDBACK⁴

This model is excellent for acknowledging positive performance or for assisting employees to understand why a particular behaviour is inappropriate, hence generating the desire for change. This model adopts a three-step approach as described below.

A – Actions: Define what the person is doing well or could improve, depending on the situation. These actions/behaviours must have been observed, and must be capable of being explained clearly to the employee with examples.

I – Impact: Describe the effects of these actions on other people including the person providing the feedback. The impacts can be positive or negative depending on whether it is to reinforce a positive behaviour or change an inappropriate behaviour. Exploring a negative impact provides the employee with a reason, and usually the motivation, to change.

D – Desired outcome: Identify ways in which tasks can be done more effectively in the future. This could be generated as a sharing of ideas between the employer and employee, rather than the employer having all the answers.

Model 2 – PRAISE TECHNIQUE

The praise technique is a commonly used model for providing feedback. This technique provides the concerns or areas for improvement between comments of praise. This model is effective when the employee's performance is mostly productive and there are minor areas of improvement required.

Positive: Begin the feedback by identifying something the employee has done well. Starting with the positive feedback helps build the relationship and confirms that the employee is generally performing well.

Constructive: Next, address the areas where the employee's performance does not meet expectations and there is scope for improvement. The key is to be constructive and focus on what the employer would like the employee to do instead of their current behaviour.

Positive: Finish on a positive note, highlighting the employee's greatest achievement. This will ensure that the employee leaves the meeting secure in the knowledge that their contribution is acknowledged and valued, and is inspired to address the concern identified.

Ensuring feedback is two-way

Constructive feedback needs to be an exploratory discussion in which both parties contribute and equally share the responsibility of planning the best solution moving forward.

Employers must establish facts and the context for the behaviour that was witnessed, acknowledging that the environment in which the behaviour occurred may have impacted on the actual behaviour. Employees should be encouraged to respond to feedback in a supportive manner.

An important part of this conversation is to ensure that the employee is offered appropriate support/strategies to improve performance.

It is also an opportunity to acknowledge good performance.

⁴ Landsberg, M. (2015), *The Tao of Coaching*, Harper Collins Business, London