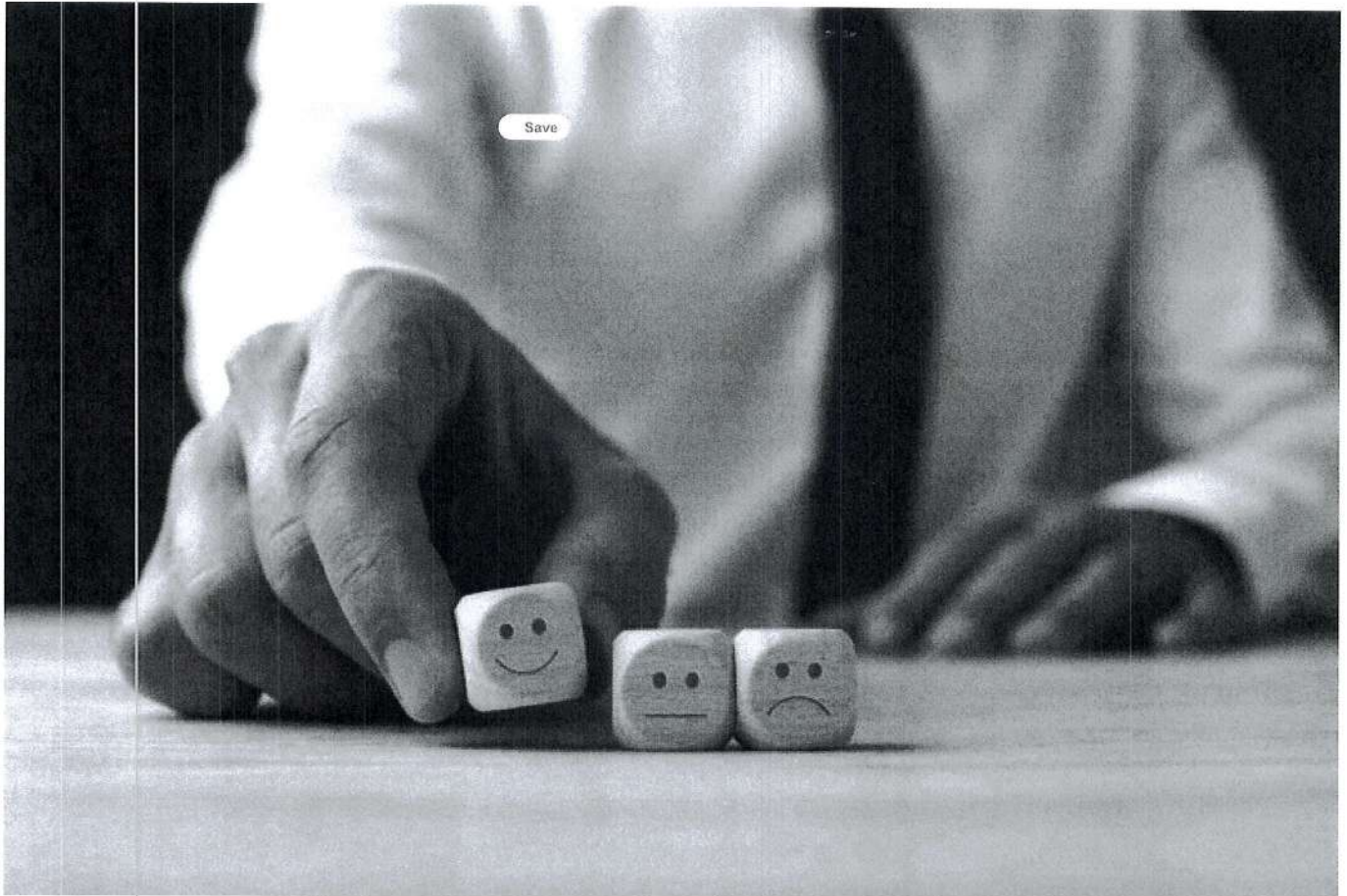


Coaching With Feedback That Actually Works

By DIANNA BOOHER FEBRUARY 16, 2021



Ask any manager what they dislike most about their job, and they'll respond quickly with something like: "Giving negative feedback" or "Coaching poor performers."

The *worst* managers ignore the problem until either the poor performers resign in frustration or the top performers leave in anger at having to "pick up the slack."

The *best* managers learn how to lead team members to assess their own performance so that feedback flows naturally. As a result, resistance decreases and performance improves.

Here's how to have coaching conversations based on useful, well-received feedback.

Lead the Person to Assess His or Her Own Performance

Create the feel of a casual conversation. Consider the informality of the time and place. What about a stroll across the campus toward the cafeteria versus calling Maya into your office and closing the door? Sift the nervousness from your voice and body language; remind yourself that you're not taking notes as a precursor for termination. You're coaching for improved performance.

- “How do you think this last product launch went over with our route drivers? Did you get the sense that they really understand the difference between this new formula and what we had on the market last year?”
- “Why do you think they left the meeting a little fuzzy on this concept?”
- “How do you think you might correct any misunderstanding before they start calling on customers next week?”
- “Who’s available to help you with that during the next three to four days?”

Ask About Lessons Learned

Rather than launching into a lecture on all things negative, ask your team member what they’ve learned through the experience. (But again, take care to not call the project or outcome a total failure — unless you both agree that the situation could be labeled a disaster.)

Again, go with questions like:

- “What do you think you’ll do differently with the drivers on the next launch?” (Then listen to them elaborate on changes they already have in mind after self-assessing the outcomes that were less than desirable.)
- “Anything else? What about the pre-launch? Have you thought about changing the way you do the tease on the invitations?” (Again, listen for their ideas on what to change, improve, try, investigate.)
- “Have you definitely decided what *not* to do again next time?” (If they have ideas to add on this question, you’ll know they’ve reflected deeply. They know failure when they’re staring it in the face! No point in rubbing it in their eyes.)

Add Your Observations

If your team member has little self-awareness, the conversation structure can lead naturally into adding your own observations. Your transition can confirm positively what your team member has said: “I agree with what you’ve said about…” “I think you’ve identified the trouble spots and have the right approach to correcting them for the next time.” (Notice that you’re giving credit for identifying and correcting their own performance.)

Or your transition will expand on the person’s perspective: “I have a few things to add about the situation. “I have a different take on what happened during the launch.” “I have a different viewpoint about why the route drivers walked away from the launch meeting confused. Let me add my observations to what you’ve said.”

Whether you’re agreeing with what the team member states about the performance, situation, and necessary improvements or expanding to include new or different observations and corrective actions, the team member feels heard.

That’s respectful communication. That in itself often turns the negative to positive, useful information.

Be Direct, Clear, and Optimistic About the Future

Be direct. You never want to sugarcoat bad news or poor performance. But focus on the future rather than on the past. End the conversation by “looking forward” to the changes or improvements the team member will be making in the process, situation, or performance.

Get out the mental eraser and remove everything you’ve ever heard about negative feedback. Employees today long for clear, useful, frequent feedback — the kind that will move them ahead in their career. And as their manager-coach, it’s your job to provide it.

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Dianna Booher is the bestselling author of 49 books, published in 62 foreign-language editions. She helps organizations to communicate clearly and leaders to expand their influence by a strong executive presence — and often by their own published book. Her latest books include *Faster, Fewer, Better Emails*; *Communicate Like a Leader*; *What MORE Can I Say?*; *Creating Personal Presence*; and *Communicate With Confidence*. National Media such as Good Morning America, *USA Today*, *The Wall Street Journal*, Bloomberg, Forbes, FOX, CNN, NPR, and *Entrepreneur* have interviewed her for opinions on workplace communication issues. www.BooherResearch.com @DiannaBooher 817-283-2333

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