



LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS: PROVIDING CLEAR FEEDBACK

It always amazes me how often leaders have strong opinions about a direct report, yet do not give those direct reports clear enough feedback for them to take action. Often direct reports are confused: “Did I get a raise or did I get fired?” I swear, no joke, people are uncertain and don’t dare ask.

Why is it that, with so many good articles and books written on the topic, leaders still don’t provide hard-hitting and clear information to their direct reports on their performance? (Scroll down for examples from HBR.) Worse yet, they sometimes let direct reports linger for months in a position knowing full well they are going to have to fire that person eventually. Why are we still doing this, knowing how devastating this is for the organization, the person left lingering, the rest of the team, and the leader’s own credibility? Some potential “reasons”:

1. It is uncomfortable.
2. We have to admit we made a mistake putting that person in the role, e.g., they had the technical skills, but not the interpersonal skills; or maybe they were the boss’s pick but not yours.
3. We have to admit we, ourselves, were inadequate in providing what the person needed to succeed.
4. If the person doesn’t improve, then we will need to make uncomfortable changes and that there is no guarantee the next person will succeed.
5. They might not like us (there has even been violence after firings).
6. We feel guilty for having a nice holiday or next few months knowing that the person is out of work ... has kids in school....
7. We expect the direct report to just figure it all out on their own.
8. We hope their peers will do the dirty work for us.

All in all, it is simply just bad leadership and poor management to let performance problems persist. As illness can prevent your peak performance, so can withholding constructive feedback; you’re never really able to leverage yourself, your team, or your organization to full capacity. The best leaders step up, shape up, and speak the truth to those who need to hear it. And then they make sure their message was heard and action is taken, or they kindly ask sub-par team members to find a better fit.

Are there performance issues you wish you had handled earlier? Are people in your organization equipped to give difficult feedback in a timely and straightforward way within their own parts of the organization?

Recommended articles:

<https://hbr.org/2015/08/a-6-part-structure-for-giving-clear-and-actionable-feedback>;

<https://hbr.org/2018/08/what-to-do-when-you-realize-you-made-a-bad-hire>;

<https://hbr.org/2015/08/giving-feedback-when-youre-conflict-averse>