

WHAT ARE YOU COMMUNICATING TO YOUR EMPLOYEES?

Which do you think is the best way of motivating an employee to perform at his/her best:

1. Point out and make the employee aware of what they are doing wrong?
2. Point out and make the employee aware of what they are doing right?

Studies by Gallup Organization (*Now, Discover Your Strengths*), Carol Dweck, PhD (*Mindset*), Alfie Kohn, PhD (*Punished by Rewards*), and Aubrey Daniels (*Bringing Out the Best in Others*) all indicate the second method - pointing out and making the employee aware of what they are doing right – is a far more effective method of motivating and helping a employee perform at their best. Why? Because, similar to Pavlov's dog, people want to repeat what they've been rewarded for.

What do most managers focus on, telling their employees what they're doing right or what they're doing wrong? What do you do?

As stated in *Now, Discover Your Strengths*, "In a Gallup survey, when asked what they spend most time talking about with their child, her As, Cs, or Fs on a report card, more than 70 percent of parents say the Fs. Since much of our programming today comes from our life experience, it's no wonder that most managers spend more time talking with their employees about their workplace Fs than their As and Bs."

There are three categories of employee communication:

1. **Corrective Feedback**, defined as feedback meant to change current performance toward a desired direction. In other words, telling an employee what they are doing wrong, telling them to do it a different way, providing progressive discipline, or addressing problems.
2. **Confirming Feedback** is feedback that is used to maintain and encourage current performance by confirming what the employee is doing well. Consider any praise or recognition, encouragement, or simply telling the employee what they are doing right (private or public) as confirming feedback.
3. **Non-feedback Communication** is defined as all other communication that happens on the job; i.e. discussions around how projects/work is going, telling the employee what you want done, reporting, setting/clarifying expectations, brainstorming and sharing of ideas, updating or providing information or knowledge, teaching, mentoring, checking in on their personal life, etc. Typically, you'll spend much more time with this type of communication than you will providing feedback.

There is research that says that you should provide at least four times as much confirming feedback as you do corrective feedback. Or, here's another way to look at it: How often do your employees make mistakes? If they are making mistakes less than 10% of the time they spend at work, that means 90% of your feedback should be confirming.

Replay the past three weeks and estimate the percentage of the time you've spent with each of your direct reports focused on each of these three categories of communication (it should total 100% for each person), and record it. Then, estimate the total amount of time you spend communicating with each direct report in a typical week, and record that as well. This communication can be in a group setting (meetings), or individually.

It's important to remember that there are no right or wrong answers – this is simply meant to provide awareness, and to set a baseline. Also, it's critical that you're honest and accurate with your estimates to ensure a solid baseline.

Revisit this process every month or two, on a regular basis to help you stay aware of the amount and type of communication you have with your direct reports. *Be aware of the type of communication you have with your employees, especially the type of feedback you provide.*

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