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Helping people shine

"One of the easiest ways to improve performance is through feedback."

Mark Jenkins, MD Coverdale OD

Innovative thinking from Upskill People. Creators of the ground-breaking new **Managing People series**.

During a four-day leadership development workshop the then Coverdale CEO, Mike De Luca, shared that "*giving and receiving* ***feedback is a skill****, and we can all become really good at it.*"

When I say it back out loud, it seems obvious now, but back then I was 39 and considered myself to be an experienced manager. No one had ever said this to me. Up to that point I'd never appreciated that this was a vital and learnable skill.

We specialise in developing expertise in leadership and human cooperation, through experiential learning. And one of the most effective ways to improve company performance is by developing everyone's feedback skill - a skill we can all become really good at.

I thought I knew how to give and receive feedback. But on reflection, I realised I didn't understand the fundamental principle: the aspiration to improve is built on confidence. And in any business or social enterprise, we need individuals and teams to continually foster the aspiration to improve, don't we?

I realised that quarterly and annual reviews (all the performance management stuff) didn't qualify me to say that I regularly gave others helpful feedback.
I realised that my concept of positive and negative (or critical) feedback was fundamentally flawed. We'd talked about the **'sh*t sandwich.'** It's the practice of sandwiching negative feedback between two slices of positive. Mike's question was "*If you're served up a cheese sandwich, what does it taste of?*"

I got the point. I reflected on something that another delegate had said – they thought of giving and receiving feedback as giving and receiving a gift. That really struck

"A cheese sandwich will always taste like cheese!"

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Watch Mark explaining feedback skills here.

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me. I realised that you need to practice regularly in order to make it a positive daily habit. And that I, that all of us, have a responsibility to build an aspiration to improve within others, every day, by giving deliberate, thoughtful, useful feedback.
This feedback has to be based on building confidence in others, no matter the situation or the content of the feedback.

After that first Coverdale workshop, I deliberately started to practice giving and receiving feedback. Intentionally slowly at first, as I was conscious my outward behaviour would change; that my colleagues would notice me starting to do something that I hadn't really done before. I'd always said: "Great job, well done," or "we need to do that again, it's not good enough." But of course, that's not the same as giving feedback.

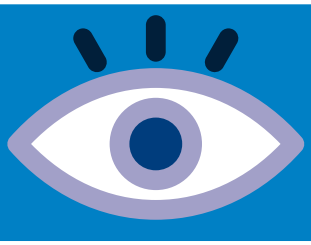
The more I practiced, the more naturally it came. I saw more, and I also heard more because I was consciously observing more. The feedback I gave became more timely, more specific and more helpful. And I began to accept feedback as a gift and used it to improve my performance.

I found it gave more meaning, clarity and focus to key aspects of my work, and it seemed to have the same impact on others. The principles gradually became implicit in my thinking and practice, and it felt really good.

It's not rocket science – it's a million miles from that. It's about embedding such principles in our day-to-day thinking and then bringing these to life through deliberate action, repeatedly. And then it really works.

Purposeful feedback can have a transformative effect. So where does the skill come into it?

"I saw more because I was consciously observing more."



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65% **of employees want more feedback**

Source: Forbes

69% **of employees work harder when better recognised**

Source: HubSpot

7 Key feedback principles

1 The **aspiration to improve** is built on **confidence**.

2 Be **timely, specific** and ideally **face-to-face**. Start with what you like.

3 **Encourage improvement**. Use 'and' instead of 'but'. *"... and to further improve you could..."*

4 Be a **witness, not a judge.** Evaluating isn't the same.

5 It's not about positive or negative, but is it **helpful**?

6 Ask them what **they thought.** Look for their **thinking and intent**.

7 A **cheese sandwich** will always taste like cheese.

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Initially it starts with consciously thinking about the principles and intentionally planning to give feedback. It may feel a little clunky at first, but with practice - and more practice - it starts to feel more natural. It becomes implicit in the way you think about, plan for and give feedback.

I've experienced the deliberate development of a feedback culture, and the transformation is remarkable. People moved from being neutral - or even negative about their jobs - to being happier, more engaged and more motivated.

It's difficult to make a direct link between cause and effect, but operational performance improved significantly over the next 12 months. To improve performance, companies often revert to implementing new systems, structures or processes.

Sometimes these changes have merit, but one of the most effective and least costly ways of fostering continuous performance improvement, is to develop a culture of giving and receiving feedback. In my experience, these are great places to work.

Leaders and managers can foster this culture through leading by example – setting the right model for others to follow, regardless of role or rank.

Every one of us, in companies, communities and society, can be great at using this skill to help others develop and grow. To build confidence and the aspiration to improve. It's one of the fundamental skills of leadership and human cooperation.

All it takes is an understanding of the key principles and the deliberate development of the skill through application and practice. It costs nothing and it's highly effective, so my advice is go for it.

"Done little & often, feedback is a small thing that makes a big difference."

Charlotte, Manager
Rise & Dine Deli

Mark and Coverdale endorse the ground-breaking new Managing People series. Explore it for yourself here:
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