

## **Steps to Provide Feedback in a Difficult Conversation**

### **Seek Permission and Set a Time**

- Seek permission to provide the feedback. Even if you are the employee's boss, start by stating you have some feedback you'd like to share. Ask if it's a good time or if the employee would prefer to select another time and place. (Within reason, of course.)

### **Soft entry**

- Use a soft entry. Don't dive right into the feedback - give the person a chance to brace for potentially embarrassing feedback. Tell the employee that you need to provide feedback that is difficult to share. If you're uncomfortable with your role in the conversation, you might say that, too. Most people are as uncomfortable providing feedback about an individual's personal dress or habits, as the person receiving the feedback.

### **Stay Focused and above the Fray**

- The best feedback is straightforward and simple. Don't beat around the bush. I am talking with you because this is an issue that you need to address for success in this organization. Do not give into temptation to amplify the feedback or excuse your responsibility for feedback. Seek to minimize embarrassment for the receiver.
- Keep feedback focused on performance/behavioral evidence and/or rules, norms and expectations of the profession/organization.

### **State the Importance for Improvement**

- Tell the person the impact that changing his or her behavior will have from a positive perspective. Tell the employee how choosing to do nothing will affect their career and job.

### **Set Goals and Procedures for Improvement**

- Reach agreement about what the individual will do to change their behavior (This will require the elicitation of the individual's point of view). Inform the individual of available resources. Set a due date - tomorrow, in some cases. Set a time frame to review progress.
- Follow-up. The fact that the problem exists means that backsliding is possible; further clarification may also be necessary. Then, more feedback and possibly, disciplinary action are possible next steps.

You can become effective at holding difficult conversations. Practice and these steps will help build your comfort level to hold difficult conversations. After all, a difficult conversation can make the difference between success and failure for a valued employee. Care enough to hold the difficult conversation.

## Pitfalls

- I. Intentional pitfalls: Avoidance, Blaming (right/wrong debate); Threatening; Shouting;
- II. Unintentional pitfalls: unchecked beliefs or assumptions (about the employee, about the benefits of supervision and feedback); fidgeting, lack of eye contact; not consulting data to inform suggestions for improvement; not employing active listening; Lack of Belief in one's ability as a Supervisor
- III. Overcoming pitfalls: Belief in the potential of people; Practice