


PLANNING FOR AND GIVING CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK

Successful coaches like Bush, are able to help their staff improve by being extremely specific. Use constructive feedback (rather than opinion-based criticism) to describe factually what the person actually did, to plan what he or she needs to do in the future, and to facilitate discussion of how the person intends to get there.

Plan ahead for your constructive feedback conversation:

- Get the facts. What did the person do or say? Who else was involved?
- What do you want the person to do?
- How will changing benefit the person?
- Using the information you gained, write the first words you'll say—a factual description of what the person did or didn't do (and when it happened). Then write an equally specific statement of what the person should do instead. Finally, write how making this change will benefit the person.
- Rehearse the words while using assertive body language (calm gestures, maintained eye contact) and voice (low pitch, even tone, even volume). This is crucial. Even the most perfect factual words will still instantly raise a wall of defensiveness if you say them loudly or while shaking a finger in the person's face. Rehearse the words so that you can say them from your brain and heart instead of reading from a paper. Looking at the paper to get started is great. Reading through the whole discussion is not.

Conduct the constructive feedback conversation:

- **Say your first words, the ones you planned in the preceding step.** 
- **Allow a moment's pause.** If you didn't have the real facts, the person can say so now. However, just a moment is all that's needed; any longer and the person's brain will jump to "Wonder what she's going to ask me to do" mode.
- **Say the words you wrote about how the change that you're about to ask for will benefit the person.**
- **Say the words you wrote about what the person should do and by when.**
- **Look for facial expressions, body language, and words indicating that the person will do what was requested.** If you don't see acceptance, point out what you see and reiterate that the person needs to do whatever it is. Tell him why. Facilitate him planning for the steps he'll take to make this change. Many times the reason you see what looks like "Not today, not ever" coming back at you is simply because the person needs you to facilitate his thinking about how to make the change. Facilitate—instead of telling them how.
- **Let your words sink in.** Wait a moment before leaving or moving on to other subjects, in case the person has anything else to say.
- **Monitor and measure.** When the change is made, make sure the person knows that you noticed and that you appreciate it.

First words, are the ones you planned above. Not, "You know, Brian, most of the time you do just fine, but yesterday . . ." You can say hello, but then just say the first words you wrote. This lets the person know immediately what he or she did (factually). It allows him to see himself doing the behavior. If you beat around the bush, he has time to think "I wonder what she's going to say to me? Wonder what I'm going to be asked to do?," and you will hit a wall of defensiveness so high and so thick that nothing will get through. Likewise, if you get right to the point, but don't use words that are factual and specific enough for the person to see the same picture you do, he'll say, "No, I didn't." Then you'll say, "But yesterday you said . . . to Mrs. Jones" and finally he'll see it. But it will be too late: the person has already posted a denial and built a defensive wall.

You wrote the words, so just say them!