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Strategies for Constructive Criticism

Criticism. We've all given it, received it, and possibly even detested it. But **constructive criticism** is essential for everyone in the workplace, especially as a manager or leader. It lets people know where they are and where to go next with expectations and goals - yours, their own, and the organizations.

The main objective in giving **constructive criticism** is to provide guidance by supplying information that either supports effective behavior or guides someone back on track toward successful performance. In doing this, it is absolutely crucial to know when and how to give the most effective criticism you can.

When is it a must to give a constructive criticism. Here is when:

- Ongoing performance discussions.
- Providing specific performance pointers.
- Following up on coaching discussions.
- Giving corrective guidance.
- Letting someone know the consequences of their behavior.

Here are some clues that constructive criticism is needed are when:

- Someone asks for your opinion about how they are doing.
- Unresolved problems persist.
- Errors occur repeatedly.
- An employee's performance doesn't meet expectations.
- A peer's work habits disturb you.

To be an effective manager or supervisor, you need to make criticism as helpful as possible. The trick is learning how to give it constructively so that employees can understand, respect and use it. Remember, constructive criticism is used to build things up, not break things down! Here are six things to keep in mind when giving constructive criticism:



1. If you can't think of a constructive purpose for giving criticism, don't give it at all. Good criticism should always have a target and aim for improvement.

2. Focus on description rather than judgment. Describing behavior is a way of reporting what has occurred, while judging behavior is an evaluation of what has occurred with "right and wrong" or "good and bad." Constructive criticism should not be judgmental.

For example: The simple statement, "Your communication skills are good," isn't very helpful. Instead, you want to be specific by saying something like, "You demonstrate a high degree of confidence when you answer customer questions about registration procedures."

3. Focus on observation rather than inference. Observations refer to what you can see or hear about an individual's behavior, while inferences refer to the assumptions and interpretations you make from what you see or hear. Be an observer. Focus on what the person did and your reaction.

For example: When an employee is constantly missing deadlines, approach them with the observation, like "You haven't been meeting your deadlines for the past two weeks, which is putting a strain on the rest of the team." Stay with the facts.

4. Focus on behavior rather than the person. Refer to what an individual does rather than what you imagine they are. To focus on behavior, use adverbs, which describe action, rather than adjectives, which describe qualities.

For example: "You talked considerably during the staff meeting, which prevented me from getting to some of the main points," rather than "You talk too much." See the difference?

5. Provide a balance of positive and negative criticism. If you consistently give only positive or only negative criticism, people may begin to distrust it and not listen.

6. Be aware of criticism overload. Select two or three important points you want to make and offer criticism about those points. If you overload an individual with more than that, they may become confused about what exactly needs to be improved or changed.



Giving criticism constructively benefits everyone! There should always be consistent communication between managers and employees, which both builds relationships and allows for valuable coaching and development. The employee, manager, supervisor, or peer receives the information they need to be successful while the organization gains and improves productivity. It's a win-win.

To experience how the Success Factor Analysis (SFA) performance indicator report can help you understand an employee's behavioral characteristics and to use this knowledge to motivate, manage and improve performance, call us today at (661) 810-2446 or visit us on-line at www.azarandassociates.com