

# 4

## *Operating as a coach on the job*

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On the job (inside the workplace during work activities) is on the shop floor, maintaining day-to-day contact with the team whilst they work. It means acting in a way that demonstrates interest and enthusiasm, with an eye and ear for excellent performance and for assisting each individual in a productive way where underperformance is noted and acted upon. It is about building relationships; bringing employees up to excellence with a clear realization that the coach has an inspirational role.

This is where evidence of performance has its origins – where early intervention (as close in time to the event as possible) takes place. Early intervention allows for the provision of immediate feedback. Feedback is of an informal type, so when it moves to the formal review, there are no surprises. Although informal, two-way feedback provided on the job develops trust in a powerful way.

Two-way feedback is not about the watcher (line manager) acting alone. It may be, but must be based on encouraging employees to ask or check if something is right or wrong. It should include opportunities for reassurance from a friendly ear – more important, to include opportunities to recommend.

Irrespective of whether feedback is given informally through on the job interaction or off the job during a formal review, it must be based on the following principles:

- be linked to specific observed behaviour;
- be descriptive not judgemental;
- be limited and focused, not overwhelming;
- be two-way, based on questions and discussions;
- be focused on performance, not personality;
- be conclusive with prescriptive outcomes;
- be presented in a professional way.

We need to be a little more specific about what the coach provides feedback on. Feedback should relate to competence to do the job to a standard, particularly in relation to safety, regulatory or environmental requirements (see performance standards examples, [Chapter 2](#)).

This may involve an employee not using a piece of equipment correctly, taking short cuts in a procedure, failing to assess the risks of a job before commencing, failing to wear protective equipment, dealing with a customer in an unacceptable manner, or failing to take account of individual differences when in a teaching or training situation.

Feedback might also relate to behaviour in terms of a code of conduct. For example:

- time management (punctuality, return from breaks);
- attendance (time off);
- team relationships (respectful towards others);
- procedures for leaving the work station;
- commencing and finishing classes on time.

(See code of conduct examples, [Chapter 2](#).) In some cases it might be a combination of competence and behaviour.

Feedback must also relate to excellent performance. Feedback that tells people they have done excellently is crucial. It is our experience that most people only receive feedback when they make errors. This form of feedback is rarely supported by a demonstration of how it should have been done or what will be done to ensure it does not happen again. We must all try to give more positive feedback.

## PROVIDING INFORMAL FEEDBACK ON THE JOB

We promote and use a very simple approach to the provision of informal feedback. We call it 'GIDAY'. [Figure 4.1](#) explains what GIDAY is and how it is used for both acknowledging excellent performance and dealing with underperformance. Of course the model is designed to show the process; the manner in which it is applied and the language used depends on the workplace; we believe the simpler the better, but again, with professionalism.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Informal on the job – feedback process</b> ★ Acknowledging excellence ★</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Informal on the job – coaching process</b> ★ Targeting improvement ★</p>
<p><b>G</b>reeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Good day', 'Hello Bob! How are you?'</li> </ul>	<p><b>G</b>reeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Good day', 'Hello Bob! How are you?'</li> </ul>
<p><b>I</b>dentify excellence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'That is great work – how did you do that?'</li> </ul>	<p><b>I</b>dentify the issue</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe non-compliance clearly</li> <li>• Relate to work standards</li> </ul>
<p><b>D</b>iscuss</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage team member to explain what they have done</li> <li>• Two-way – listen</li> <li>• Confirm benefits</li> </ul>	<p><b>D</b>iscuss</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two-way – gain a response</li> <li>• Seek an explanation</li> </ul>
<p><b>A</b>gree</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reinforce excellent work</li> <li>• 'Keep it up' – commit to tell others</li> </ul>	<p><b>A</b>gree</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confirm standard expected</li> <li>• Gain commitment to change</li> </ul>
<p><b>Y</b>es</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Follow up and confirm excellent work and benefits with others</li> <li>• Yes, it is important to tell others!</li> <li>• Make a note</li> </ul>	<p><b>Y</b>es</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Follow up and check practice maintains standard</li> <li>• Take further action if required</li> <li>• Yes, it is important to act on under-performance!</li> <li>• Make a note</li> </ul>

**Figure 4.1** Approach to the provision of informal feedback

## KEY FEATURES

### Acknowledging excellence

If you have difficulty in looking employees in the eye and telling them they have done well, you share a common problem. We have found the majority of line managers are uncomfortable with it. It is therefore one of the major emphases in our training of coaches.

Really, the bullet points under each step in [Figure 4.1](#) say it all, but we must emphasize how important it is to shift from a commitment to tell all the other team members, to actually doing it when they are all together. It must be timely to have impact and meaning. ‘Yes, I will follow up on excellent performance’ or, ‘Yes, I will follow up on the need for improvement.’

### Targeting improvement

If you have difficulty looking employees in the eye and telling them they are not complying with a standard, then you had better overcome it. Any non-compliance with performance standards or code of conduct must be dealt with immediately. Here both the ‘agree’ and ‘follow-up’ stages are critical. ‘Yes, I will follow up on underperformance!’

If the non-compliance is to do with competence, the coach might be able to deal with it by demonstration, practice and drill, or call on a job specialist to do so. This may require a coaching plan that clearly sets out what has to be learnt and how what is learnt will be assessed. In terms of behaviour, the non-compliance might be to do with punctuality. This can be dealt with by a simple discussion, clear evidence provided by the coach, an opportunity for the employee to explain – then a commitment to improve by the employee, or recognition of assistance and action required by the coach.

Whatever the non-compliance, there must be a two-way conversation, followed by a commitment to change from the employee (‘Yes, I will fix it’). More important, there has to be a commitment from the coach to follow up and implement the necessary action to improve performance. The follow-up will also involve the coach checking subsequent practice by the employee to ensure the agreed standard is maintained. At times it will be necessary for periods of consolidation to accompany any coaching on the job.

It is important to reinforce one of the key principles of workplace coaching: genuine two-way feedback must be just that. It is pointless to have a work environment in which the coach is the only person who does the observing and talking.

We suggest that a good starting point is a work environment that encourages all team members to have a say on how:

- work ought to be done;
- learning should take place;
- problems should be dealt with;
- work can be improved.

Of course such an environment must be managed well in terms of the right mix of discipline and freedom to initiate.

Creating an environment for both the team and the individual to motivate themselves, builds confidence and helps them to overcome obstacles. This is about building team work and the line manager demonstrating leadership. This in itself creates confidence to raise issues, concerns and work improvement, so that when the coach finds it necessary to intervene, both points of view are expressed and all facts are brought out. This must apply in respect to both excellent and underperformance.

This simple technique may be all that is required of the coach. However, in the event of subsequent non-compliance or a lack of time to deal with non-compliance in detail, it may be necessary to deal with it during a formal review process, or, depending on the seriousness of the non-compliance, transferred to the discipline process (see [Chapter 7](#)). This is dealt with through coaching off the job (see [Chapter 5](#)). It might also require the formal assessment of the employee's competence by a trained and competent assessor. The outcomes of the assessment will confirm the level of the employee's competence and, if necessary, what improvement is required.

Irrespective of where coaching takes place, evidence of excellence or underperformance becomes critical. Any judgement must be based on the quality and integrity of the evidence against predetermined standards.

## THE QUALITY AND INTEGRITY OF EVIDENCE

In providing feedback on human performance, there is nothing more important than evidence. Some of you reading this will have worked in organizations where the feedback from your supervisor/manager was based on subjectivity, like whether you:

- drank with the boss after work;
- were a member of the same community group as your boss;
- followed the same sporting club or interest as the boss;
- did as you were told.

Many of the criteria (if they could be called that) had nothing to do with your performance on the job.

Evidence used in the assessment of a person's performance will never have any value or acceptance unless it is:

- *Objective* – related to the competence and behaviour of the person – not whether you like them (free of discrimination).
- *Valid* – judgements relate directly to the agreed standards of competence and code of conduct required to do the job.
- *Reliable* – the evidence can be trusted and preferably supported by more than one source.
- *Fair* – an employee will be given the opportunity to dispute the evidence and/or explain the circumstances of the event.
- *Consistent* – the coach will be consistent in his or her behaviour in collecting evidence and operating as coach both on and off the job.
- *Transparent* – the process for collecting evidence and making judgements is clear to all employees. There are no hidden agendas. The criteria by which the coach operates are clearly known to all.
- *Result-focused* – evidence gathered will reward excellent performance and provide clear and agreed plans of action to improve underperformance.
- *Clearly recorded* – noted on the back of a coach's hand, in a notebook, on an electronic diary – as long as it is clear and provides sufficient detail.

## **Taking stock again**

Since we last took stock on page 50, we have moved from the principles of workplace coaching to their application. We promote their application informally, on the job, using our 'GIDAY' process, or off the job through a formal review.

Before we move on to an explanation of how we apply the coaching principles through feedback in a formal review, we want to reinforce our message that managing performance is about continuous improvement based on providing regular day-to-day feedback and coaching as close in time to the event as possible (early intervention). In doing this, the line manager acknowledges excellent performance and targets and responds to underperformance in a planned and achievable way. We stress the importance of:

- genuine two-way feedback;
- early intervention;
- recognition of excellent performance;
- objective evidence of non-compliance;
- development, delivery, review and measurement of individual and team development needs.

We acknowledge here that workplace coaches cannot spend all of their time on the job (inside the workplace). Neither can all that is required to provide informal feedback on excellent or underperformance be dealt with there. There will always be a need to follow up through a formal feedback session away from the work activity (off the job).

The key to all of this is early intervention. It can bring some real success and a lack of it can result in a disaster.

### CASE STUDY – SUCCESS

A manager, unimpressed by the performance (mistakes/sloppy work) and attitude of an employee (grumpy/unhappy) at the time of taking up a new position, decides to intervene. Within a week he has a meeting with the employee. The general expectation is that the employee will be dismissed. The employee raises the following points:

- bored – not enough work;
- poor environment;
- out-of-date technology;
- no induction/no training/no explanation of work to be carried out;
- feels isolated – would like to leave.

A performance improvement plan was agreed, with additional duties, new technology and training/monitoring put in place. The change/improvement was immediate.

Result	5 years	doubles salary
	10 years	head hunted as top performer in field

### **CASE STUDY – FAILURE**

An employee has been verbally abusing fellow workers for years. There is no code of conduct, no guidelines. A new supervisor notices the rapid turnover of staff and asks some new employees why they are leaving. 'X is constantly in your face, swearing at you, telling you you're useless. You just get sick of it.' When reported to senior management, the response is 'X is always like that, tell them to ignore it.'

After four more incidents, action is taken against X. X goes on stress leave – doesn't return, there is a considerable payout, lots of potentially good employees are lost, and it adds to the reputation of a 'nasty workplace' at considerable cost to the employer. Oh for early intervention!