



Providing constructive feedback on staff member performance

“This remains a persistent problem and in many cases still seems to be neither timely nor thoughtful. Staff members still complain that they thought that they were doing a good job only to hear at the very end of the reporting period that the supervisor is dissatisfied. Feedback should not be a one-time event but something that happens regularly during an assignment.” (p. 12)

This quotation from the latest Annual Report (2011) of the Office of the Ombudsman for United Nations Funds and Programmes indicates the importance of timely, honest, motivating, clear and action-orientated feedback at the working place. The quality, the quantity and the circumstances of feedback highly influence the perceived tone and undertone of the message by the addressee. If the feedback is constructive, objective and continuous, the individually addressed staff member might be rather willing to change and to adapt his/her performance to the comments and suggestions included within a feedback.

This Ombudsletter contains some practical advice on how to give constructive feedback in order to manage performance effectively.

First of all, it seems to be very important to reflect on the question why you would like to provide a feedback? What would you like to achieve with this feedback? What is your motivation for this conversation? Is it rather an emotional reason, like disappointment and frustration? Would these feelings influence the feedback negatively? Is it timely? What kind of specific behavior would you like to see changed in the future?

More precisely, in order to focus on a certain behavior detailed descriptions of incidents should be noted. This task does not aim on blaming or humiliating someone for something. It rather prevents a possible evaluative as well as subjective effect for the addressee because personally offensive remarks may create defensiveness and resistance. It is important to focus on the performance and not on the character or personality of the staff member. Therefore, the demanded behavior should be aligned with clear criteria like job descriptions

as well as already documented conversations concerning performance expectations. Finally, you should provide a solution- and future-oriented perspective for the staff member and outline how you could support the change.

After the clarification of these points, the staff member who is supposed to receive feedback should obtain an advanced note concerning this meeting in order to give him/her the chance for a prepared input.

In order to conduct a constructive meeting, trust and respect should be established and any interruption of the conversation needs to be avoided.

Structure your feedback issues as a 'positive - negative - positive sandwich'. This technique will not leave the staff member with a feeling of disillusions and increases his/her willingness to correct and/or improve the performance.

During the conversation you should take the following aspects into consideration:

- ➔ By formulating your prepared comments as questions you create space for the addressee to identify a pattern of his/her behavior on his/her own. It gives the staff member a feeling of ownership of his/her future performance and minimizes the perception of criticism.
- ➔ Moreover, phrase your sentences as 'I' and not as 'you' statements. This formulation will reflect your impression and not a judgment.
- ➔ Avoid 'need to' formulations. This method will prevent mutual accusations.

- ➔ Do not use comments on the staff member's performance like 'good enough' or 'you could do it better'. Use prepared detailed examples to highlight specific past behaviors.
- ➔ Take pauses in order to give the other person the opportunity to clarify some of your remarks. Desirably, your suggestions are the starting point for a dialogue which will create learning as well as a deeper understanding for each other.
- ➔ Additionally, try to end up the points you will raise with positive suggestions and leave the addressee a choice of future actions.

All in all, a constructive feedback should be thoughtful and provide the impulse for improvement and creativity. Only a dialogue, which is conducted at least twice per year or more regularly, contributes actively to an improved motivation, performance and interaction at the working place.

The Ombudsman Team is at the staff member's disposal to advice and to support the acting in a constructive feedback talk. Moreover, the Office of Human Resources will help you with your specific feedback questions.