Giving honest feedback – an NHS myth…?

'I don’t particularly like giving feedback, good or bad'

'I don’t know how to give negative feedback'

'No one ever gives me useful feedback'

'I hate getting feedback'

'I start with good intentions and then worry about the persons feelings'

‘I never think about the person feelings – I tell them straight that they are no good’

Can you relate to any of these situations?

One of the core skills a leader / manager needs in order to enable staff to achieve high performance, is the ability to give effective feedback about performance.

Methodology:

Feedback should always be given with a positive intention, if a positive intention is truly intended then feedback will be better received, if it is given in a disingenuous manner, with negative intention or without integrity – it will not be received well.

- Feedback on good performance - a positive intention is to reinforce the behaviour, enable the recipient to understand why it went well and give them an opportunity to enhance their performance or replicate it.
- Feedback on poor performance - a positive intention is to prevent the recipient from failing at a given task and thus perpetuating the cycle, preventing the recipient from making themselves look incompetent or foolish, enabling the recipient to see a better way of undertaking a task / interaction and thus developing their skills.

It is suggested that when giving feedback, you give positive feedback first, followed by feedback which gives information about improving performance, then close the interaction with another positive piece of feedback – known as the ‘feedback sandwich’.
Giving the positive message first increases the recipient’s listening.

So how do you do it?

Process for giving feedback

Develop a statement which gives the recipient your observation of their behaviour or performance and what impact this had and the outcome it created.

This gives the recipient something meaningful to take away. A random judgement statement such as ‘that was great’ is good to hear but doesn’t give you anything which tells you what you might want to replicate next time. Similarly, ‘that was poor’, gives no sense of what the recipient has done and needs to do differently next time.

Examples of this method are below.

Positive feedback:

Team member to Team leader:

‘I observe that you always have positive regard for team members and this impacts by building trust and creating an environment whereby team members feel safe to participate in the discussions’.

Observation: you always have positive regard for delegates
Impact: this builds trust
Outcome: creating an environment whereby team members feel safe to participate

Feedback to improve performance/behaviour:

Line manager to direct report:

‘I observed when you challenged x in the planning meeting you would not allow them to respond, this caused them to become very frustrated and angry resulting in them disengaging from the whole process’.

Observation: when you challenged x in the planning meeting you would not allow them to respond
Impact: they became frustrated and angry
Outcome: they disengaged from the whole process

Feedback on unsuccessful behaviour:

Leader to direct report:

'I observed that when you worked hard at undertaking the review, you did not engage with all the required stakeholders, they have contacted me and feel disenfranchised, this has meant that you met barriers with your plans'

Observation: when you worked hard at undertaking the review, you did not engage with all the required stakeholders

Impact: they have contacted me and feel disenfranchised

Outcome: you met barriers with your plans

This method / process challenges the manager / leader to be much more observant. When specific observations replace value judgments, recipients have increased understanding and can actively alter or replicate behaviour based on honest understandable feedback and results.

Do test out what the recipient has heard, ask them to play back what you have just said and ask them to advise you if ‘your’ observation of a situation was ‘their’ observation and how can they be supported to continue or change the behaviour/performance as appropriate. Remember – it is the recipient’s responsibility to change their behaviour/performance – you can only provide the appropriate feedback and support to enable them to do this.

This method does require a little practice, as we are used to giving judgment statements or limited feedback until its ‘almost too late’ – why don’t you give it a go!

Observation - Impact - Outcome