

Challenging Poor Performance

Honest feedback is critical when challenging poor performance. But when does being honest turn into being *brutally* honest?

Most of us feel anxious about challenging someone about their performance. Anxiety can have a negative influence over our approach to a conversation of this sort in several ways:

- We focus entirely on getting the conversation over with, so much so that we rush through it and leave little or no opportunities for discussion
- We try and distance ourselves from the message by becoming overly formal. What we hope is 'business like' and 'objective' actually comes across as robotic, cold and insensitive
- We worry so much about what we're going to say that we forget to listen to what the other person has to say. The conversation is no longer a conversation - it's a monologue...

So how can you challenge poor performance constructively? Here are our top 6 tips:

1. Approach the conversation with 'positive intent'. If you believe that the person can change, your words and body language will reflect this. Label the conversation as 'difficult' and it probably will be!
2. Be clear about what you want to say. What aspect of the person's performance do you want them to change? Why is this important? What will be the impact on the business, team or themselves if they don't change?
3. Prepare your opener so that you start the conversation confidently and fluently. A useful framework for your opener is Feeling/Example/Effect/Change:

Feeling State what you are feeling – it stops you showing it!
'I feel frustrated because....'

Example Use an example to illustrate the point you are making.

'...when we sit down to talk through progress with action points, you say that you haven't had an opportunity to work on the areas we agreed...'

Effect Explain what impact their actions/behaviour have on you or others. If possible, try to use an impact that will mean something to them (i.e. there is benefit to them if they change)

'...this means that I use up more of your time by arranging additional meetings to review progress and calling you regularly for updates...'

Change Describe what you would like them to do differently.

'I need you to be honest about what you can commit to and to say when you feel unable to take on a responsibility'

4. Test Understanding – Once you've said your opener, STOP! Invite a response 'Do you agree?' 'What do you think?' 'I'm interested in hearing your perspective...' Don't be afraid of silence. Often the other person needs time to think. Pause and let them reflect. Ignore the urge to fill the silence or to repeat your question.
5. Discuss and explore the issue in more depth. Use open questions to gather information and to really listen to what they have to say. Stay calm. Don't raise your voice and keep the tone level.
6. Agree next steps. Draw the conversation to a conclusion by summarising what has been agreed.