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“Relationship is surely the mirror in which you discover yourself.”

~ Krishnamurti

“One thing I never want to be accused of is ‘not noticing’.”

~ Don Shula

Having Those Difficult Conversations...

Have you been avoiding a difficult conversation that you just can't put off any longer? Even in cases where we know that giving someone some 'constructive criticism' will be beneficial for them, we often avoid these conversations because they can be awkward and we don't want to hurt their feelings.

The focus of this month's newsletter is on giving feedback to help others develop and enhance their performance. I will give you some tips for how to best approach these conversations, whether in your personal or professional life, and challenge you to have these important discussions as soon as possible.

First things first – do a quick self test. Ask yourself why you feel you need to say something to the person. Is it so he/she can develop better skills and be more effective? Is it so that he/she can help your organization be more productive? Or perhaps, you need to set personal boundaries about how you want people to interact with you. These are all great

reasons to open up a conversation with someone.

On the other hand, delivering negative feedback just to 'vent', because you're frustrated, or because you don't like the person, is not a good idea. The purpose of your conversation should always be to help the other person.



The best time to deliver feedback is when both people are calm and relaxed, and in a private setting – corrective/developmental feedback should never be given in front of other people. The first thing you can do to help people feel at ease is to empathize with their situation. By showing that you understand there may have been reasons why the person didn't perform up to your expectations, you help

him/her become less guarded and more open to discussing the issue. It demonstrates to people that you want to solve the problem, not attack them personally.

The next step in delivering effective feedback is to be extremely specific about what the problem behaviour is and what actions you would like to see instead. It is key at this point that you only discuss observable behaviours. You can never know what another person was thinking or what their motives were, so focus on the specific actions that you would like to address.

For example, instead of discussing someone's 'poor attitude' at work, spend some time before the conversation identifying the key behaviours you have noticed that lead you to believe the person has a poor attitude. These behaviours might include issues like being 10 minutes late 3 times last week, or reports not being submitted on time. Another helpful hint is to avoid using generalities such as 'always' or 'never'. Instead, it is best to use examples (continued on p. 2)

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that are clearly visible, quantifiable, and indisputable. This approach helps the person to clearly see what the problem is and avoids the conversation being turned into an argument over the facts.

The third step in the feedback process is to open a conversation to find a solution. Don't just point out what people are doing wrong – help them to move forward in a productive manner. The best way to do this is to ask people future-oriented questions to get them thinking about a solution. If possible, avoid 'why' questions (such as, 'why didn't this work?'). These questions tend to get people stuck in focusing on the past and making excuses. Your job should be to help them look for solutions by asking questions like, 'how can we make sure you hit your target next time?' or 'what systems need to be in place to make this work?'

If you are ready to become more effective at delivering feedback to the important people in your life, join me in this month's *Live Your Strengths* Challenge.

Live Your Strengths Monthly Challenge

Your challenge this month is to shift to solution focus questions when having conversations with people about improving their performance. Here are some questions to get you thinking about the difference between problem focus questions and solution focus questions:

Problem Focus Questions	vs.	Solution Focus Questions*
Why didn't you hit your targets?	vs.	What do you need to do next time to hit your targets?
Why did this happen?	vs.	What do you want to achieve here?
Why didn't this work?	vs.	What do you need to do to move this forward?
Why do you think you are having troubles with this?	vs.	How can you develop strength in this area?
Why is your team not working well together?	vs.	What does your team need to do to win?
Why did you do that?	vs.	What do you want to do next?
Why isn't this working?	vs.	What do we need to do to make this work?

*Questions adapted from David Rock's *Quiet Leadership*, ©2006

Take a few minutes now to develop some solution focus questions that you can ask others throughout the month. It may take a bit of practice before you become accustomed to this approach, but the results—both in relationships and improved performance—are definitely worth the effort.

Could you use some guidance with this month's challenge? Call Denise for a free 30-minute coaching session. Start living *your* strengths!

"In any situation, the individual most able to describe reality without blame will emerge as the leader, whether designated or not."
~ Edwin Friedman

Do you have suggestions for upcoming newsletters or success stories you want to share?
Contact Denise denise@insearchofexcellence.ca