

A large, colorful sculpture of a plant with blue and red leaves hanging from a glass and steel ceiling. The sculpture is composed of many small, oval-shaped leaves in shades of blue and red, arranged in a dense, branching pattern. The background is a bright, sunlit glass and steel structure, likely a modern building's interior or a conservatory.

3 Ways to Coach, Not Criticize, Employees

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Most entrepreneurs hate giving their employees feedback on how they're doing. As a result, they do this once a year in the form of employee **performance reviews**, or, at worst, they avoid the process entirely.

That's because people often equate feedback, especially the negative kind, with confrontation. Most of us are usually never taught how to give feedback in a welcoming way, yet we know how to receive constructive criticism in other areas of our lives and actually appreciate it.

Take sports, for example. No matter what sport you played growing up, you had a coach who told you what you were doing right and wrong, so that you could improve upon it. A good coach constantly gave you feedback and you appreciated it because you wanted to get better in order to win. But while most of us have had such positive experiences at some point in our lives, this kind of coaching is rarely used in business.

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Here are three steps to help you turn criticism into coaching so that employees welcome your feedback:

1. Define the goal.

Feedback works so well in competition because the common goal -- to win -- outweighs the coach's discomfort in giving criticism and the player's discomfort in receiving it. Olympic athletes don't resent getting criticism on how to improve. In fact, they resent not getting the proper insight that might help them win medals.

So what is your business's goal? Unless you have a startup that's trying to change the world, like Apple in its early years, I find personal goals that also benefit the company resonate better with employees than big-picture company goals.

For example, an employee will be more motivated to achieve a personal goal of \$1 million in sales than to help the company as a whole make \$10 million in sales. All employees have career goals even if they don't tell you about them. The key is to find out what goal each person has that benefits both the individual and the company. Agree to work together to help them achieve it.

2. Set feedback expectations early and often.

Once a goal has been defined, set the expectation that employees will receive informal performance feedback. You can give feedback as often as daily for someone in a new role to monthly for a veteran running her own division of your business. Most employees would benefit from even 30 seconds of feedback delivered most weeks. Tell them how often you will provide feedback and that they should ask you for it if you forget.

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3. Start every discussion with the goal.

Start every feedback discussion with the employee's bigger picture: "John, I have some suggestions to help you achieve your goal of \$1 million in sales." Notice the keywords in the phrase: "you" and "your." By making the conversation about the employee's goal, your critique lays the groundwork for a welcome conversation instead of a confrontational one. Always frame the discussion as a way to help your employees achieve what's important to them.

Coaching feedback helps competitors win medals and trophies, so there's no reason it can't help you and your employees achieve business success.

What strategies are you using to coach employees to be better performers? Let us know in the comments below.

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