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Transforming Negative Feedback

BEST PRACTICES

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Getting negative feedback sucks. There isn't any way around that. Whether it be your boss, spouse, friend, or offspring, it leaves you feeling down. The thing is, we rarely grow without it, so it's essential for improving ourselves and our organizations.

Over my last 24 years with Clientek, we have tried many different tactics to try and make negative feedback less sucky. After lots of trial and error, I think we're in a good place, and I'd like to share some lessons we've learned along the way.

Doesn't work - Leading with questions like "how did we get here?" or better yet "what were you thinking?". If you are looking to end the usefulness of any conversation with someone, just start with one of these questions.

Instead - Focus on what you need to do next to resolve the situation and move forward. You can ask your teams to hold their own retrospectives and present back what they would change and do differently next time. This allows them to learn from the situation and shows that you are there to collaborate on fixing things, not blame people.

Doesn't work - Engaging with emotions. Throw some anger into a conversation and you will put them immediately on the defensive. At that point, most of what you say will go unheard. Emotions also tend to lead us to using words that aren't helpful and often damaging.

Instead - Keep to the facts and remember that the other person is already feeling bad about the situation. There are very few times in business that people need to get

upset about what just happened. Give some grace and stay calm to ensure that whatever feedback you provide is heard and understood.

Doesn't work - Assuming people understood what you just told them. It can be hard to clearly articulate your concern when providing difficult feedback. We often want to make the person feel "OK" as we do it. This can lead to some very ambiguous language or a lot of "talkie-talkie"!

Instead - Ask the person to state back what you just told them. This way, you know they understood your intent and you can both move forward aligned on the next steps.

In the end, none of this is all that complicated. Remember the rule you learned probably even before kindergarten, treat others the way you want to be treated (i.e. don't be an ass). This simple lesson will allow you to provide more useful feedback and help your people AND your organization succeed.

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