

MTD Quick Tips

If There Was Just One Thing…

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If There Was Just One Thing…

I am sometimes asked "If there was just one thing that a team could do to improve its overall performance, what would it be"?

There is little doubt in my mind: the ability to deliver and receive personal feedback in a constructive way.

When I run a training session on giving and receiving feedback, I always ask the following question:

"If you were doing something that was annoying / upsetting / or just racks others off, and you didn't know what it was, would you like to know"?

Having run this session hundreds of times by now, the answer is always "yes".

So do we always do it? Do we heck!

There are all sorts of things which get in the way.

Reasons I have been given are:

- Fear the reaction, which might range from tears to violence
- Fear the consequences, especially if I want to tell my boss something
- Fear of losing a friendship, your best friend will seldom give honest feedback for this reason
- Fear of damaging the good working relationship we have developed over time

But these are only our perceptions, which seldom produce these reactions in reality, and remember, all people would like to know!

And we are not just talking about negative feedback, positive feedback seems to be something that we seldom give either. Why don't we do that?

Reasons I have come across are:

- It's not within our culture
- Embarrassment
- We don't need to tell someone they are doing well…they will know that themselves!

But when I ask people if they like receiving positive feedback, they almost always say yes.

So is it possible to learn a technique to overcome these difficulties?

YES is the answer!

One of the most useful and practical ways I have discovered (and it works for me) is to try this.

Before delivering some feedback that may be described as negative, think about something positive that you have seen the person doing.

For example if you have sat through a presentation that actually took twice as long as it should have done, going to someone and just saying it was far too long, is not very helpful.

Next, always offer an alternative that they might like to consider.

Deliver the feedback in a structure of:

1. What I liked
2. What I disliked
3. What I might do differently

So the technique in practice might sound like:

- I really liked the way you used the different graphics within your presentation….
- What concerned me though was the length of time you took to complete each section…..
- In future can you try to cover the content, but considerably reduce the amount of time it takes

This is a technique that can be learned, but there is only one way to learn how to do it effectively - by delivering it.

Often something happens between what we want to say, and what we actually say when faced with a real situation and the person sat in front of us. However, providing the feedback is genuine, sincere, and meant to help the recipient improve, by practicing, it will become second nature to you - trust me I have been practicing and improving for a good while now!

We also condition people about giving us feedback.

If someone has plucked up courage to give us feedback and we meet that feedback by being either very defensive about our actions or aggressive towards them, what are they likely to do next time? Pretty obvious answer to that!

So how should we respond?

If like me, your natural reaction to negative feedback can be defensive, no matter how well it is being delivered, the approach I have learned is simply to say "thank you" and nothing else at this stage. When the emotions have subsided, and you appear to be a little more rational in your thinking, this is the time to go back and ask a few questions for clarification.

You then have a choice:

Consider:

Is the feedback valid and could I or should I do something about it if it is?

Is it just one person's opinion and not substantiated by others, in which case I could just set the feedback aside.

But by just saying thank you I have ensured that the individual won't be put off from giving me some feedback in the future.

So try it and practice it - it IS a skill that can be learned and will definitely improve the relationships and working practices within your team

Until the next time, take care of yourself

Live, love and laugh

Sean

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About Sean McPheat



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Founder and MD of international management development firm MTD Training, Sean McPheat is widely regarded as a leading authority on modern day management and leadership.

Sean is a bestselling author, and has been recognised for his own business building skills through the **British Business Awards** and has been featured in the **Who's Who Of Britain's Business Elite**.

He has been a regular judge for the UK's Young Enterprise Programme but was not as horrible as Simon Cowell (well almost!)



Sean has been featured on **CNN International, the BBC, SKY, ITV, The Guardian, Forbes, Arena Magazine, Marketing Weekly, Business Zone, Winning Edge** and radio stations such as BBC WM and LBC (London's Big Conversation).

Sean has over **250 media credits** to his name and his weekly email tips go out to over **60,000 people** interested in management and development strategies.

Sean is also a **much sought after media figure and motivational speaker** on all topics related to management, HR, business improvement and entrepreneurialism.