If you are a new manager or want to improve communication with your employees, it is important to establish clear and frequent feedback. This feedback lets your employee know how they are performing at any given time and as a manager, you know that you have provided your employee with the information they need to improve their work.

Providing feedback is often a source of stress for managers, especially when an employee is underperforming. Often, an employee may not know they are performing poorly because you, as their manager, may not have provided consistent and timely feedback about the quality of their work.

This article will discuss a few ways to provide your employees with clear and effective feedback, and avoid many common pitfalls faced by both new and seasoned managers.

Clarify Performance Standards

From day one, your employees should be aware of the standards you require of them as part of their regular duties. Maintaining these standards helps you and your team understand both their individual roles, and their role within the organization. Before your team can understand their individual roles, you must be clear about how their role, and yours, fits into the overall vision of the organization. Employees cannot perform effectively if they do not know the standards you have for their performance. These standards must be communicated through clear, specific, and measurable goals, and you must regularly discuss these goals with your employees.

Have Clear Expectations for Your Employees

The next step in accountability to standards requires managers to assure that each employee understands the rules of great performance at your organization. What expectations do you have for your employees? How often will you check in with them about how they are meeting (or not meeting) these expectations? What will happen if they do not meet these expectations on an ongoing basis? When expectations are clearly established employees are aware of where they stand on your team, and understand the consequences of poor performance.

Uphold Performance Standards

Upholding employee performance standards is a critical step for effective managers. By holding your employees accountable for their performance, you are providing clear feedback about how they may be meeting or not meeting the goals you have for them. This step is often difficult to execute because it requires consistency on the manager's part to let employees know how they are performing on a regular basis.

A good rule of thumb is to check in with your employees once a week to discuss where they have excelled and areas of their performance they need to improve. A weekly meeting may seem like a lot to handle, but this meeting does not need to be a formal conversation. A simple five-minute chat at the beginning or end of the day is often enough to express your satisfaction

or concern with their recent performance. Remember that you have established a relationship with your employee as their manager, and it is very important to uphold standards you set for yourself as well as standards you require of your employees.

Checking in with your employees regularly lets them know that you care about how they are performing and want to see them perform effectively as a part of your team. This regular feedback will go a long way towards creating a positive and encouraging environment for your employees to learn and grow.

Coaching and Counseling

When providing feedback to your employees, you should know whether they are coaching or counseling your employee. By nature, coaching is forward-looking, while counseling is used to reflect on past performance, typically when an employee is underperforming, and determining how to amend that behavior in the future.

Coaching (also referred to as mentoring) is a management approach that is most effective when an employee is succeeding at their job, but still has room to grow. Through coaching, a manager has the opportunity to share knowledge and experiences, give advice, and get feedback from an employee. Coaching should always be balanced - always provide your employee with feedback about what they are doing well (their strengths) and any performance issues they need to improve on (opportunities for improvement).

Regular coaching helps managers maintain a connection to their staff by understanding their current needs and interests, which means that coaching itself can be considered a team building tool. Managers are responsible for asking questions they may have about an employee's performance, however, the check-in should be an employee-directed conversation. The goal of coaching is to connect with your employee – one of the main reasons an employee decides to stay with a company is the connection that they feel with the manager.

Counseling should be used when an employee is failing at their job. When counseling an employee, managers should be very clear about the values, attitudes, and actions that are causing your employee to fail, stress the importance of correcting these behaviors and attitudes, and outline the next steps that will be taken if your employee does not change their behavior or attitude. Depending on the severity and/or consistency of the infraction, these next steps can include: regular meetings to discuss your employees performance, a verbal warning of future corrective action, demotion, and/or termination.

In general, whenever any employee enters into the counseling stage all conversations should be documented in some way. This can include a formal "Path to Success Plan," but can be as simple as writing a short memo into your employees file. Always provide your employee with a copy of anything you add to their file to provide them with open and clear communication regarding their performance.

A common mistake among managers is a lack of clarity about what you expect from your employees. It is important for managers to state their expectations for employee performance clearly and on a regular basis to avoid confusion and eliminate frustration for both you and your staff.

When an employee seems to consistently fail at a task or set of tasks, be sure to discuss how they are not meeting your expectations. Be sure they understand how to perform the task, allow them to ask any questions, and make sure they understand any feedback you have provided. A simple five-minute discussion about what you expect can easily remedy frustration and confusion.

Providing Feedback

Informal daily feedback is a good way to remind employees of the expectations of their manager and provide an assessment of overall performance. If you are providing feedback on a mistake your employee made, be sure to discuss this with them as quickly as possible after the infraction. Whether you are praising great employees or counseling poor performing staff, this feedback should incorporate positive and negative aspects of your employee's performance, and be specific to their current issues. Including positive feedback will make employees more likely to correct their performance in the future. Avoid bringing up any previous issues they have corrected, unless that issue is related to their current poor performance.

Very few managers enjoy confrontation, so it is sometimes difficult for a manager to discuss bad behaviors or attitudes with an employee. If you are feeling hesitant about discussing an employee's poor performance, you may find that you are avoiding a conversation with them. You may be avoiding the conversation for any of the following reasons:

Delaying the conversation for another time. It is easier to delay tough conversations until a later time, and focus on "more important things" right now.

Waiting until their annual performance review. The manager thinks it is best to discuss these issues during the check-in, instead of when the offending attitude or behavior was recognized.

Avoiding conversation out of fear of retaliation. The manager is afraid your employee will retaliate to feedback by pointing out the manager's weaknesses.

Avoiding confronting a "nice person." Regardless of your employee's shortcomings, the performance issues are ignored because of your employee's personality.

Assuming your employee understands their performance issues. your employee has already been warned about this issue and they know they are doing something wrong because the manager gave a signal ("the look," a heavy sigh, etc.) instead of pulling your employee aside to discuss the issue.

It is important for you to reflect on how you feel about having the conversation with your underperforming employee, and determine if you are avoiding the conversation for any of the reasons above.

Here are some tips for preparing to discuss performance with your employees:

Create an outline. Write or outline main points you want to make in the conversation and rehearse them if necessary.

Create the right environment. Find a private setting to have the conversation. This is especially important when having more difficult conversations.

Be honest. Honesty with staff builds trust, even in tough conversations. Even if your employee is upset, they will be relieved to know about their issues and what needs to be improved.

Clearly express expectations. The goal of the conversation is to discuss your employee's performance, and they should leave the conversation with a clear understanding of how well they are currently performing and how well you would like them to perform in the future. Set realistic goals for improvement and let them know you will be tracking their progress through informal daily feedback and regular check-ins.

Exhibit confidence. Correct body language is an important aspect in displaying confidence during these conversations. Managers may be nervous about having this type of conversation with their employees, but it is important to avoid fidgeting, maintain eye contact, and be clear about your expectations of your employee. Maintain control of the conversation and redirect the conversation to the issue at hand if your employee strays from the topic.

Speak and write professionally. Discuss what is efficient/inefficient, appropriate/inappropriate, acceptable/unacceptable about your employee's attitude or behavior and outline steps they will need to take in order to improve. Avoid joking or excessively casual language to make sure your employee takes the conversation seriously.

Always check for understanding. Remember to have your employee repeat back what was said during the conversation. Make sure that they focus on the issue and the steps needed to correct it.

Ask your employee for a self-assessment. This is a good indicator of your employees willingness to change their behavior.

You can gauge the effectiveness of your feedback by determining your employee has expert knowledge of organization policies, procedures, and values. Also be sure your employee understands the policies and expectations that relate to their specific job. Additionally, you can tell if your feedback has been accepted if they show they have the skill and knowledge to perform their tasks correctly and efficiently. Finally, effective feedback should reinforce the

standards you have for your employee as a part of your team.