

TALENT DIARIES



# The art of performance feedback

**Dr AQUIL BUSRAI**, AN HR VETERAN AND CEO OF AQUIL BUSRAI CONSULTING SAYS THAT THOUGH FEEDBACK-GENERATION IS AN AWKWARD EXERCISE, IT IS AN UNAVOIDABLE ONE

The business environment today, with increasing globalisation, high focus on productivity enhancement, coupled with declining margins, makes it critical for organisations to maximise the value of each employee. It is, therefore, imperative to calibrate set goals with what has been achieved in an objective manner and provide real-time feedback for continual improvement.

Performance at an individual level is about talent, skill and motivation whereas at the organisational level; it is about providing the right ambience for employees to succeed. High-performing organisations therefore focus sharply on ensuring that their performance management systems do, in fact, encourage behaviours that lead to achievement of business goals.

When employees receive little or no feedback, they tend to either be overly self-critical or self-congratulatory. This is because they are relying upon their self-perception of events rather than specific feedback to measure their performance and impact.

Feedback is information about one's past behaviour with the hope of influencing future behaviour. The ideal outcome of the feedback process should be for an employee to emerge more engaged, energised and motivated to strive for better performance. However, insight of best intentions to discuss

past performance and plan the future; managers find themselves delivering an annual report card or being a judgmental, punitive parent. Whether the feedback is positive or constructive – the focus should be on helping an individual's development, not judging it.

Many managers struggle with providing constructive criticism. They tend to avoid it assuming that the conversation may end up in an argument or the employee may reject the feedback. However, this discomfort can be avoided provided the manager is prepared to use facts as against 'labelling' an

behaviours that could make a positive difference to their lives. A manager for instance could suggest to an employee, "Here are four ideas for the future. If you can only use two of the ideas, you are still two ahead. You may ignore what doesn't make sense to you." It is obvious that this will not replace the current feedback mechanism, but will only supplement it.

The main aim of any performance feedback system is to initiate a positive change, make an individual more conscious of his/her effectiveness and provide a guideline to improve. It is therefore imperative that employees also take responsibility for an accurate assessment of their current skills, performance and behaviour. They need not rely only on their manager to assess their contribution and developmental needs. It is as much up to the individual to take control of this process by seeking coaching, asking for very specific feedback, and being receptive to input from a wide variety of people at various levels. When this is done on a continual basis - the cycle of performance improvement is set in motion.



ARE YOU RESISTANT TO GIVING OR RECEIVING FEEDBACK? SHARE YOUR VIEWS BY CLICKING ON 'CORPORATE LIFE' AT [www.ItsMyAscent.com/CareerAdvice](http://www.ItsMyAscent.com/CareerAdvice)

employee, which conveys a judgement rather than an objective evaluation. On the other hand, withholding feedback has long-term negative consequences. It lowers productivity, impacts morale and damages relationships.

Dr Marshall Goldsmith refers to the concept of 'Feed Forward' - focusing on the promise of the future rather than the mistakes of the past. In this process, employees are encouraged to change one or two

> The author has 40 years of experience in HR with blue chip organisations like Unilever in Kenya and India; Motorola in Asia Pacific; Shell in Malaysia and IBM in India