



Feedback that doesn't hurt

One way we influence others is through feedback. **Feedback can be an effective tool for getting others to repeat behavior that pleases you.** Some feedback is as simple as saying, "Thank you," with a smile. At a restaurant you tell the server, "I really appreciate your keeping my water glass full." You tell a co-worker, "I really like it when you ask me if I have time to talk instead of immediately launching into a conversation. I wish everyone would do that."

Let me share with you a feedback tool I learned many years ago that is AMAZING in terms of being able to provide feedback without it being heard as criticism. The acronym for it is LBNT which stands for "like best/next time." Here's how it works:

We'll start with leaders but keep reading if you're not a manager. There are opportunities for you to use this tool, as well.

Let's say a staff member (we'll call her Lupe) turned in a project to you and you've had a chance to review it. You set up a meeting with Lupe to review the results. If you're like most, you start by telling her what you liked about her work. By the way, employees refer to this tactic as "being buttered up for the kill." That's because they know what's coming next—a stinging (at least to their ears) critique of all the things that weren't done well. Both you and Lupe walk away from this meeting dispirited. It wasn't easy for you to tell her these things and it wasn't easy for her to hear them.



LBNT is a tool that sets up a very different scenario. In the review meeting, you start by asking Lupe, "What did you like best about your work on this project?" She might answer, "I was proud of turning it in a week early." This is great because, truth be told, you didn't even notice that she'd turned it in early and now that you know, you can tell her how much you appreciate it (without, of course, mentioning that you didn't even notice).

You keep probing, "What else?" until she's given you a picture of what she liked best about her performance. Then you ask, "What, if anything, would you do differently next time?" This is an opportunity for Lupe to "tell on herself." Maybe she says, "I thought I could have researched the data on page 12 more thoroughly." Without commenting, you continue to ask, "What else?" until she has given you HER OWN CRITIQUE of the project.

Here's what's so great about this. Lupe is doing her own performance evaluation! It is much kinder to allow her to do this herself versus hearing it from you. Additionally, you will gain valuable information: (1) details about the work that you didn't notice; and (2) insight into the way Lupe thinks and works. This kind of feedback is an essential leadership skill.

Now it's YOUR turn. You tell her what you liked best and what you would like to see next time. What you DON'T have to do is point out the issues Lupe already revealed in her own evaluation. If appropriate, you might comment on them and let her know if you agree or disagree. Maybe Lupe was too easy or too hard on herself. That would certainly be valuable feedback to give.

LBNT gives both parties a voice and a voice is what we all want.

What if you're not a manager and wouldn't have an opportunity for the scenario above? There are many opportunities to use LBNT—when family members do chores at home, for example. It wouldn't be as formal as the meeting with Lupe—that would be weird—but it still works. Let's say your son Malcolm cleaned his room after using up every excuse he had for NOT doing it. Here's how the conversation after he's done might go:

You: What did you like best about doing that?
Malcolm: Not a thing.
You: Well, if you DID like something about it, what would it be?
Malcolm: I found my iPod.
You: Great! What else?
Malcolm: I don't know. I guess I like that I can see where things are now.
You: Okay, what will you do differently from now on?
Malcolm: Maybe keep it cleaner so it doesn't get so bad.
You: Anything else?
Malcolm: Sheesh! Isn't that enough?
You: Okay, what I liked best is that you did it without moaning the whole time. Finding that iPod was a blessing; once you put those ear buds in, you seemed to work faster. Also, I appreciate your going the extra step by carrying your hamper to the laundry room. And I agree with you. If you keep it cleaner as you go, you won't have such a mess to clean up next time. I'm proud of you, son.

I've outlined just two scenarios here one to improve leadership skills and one for parenting skills. Use them as a model for how to do this in your own life. I'd love to hear back from you when you do.

P.S. You have my permission to anonymously slip this into your boss' In Box. LOL.