



## Feedback that Promotes (versus crushes) Employee Engagement



When I work with organizations I am often surprised by how few leaders know how to give feedback that is constructive and energizing. There seems to be a black or white quality to the feedback. Either employees hear what they did wrong or we're cheerleading them when they did something right, all without providing guiding details. Or worse, we don't provide feedback at all and they are left floundering, wondering if they're getting things right or about to be fired. None of these approaches lead to more employee engagement—quite the opposite—they all lead to employee *disengagement*. Yes, lacking specific details, even positive feedback can be a detriment to employee engagement. Employees don't want cheerleading—they want to know specifics about their performance (don't you?)

It is a rare leader who understands and can provide the kind of feedback that creates an opportunity for improvement of employees' skills, boosts morale, and results in employees' taking responsibility for their results.

Happily, there is a feedback process that builds employee engagement specifically because **the employees critique their own performance**.

Feedback, in its purest essence is neither positive nor negative; it is merely data. The person providing the data cannot control how it is perceived; that is controlled completely by the recipient. When the provider and the recipient of feedback are one and the same (i.e., self-critique), it can become very interesting.

By adding the following process to your toolkit your employees will begin to participate in their own development and become more engaged in their work.

### The LB/NT Process

The process is called **The LB/NT Process**. Here is how it works:

When a task or project is completed, you ask your team member, "What did you **like best** (LB) about what you did, and what would you do differently **next time** (NT)?" This process is useful for both individual and project team feedback.

Once the self-critique is completed, you will have less to say than if you had been the only one delivering feedback. In fact, sometimes your input won't even be necessary, your employees will cover everything you intended to say. However, it will support their process to let them know which parts of their assessment you agree with and which you do not. You may have an opportunity to say, "I think you're being a little hard on yourself," if, in fact, that's true. And if there is feedback you wanted to give that they didn't cover, you can guide the conversation in that specific direction. "What did you like best about \_\_\_\_\_ and what would you do differently next time?"

Here are some key advantages to using this process:

- **(LB) You may learn something you hadn't even noticed**, giving you an opportunity to provide positive feedback. For example, you might learn that the project was delivered a week ahead of time. This gives you the chance to express how much you appreciate it (they don't ever have to know you didn't notice).
- **(NT) Employees take responsibility.** By taking an objective look at their work they can see the opportunities for making improvements. Because the employees identified those areas themselves, they are significantly more likely to make those corrections in the future.
- **(LB) It encourages a feeling of satisfaction** for what was done well. A major component of employee *disengagement* is the feeling that they are not making progress. (Don't you sometimes feel the same?) Acknowledgement of "wins" is sorely lacking. (For more empirical evidence on why a feeling of progress is important to employee engagement, I highly recommend the book **The Progress Principle – Using small wins to ignite joy, engagement and creativity at work** by Teresa Amabile and Steven Kramer.)
- **(NT) It eliminates your role as “the bearer of bad news.”** When you *consistently* use the LB/NT process with employees, you are no longer regarded as being overly critical, difficult to please, or other “not fit for print” labels employees make up when they receive negative feedback.
- **(LB/NT) It increases productivity and energy.** Too often we move from task to task without acknowledging that things are getting done. When the LB/NT process is utilized you are acknowledging the completion of a task or project. Completion generates energy and we are infinitely more productive when energetic.

I would be negligent if I didn't mention the linchpin that makes the LB/NT process work beautifully: once you ask, 'what did you like best?' and, "what, if anything, would you do differently next time," SHUT UP! Stop talking! Do not offer suggestions (leading the witness); do not fidget in your chair (due to your discomfort with silence), JUST WAIT.

I promise, as you get better at this, and you will, you will be amazed by what your employees offer and how much easier your job becomes. At first, it may be awkward. Employees might worry that these are trick questions. If so, reassure them that their input is a valuable component to a new approach you just discovered and are applying. Employees are glad to know you don't have it all figured out; it makes you human.

Once your employees see this in action and understand that this is the new feedback process (i.e., it's not going away), they will come to meetings prepared with their LBs and NTs. The benefit to everyone is that it will take less time and be more productive than traditional feedback sessions where they may often have felt defensive, unappreciated and beaten up. They may also choose to incorporate this practice into tasks and projects they've completed for which your feedback is not necessary, making them more self-reliant and efficient in their work.

Finally, *ahem* (small cough), if I may suggest? This is an excellent process for *you* to use when reviewing your own work.

*Silver Rose is an Employee Engagement Evangelist who provides organizations with strategies for: (1) re-energizing employees; (2) increasing profitability; and (3) freeing leadership from the necessity of micro-managing results.*

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