

The Art & Science of Positive Feedback

Giving feedback effectively

The most significant work on this subject was done by Dr. Thomas Gordon. He was a child psychologist searching for ways to balance power between children and parents. His work was based upon giving children an avenue for expressing themselves to parents who could easily reject their upsets and exert power to “stomp” the child’s concerns.

Today, though, Gordon’s approach appeals to a huge number of people in leadership positions because of its easy to remember and use words.

The formula is simple. “**I** want, **I** would rather, **I** would like it if... **because**...”

So?

The single most powerful thing you can do to move your staff in a new direction is to give feedback. If they hear positive comments from you, they will be inspired to accomplish more of the same.

So what about negative feedback? In general, negative feedback creates avoidance. *If I was criticized for this thing, I will not do that again. I don’t know what I did wrong, and I don’t know for sure how to change what I do to get better feedback.*

Let’s take what we know for sure... based upon almost 50 years of research. **Positive feedback is powerful and relatively easy to give.**

What to do

The “recipe” Dr. Thomas Gordon created for giving powerful feedback is deceptively simple.

This first part is an “**I**” statement. People know you are the leader. Your feedback is singularly important. *If you like me... or what I do... it tells me that I’m on the “A” team.*

The second part requires some thinking, but nails down the reason for the feedback.

“**Because**” gives validity and believability.

When you say, “**I’m delighted** you spent time with Martha and found out she was a second grade teacher. This will be important to our ability to communicate with her, **because** we haven’t had a way to involve her in personal activities. **Thank you** for spending time with Martha and sharing what you learned.”

If you were a front-line staff member and received that kind of feedback, would you make an effort to repeat the action?

High return on your investment

How do you give anything more than, “Nice job” if you didn’t see it happen? Being on the floor for 10 minutes each day assures you will see your staff doing good things.

Using a small part of “stand up meetings” to say “thank you” is a subtle but powerful way to get the point across. *If you do right things, you will be publicly recognized. If you don’t do ‘right’ things you won’t be chastised... but you won’t be recognized.*

People gravitate toward positive feedback. It doesn’t take long for them to figure out how to make the “comment list.”

What does it take to make the list?

Does a staff member have to make a major breakthrough to get a mention on your list? Hopefully, not.

Even the smallest effort in the right direction that is rewarded will be repeated and improved. Your staff is no different from others. You have super stars that do excellent work and will continue to do so. If you only comment on star status accomplishments, many will give up under the realistic assessment that, "I will never be as good as _____."

Spread praise generously.

Suppose you have an introverted person who almost never speaks in staff meetings? But, if this person were to mention that he had taken a few minutes to visit with a retired (used to buy a lot) customer while a load was being built for his son, would it be good enough to make your "comment list"? If it does (without too much syrup), you can bet the person will repeat and perfect the performance.

You are the spark plug

If you're part of a large group of stores, praise from on high (headquarters) doesn't have greater or even equal value to the small comments you make. You're "the boss." You're the one who hires and fires. You're the one who sees them in action (during your time out on the floor).

You're the one who can send them home feeling like the (sometimes) back-breaking work they do is not only appreciated... it's worthy of **praise**.

Recognize everything from the simple to the sublime.