5 Situations Where You Need to Avoid Giving Feedback

No matter how you're delivering performance appraisals, we all know that giving negative and positive feedback is a critical part of a leader's job.

Most managers don't like giving feedback--especially negative feedback. Research also shows that, as much as managers may dislike giving negative feedback, employees want to get it--as long as it is *delivered appropriately*.

Delivering feedback appropriately is the crucial element that makes the difference between whether an employee experiences feedback as helpful or harmful. And while you might think that delivering feedback *inappropriately* sounds like yelling or threatening your direct report, it doesn't have to be loud or overbearing to miss the mark.

Here are five times to reconsider your performance feedback before you run the risk of being heard as hypocritical, inconsistent, overwhelming, or worse:

1. When you're accidentally being a hypocrite.

Are you planning to let your sales manager know you'd like them to speak less and listen more in meetings? Then you'd better be modeling a lot of listening in meetings.

If you're giving feedback about a behavior or a task, you want to make sure that you're either doing it well enough to be a role model--or be open enough to admit that this is a developmental goal for you as well. You'll have much greater credibility if you come clean about the fact that you don't have a particular competency mastered--and you can take the opportunity to share what you're doing to improve it.

2. When you've given a lot of other feedback recently.

Behavior change is hard. Behavior change takes time. Behavior change happens in five stages: pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action and maintenance.

If you've given someone a lot of negative feedback recently, that means you've made multiple requests for them to launch this five-stage process for each and every change. This is the problem with traditional annual performance reviews when they serve as the only time that a manager gives feedback.

It's a practical and emotional overload, with few lasting results. You may have more feedback to give, but that doesn't mean your employee has more capacity to take it.

3. When you haven't followed up on previous feedback you've given.

Every feedback conversation doesn't have to include new feedback. But most feedback conversations should include a discussion about progress on previous feedback conversations--what's working, what isn't, what's getting in the way, what you've noticed, what resources may still be needed, etc.

But if you keep giving out new directives without checking in on earlier discussions, your feedback may be viewed as unimportant, irrelevant, or ignorable.

4. When feedback is used to lay blame, or for any other reason than to improve performance.

Negative performance feedback should not be used:

- to make sure you can pin a project gone wrong on someone.
- to retaliate.
- to unload emotions, you are having trouble managing.
- to show that you're a tough boss.
- to instill fear.
- to manipulate someone.
- to force someone's hand.
- for any other reason that isn't performance related.

5. When you can't remember the last time you've given this person positive feedback.

I'm not a fan of the "feedback sandwich" (positive feedback, negative feedback, positive feedback). I believe it's more of a "guilt sandwich", aimed at making you feel better about having a difficult conversation.

Before you give your next piece of negative feedback, make sure you've created an emotional and relational cushion for it by amping up your positive feedback early and often--and in a way that isn't attached to negative feedback.

Perhaps it's best summed up by management author Ken Blanchard, who wrote that "feedback is the breakfast of champions"--and champion feedback providers know when to give it, and when to skip it.