Give and Take of Constructive Criticism

Instructor Guide

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

Constructive criticism can be a helpful tool when used with the intent of helping or improving a situation in the workplace. However, it can be one of the most challenging things not only to receive, but also to give. It can often involve various emotions and feelings, which can make matters delicate. But when management learns effective ways to handle and deliver constructive criticism, employees can not only learn from their mistakes, but even benefit from them. We need to recognize that we can be a part of the problem if we are not addressing the problems or are not addressing them effectively. This workshop will guide you in positive ways to criticize your employees and help them improve their behaviors.

Workshop Objectives

To effectively deliver constructive criticism, you must understand what it is, how it is used, and its purpose. The following objectives of this workshop are designed to help you do just that.

By the end of this workshop, participants will be able to:

- Explain when feedback should take place

- Prepare and plan to deliver constructive criticism

- Determine the appropriate atmosphere in which criticism should take place

- Identify the proper steps to be taken during the session

- Describe how emotions and certain actions can negatively impact the effects of the session

- Set goals and explain the method used to set them

- Follow up with the employee after the session

Module One: Preparing and Planning

When Should Feedback Occur?

One aspect of delivering constructive criticism is in knowing the right time and opportunity to deliver it. Some instances can be addressed on the employee's next annual review, while others should be addressed right away. If it is done too soon, it could make the employee doubt their abilities and affect their job performance. If delivered too late, then the employee may ignore it

altogether and dismiss any help at all. Identifying key situations can help decide when feedback needs to be done.

Choosing the Time and Place

Choosing a time and a place to deliver constructive criticism can play a key role. The location should allow for you to speak in private and away from other coworkers. Many factors can affect what would be the best time, such as if the employee is tired or getting ready to go to lunch. Also the manager should consider how the employee is feeling before setting a time. If he is angry or uncomfortable with the subject, he may need more time to prepare.

Choosing the Time and Place Case Study

Terry needed to speak with one of his employees, Debbie, who had recently missed some of the deadlines on her projects. He had an open door policy with his employees, but Debbie hadn't approached him with any problems or setbacks she may have been having. Terry did not particularly like this new employee as she seemed to come off as unfriendly toward others in the office, but he had to brush these personal opinions aside and arranged a private meeting to speak with Debbie. He felt things were better explained and resolved in person.

When Terry spoke with Debbie, he complimented her work effort and the projects she had turned in, but reminded her that they were often overdue. He calmly explained that deadlines must be followed and that if she was having difficulty meeting them, then she needed to speak with him for help. Debbie then explained that she was feeling overwhelmed with many of the projects and wasn't sure how to ask for assistance. After that, Terry assigned Debbie to work with a partner to complete the workload in time for each deadline and reiterated the concepts of his open door policy. He then made periodic follow-ups to ensure she was keeping up with her workload.

Estimated Time	10 minutes
Topic Objective	Outline the Choosing Appropriate Times and Places case study.
Topic Summary	Case study. Discuss the Choosing a Time and Place case study.
Recommended Activity	Discuss the results of the case study. What obstacles did Terry face when preparing to speak with Debbie?
Review Questions	How did Terry prepare to speak with Debbie?

Repeated Events or Behavior

An employee that displays repeated negative behaviors or patterns should be addressed in order to either stop or further prevent it in the future. Before addressing the problem, the employee should be monitored to ensure the event or behavior is reoccurring, not a onetime incident. Once it has been identified, the employee should be addressed in private. Privately, a

resolution can be found to end the behavior and prevent it from happening further without embarrassing the employee in front of other coworkers.

Examples:

- An employee is constantly tardy to meetings, although he contributes throughout the meeting.

- An employee always turns in his reports always on time, however they are in the incorrect format.

- An employee works hard during the day, but takes long breaks and lunches.

Estimated Time	10 minutes
Topic Summary	Repeated Events and Behaviors. Recognize the positive and negative aspects of a repeat behavior/event. Identify how to address and resolve the problem.
Materials Required	01-Handling Repeated Events and Behaviors
Recommended Activity	Complete the handout individually. Review your answers with the rest of the class.
Review Questions	What is one instance of a repeated event or behavior?

***Activity Handout "Handling Repeated Events and Behaviors"

Review each scenario individually. Identify the positive aspect of each situation. Then identify the negative behavior or event that should be addressed. Finally, come up with a solution that can be used to stop it.

- An employee works hard during the day and stays late to finish projects and assignments. However, she is always tardy in the morning when reporting to work.

Positive: _____

Negative: _____

Solution: _____

_____

- An employee is on several committees and continues to volunteer to work on others. In return, her quality of work has started to drop.

Positive: _____

Negative: _____

Solution: _____

_____

Additional Notes: _____

_____

_____

_____

Gather Facts on the Issue

Before you can begin to address any situation, you have to gather the facts. It's best to make a quick list of what you'll need to cover and what information you'll need to do that. This can include employee performance stats, memos; emails exchanged, or even notes containing your own personal observations. If needed, include information from company policies or training guides. The more facts and information you gather beforehand, the more prepared you'll be when the time comes meet with the employee.

Hints:

- Review the reason for giving the constructive criticism

- Find what the employee may need to improve or change in the future

- Gather information that supports why you have addressed the problem (i.e. performance stats, behaviors)

Estimated Time	10 minutes
Topic Summary	Gather Facts on the Issue Review different situations and what would be the correct information to gather.
Materials Required	Flipchart/Dry erase board, marker
Planning Checklist	None.
Recommended Activity	Discuss various situations and topics regarding employee behaviors. Review what information would be needed on all cases and what would be case specific. Write answers on the flipchart/dry erase board.

Review Questions	What are some of the first steps to gathering facts about an employee?

Breaches in Company Policy

Situations such as tardiness, improper dress, and poor performance are examples of a breach in company policy. Problems such as these should not wait until the employee's next review, but should be addressed right away. If not properly handled, the employee's behaviors can start to affect others in the office and disrupt the work flow. Employees should be reminded of the company policy, including guidelines to follow and possible consequences for misconduct.

Examples:

- Excessive tardiness or absences

- Consistent violation of dress code policies

- Disruptive behavior to other employees

- Continued unsatisfactory job performance

Estimated Time	10 minutes
Topic Summary	Breaches in Company Policy Review how to identify and evaluate breaches in company policies and how they can be addressed.
Materials Required	02-Breaches in Company Policy
Recommended Activity	Complete the worksheet in your workgroup. Review your ideas with the rest of the class. Discuss briefly some of the DOT policies that are relevant to this activity.
Review Questions	When should breaches in company policy be addressed?

***Activity Handout for "Breaches in Company Policy"

For the following situations, identify the policy that addresses each problem situation and identify how you would review these policies with the employee.

Problem #1 – Unsatisfactory job performance (EPA Policy)

_____

_____

Problem #2 – Discriminatory behavior among co-workers (Workplace Harassment Policy)

_____

_____

_____

Problem #3 – Excessive absences and/or tardiness (Attendance, Leave & Overtime Policy)

_____

_____

_____

Do more topics need to be included? What additional information would you provide at this stage?

_____

_____

_____

_____

When Informal Feedback Has Not Worked - Lecture

Informal feedback includes actions such as a helpful reminder, a discussion in passing or even an email or memo. Many managers will try one of these methods (or another) to address a problem with an employee and keep the constructive criticism to a minimum. But when informal methods do not work, and the behavior continues the manager needs to then find a form of formal feedback to speak with the employee. Formal feedback, as the name suggests, usually involves a more planned or structured approach, such as a meeting or review. These actions normally allow more direct contact with the employee and can better address the problem, as well as a solution.

Example of formal feedback:

- Private meetings or discussions

- Personal follow-up after a particular incident

- Employee review or appraisal

Estimated Time	10 minutes
Topic Summary	When Informal Feedback Has Not Worked
	Review problem situations that continue after informal feedback. Identify which forms of formal feedback would be effective.
Materials Required	03-When Informal Feedback isn't Working
Planning Checklist	None
Recommended Activity	Complete the worksheet individually. Review your ideas with the rest of the class.
Review Questions	What is an example of informal feedback?

***Activity Handout "When Informal Feedback Isn't Working"

Sometimes informal feedback doesn't get the message to the employee. Review both situations and identify the informal feedback that was taken to resolve it. Assuming the informal feedback did not work; decide what actions should be taken next.

- An employee does not turn in reports on time and does not spell check/edit them. The manager spoke with him at his desk and reminded him to finish work on time and turn in reports after he has reviewed them for errors. However, the behavior continues.

Informal feedback given: _____

_____

Possible action: _____

_____

- An employee continues to wear tops that are too revealing or inappropriate. Her supervisor sent her an email reminding her it was against company policy to wear these types of clothes to work. The employee continues to wear them to work.

Informal feedback given: _____

_____

Possible action: _____

_____

Immediately After the Occurrence

One of the best times to deliver feedback is immediately after the incident happens. This way, the behavior or problem can be addressed right away. If a problem is ignored and allowed to continue, it can not only affect the employee, but coworkers as well. The longer the behavior goes on or the more time that passes after an incident, the value, and effect of the feedback decreases. Formal or informal feedback can be used, as long as it effectively resolves the problem.

Tips:

- Speak with the employee privately.

- Address the problem – don't criticize the employee.

- Find a solution and how it can be implemented.

Estimated Time	10 minutes
Topic Objective	Identifying when to deliver feedback
Topic Summary	Immediately After the Occurrence Discuss when feedback is needed in certain situations.
Materials Required	04-Recognizing When to Deliver Feedback
Planning Checklist	None
Recommended Activity	Complete the worksheet individually. Share your answers with the rest of the class.
Stories to Share	Share any relevant personal stories.
Delivery Tips	Encourage everyone to participate.
Review Questions	Which form of feedback should be used after an occurrence?

***Activity Handout "Recognizing When to Deliver Feedback"

Review the following situations and determine if feedback should be given immediately after the incident or if it should wait until a later time based on the possible effects of employees and coworkers.

Situation 1: *An employee turns in a report that has numerous spelling errors.*

Immediate or Delayed? _____

Why? _____

_____

_____

Situation 2: *An employee's job performance stats are lower than normal. The reports are set to be reviewed again in one week.*

Immediate or Delayed? _____

Why?_____

_____

_____

Situation 3: *An employee comes to work wearing flip-flop sandals, which is against company policy.*

Immediate or Delayed? _____

Why? _____

_____

Case Study

Joseph has been monitoring his employee, Susan, and notices that she has continued to be late to their weekly meetings. He also notices that even though she is late, she does contribute to the meeting and has her materials ready. However, her tardiness usually upsets the other employees and disrupts the presentation of reports that they have prepared.

Joseph sent Susan an email a few days before the meeting and reminded her that she is supposed to arrive on time and be ready for her coworkers' reports. That week Susan was late for the meeting again. Afterwards, Joseph called Susan into his office and spoke with her about the problem. She had excuses, such as car trouble or broken alarms. Joseph reminded Susan where it is against company policy to constantly be tardy and reviewed the policy page with her, including possible consequences for continued behavior. At the following week's meeting, Susan arrived on time.

Estimated Time	10 minutes
Topic Summary	Case study.Discuss identifying and delivering appropriate feedback in the workplace.
Recommended Activity	Discuss the results of the case study with the large group. Would Susan have responded sooner with formal feedback?

Review Questions	What did Joseph do that convinced Susan to show up on time?

Module Three: Communication Is Critical

Management generally finds it easier to deliver any form of constructive criticism once they have prepared what they want to say and how they want to deliver it. The key is to decide what problems or situations you want to address and how you can provide the employee the information he needs to succeed. Careful preparation, clear information delivery, and a sense of sensitivity toward the employee will not only result in better employee performance, but possibly a better relationship between management and employees.

Practice Your Tone

The point of constructive criticism is to help the employee and encourage them to improve and be successful. However, the tone of your voice can speak louder than the words you use. If your tone is hard or comes across as disapproving, the employee may interpret the meeting as a form of criticism or discipline and then ignore or dismiss any helpful advice or action plan. On the other hand, if the tone is too light and amicable, the employee may interpret the action plan as friendly advice and not take the need for improvement seriously.

Points to remember:

- Remain neutral – your focus is to help the employee.

- Watch for angry or accusing tones – these can counteract the help being offered.

- Practice what you want to say beforehand. Look for tones and pitches that can either help or harm.

Estimated Time	15 minutes
Topic Objective	Practice controlling your tone of voice.
Topic Summary	Practice Your Tone Discover how tones can affect the words we say
Materials Required	05-Practicing Your Tone
Planning Checklist	None.
Recommended Activity	Complete the handout with a partner. Make notes on your results and share with the rest of the group.
Stories to Share	Share any relevant personal stories regarding misused tones.
Delivery Tips	Ask for volunteers to share answers aloud.
Review Questions	How can tone affect the purpose of constructive criticism?

***Activity Handout "Practicing Your Tone"

In the following exercise, role-play each situation with a partner. Turn your back to each other and practice the following statements and notice the tone that can come with each sentence. Try to identify the tone you and your partner make on each statement.

Phrase #1 – *Your job performance has declined 50% this week.*

Notes: _____

_____

_____

_____

Phrase #2 – *I'd like to see you improve your typing speed by the end of the month.*

Notes: _____

_____

_____

_____

Check Your Ego at the Door

One of the first steps in actually delivering constructive criticism is to remove the emotions involved. This includes your emotions and the possible ego you can bring with you. When preparing to speak with an employee, leave opinions and emotions at the door and deal with the subject at hand. Don't let something such as your personal opinion of the employee or your knowledge of the subject affect how you resolve the problem.

Tips:

- Focus on the issue, not the person.

- Remain open to suggestions or questions.

- Don't harp on an issue. Say what has to be said and move on.

Estimated Time	10 minutes
Topic Summary	Check Your Ego at the Door Identify how each situation can have effects on your ego and how to identify the real problem.

Materials Required	07-Checking Your Ego at the Door
Recommended Activity	Complete the worksheet individually. Discuss your results with the rest of the class.
Review Questions	What does it mean to check your ego at the door?

***Activity Handout "Checking Your Ego at the Door"

Below are some example situations of common office problems. With each situation, first identify how you feel about the situation and how it can affect your session with the employee. Then identify the real issue in the situation that really needs to be addressed.

Situation #1: *Cynthia is on time for every managment meeting except yours. She continues to be late to yours.*

Your Emotions/Ego - _____

Real problem - _____

Situation #2: *Jacob does not print his reports in the correct template. He does not listen to coworkers on how to fix it.*

Your Emotions/Ego -_____

Real problem - _____

Situation #3: *Anna is having trouble learning the new accounting books. She is making mistakes every week.*

Your Emotions/Ego - _____

Real problem - _____

Criticize in Private, Praise in Public

Constructive criticism shouldn't be done in a public setting, such as the employee's cubicle or the break room. Confronting an employee in front of coworkers or in a common area can cause embarrassment or anger, which counteracts the purpose of offering help and creating solutions. A private meeting allows both parties to speak and go over every aspect of the issue. The employee can feel free to ask questions and not feel as though they are being attacked in a group setting.

Ensuring that the conversation takes place in private and only between the relevant parties not only eliminates unnecessary gossip, but shows respect for the employee and their future success. On the other hand, praising the employee in a public setting can not only boost morale for the employee being praised, but also for all employees who witness it. This allows employees to see firsthand that the company they work for not only discusses changes that must be made with employees, but also appreciates the things that employees are doing right!

Estimated Time	10 minutes
Topic Summary	Criticize in Private, Praise in Public. Review different situations that would either need to be discussed in private or public.
Materials Required	08-Public vs. Private
Recommended Activity	Complete the handout individually. Share your answers with the rest of the class.
Review Questions	What courtesy does speaking in private offer the employee?

Activity Handout "Public vs. Private"

Different situations require a different settings and surroundings to discuss in. Using this handout, list different situations that you would discuss with an employee both in public and in private. Remember that the general rule is to provide praise in public and criticism in private.

Done in Public:

_____

_____

_____

Done in Private:

_____

_____

_____

What key elements are identified in each set of situations?

_____

_____

It Has to Be Face to Face

When delivering constructive criticism, the best method is always to speak face to face with the employee or other parties. Even though we live in the electronic age and rely on technology too often communicate with others, a traditional face to face meeting is always best when delivering news or criticism to someone. Emails or written letters are usually one sided and portray accidental tones. Phone calls can cause intimidation and usually do not allow the employee to speak in private if the phone call is made on an office phone. Speaking with the employee live and in person leaves no room for implied tones or pressures and allows them to speak openly. After the initial meeting, it is acceptable to follow up in an informal method, such as email or phone call.

When meeting face to face:

- Meet in a private setting where everyone can be comfortable.

- Keep a respectable distance, but remain close enough to speak without raising your voice.

- Speak directly with the employee and turn your focus to them when they are speaking.

Estimated Time	15 minutes
Topic Summary	It Has to be Face to Face. Discover messages said without being face to face can lose meaning or value.
Materials Required	09-Being Face to Face
Recommended Activity	Complete the handout with a partner. Make notes about your findings and share with the rest of the class.
Review Questions	What is one benefit of speaking face to face?

Activity Handout "Being Face to Face"

In the following exercise, role-play each situation with a partner. Turn your back to each other or simply look in another direction and practice the following statements. Then turn and look at each other face to face and discuss how different each experience felt. Which seems to be most effective?

Phrase #1 – *Your job performance has declined 50% this week.*

Not facing each other: _____

_____

_____

After facing each other: _____

_____

_____

Phrase #2 – *I need to see your data entry speed increase before the end of this quarter.*

Not facing each other: _____

_____

_____

After facing each other: _____

_____

_____

Additional Notes: _____

_____

Create a Safe Atmosphere

The last thing an employee wants to feel is that the manager's office is a place of discipline or criticism. Don't make employees fear coming into your office. Establish trust and open communication with your employees and ensure them that you are available to them. Ensure employees that they can approach you with any questions or concerns they may have. This allows you to create a safe atmosphere and environment where you can deliver the constructive criticism you need without making employees feel as though they are in a torture chamber.

Benefits of a safe atmosphere:

- Employees are more open to approaching you with problems or concerns.

- Allows you to deliver news or criticism to employees without frightening them.

- Employees feel more at ease hearing constructive criticism.

Estimated Time	10 minutes
Topic Objective	Making a safe environment for employees
Topic Summary	Create a Safe Atmosphere Discover what it takes to create a safe atmosphere for employees and how it helps with constructive criticism.
Materials Required	Flipchart/Dry erase board, marker
Planning Checklist	None.
Recommended Activity	Discuss the many elements that can help create an atmosphere that employees can feel safe to talk in. Review how these factors can make it easier for employees to hear constructive criticism. Write answers on the flipchart/dry erase board.
Stories to Share	Share any relevant personal experiences.
Delivery Tips	Encourage everyone to participate.
Review Questions	How can a safe environment aid in delivering constructive criticism?

Monitor Body Language

Body language can be a good indicator of how someone is feeling and how they are accepting what is being said. When the manager is speaking, gestures such as furrowed brows, eye rolling, or certain standing positions can make the employee feel uncomfortable and dismiss

what is being said. The manager should not only monitor his own body language, but pay attention to gestures the employee may be making, such as squirming in his seat, fidgeting, or not making eye contact. Based on the employee's body language, the manager may need to change tactics and approach the subject in a different way.

Common body language gestures:

- Eye rolling

- Fidgeting

- Looking away or not making eye contact

- Certain stances, such as leaning away, slumped shoulders, or crossed arms

Estimated Time	10 minutes
Topic Summary	Monitor Body Language. Review different types of body language and what they could portray
Materials Required	11-Body Language Signals
Recommended Activity	Complete the worksheet individually. Share your responses with the rest of the class.
Review Questions	How does the employee portray possible discomfort?

***Body Language Signals

Review the following gestures. In the space provided, try to translate what the body language gesture is saying.

1.) An employee cannot sit still in her chair while you are speaking to her.

_____

_____

2.) A coworker is not making eye contact with you while you are making a presentation.

_____

_____

3.) An employee has her arms crossed while talking to another colleague.

_____

_____

4.) Your boss rolls his eyes every time the phone rings in his office.

_____

Check for Understanding

After the manager has delivered the constructive criticism and is preparing to put the action plan into play, they must check for understanding from the employee. Allow the employee to ask questions and add input to the solution. Ensure that the criticism is understood clearly and that it is meant to help the employee grow and succeed, not to single them out or make them feel like a target. Reassure the feedback is for their benefit and that they understand the information is provided to make positive changes in the future.

Estimated Time	10 minutes
Topic Summary	Check for Understanding. Compare different signals of understanding and how you can identify them.
Recommended Activity	Discuss the different ways a person can show understanding (head nodding, verbal acknowledgment) and how you can identify them. Role-play with different body language gestures and identify if they portray a sense of understanding. Write answers on the flipchart/dry erase board.
Stories to Share	Share any relevant personal experiences.
Review Questions	Why is it important to check for understanding from the employee?

Practice Active Listening

Active listening is where a person makes a conscious effort to hear what the other person is saying. This requires your full attention, so try to ignore distracting noises or situations around you. Don't dwell on responses or answers you want to make when the person stops speaking, as this can take your attention away from the message. Some tips you can include are saying the other person's words back to yourself and using body gestures such as head nodding to acknowledge what is being said. When they are finished, follow up with questions or comments to show you've taken in the information.

Keys to active listening:

- Pay attention to the speaker. Try not to let your mind wander.

- Show you are listening by using body language, such as nodding your head or smiling.

- Provide feedback and ask questions.

- Allow the speaker to finish talking. Don't interrupt with counter arguments.

- Respond respectfully and offer opinions or comments.

Case Study

Edna called her employee, Judy into her office to go over her recent article she'd written about office personalities. She had pointed out that she liked and didn't like, so she started with a positive note.

"I enjoyed your recent article and found it pleasing and fun to read."

Then she eased into the trouble area before ending with another compliment, to let Judy know the article was still good, but needed improvements.

"In your next article, it's not a good idea to use names of actual colleagues you work with. Someone might feel offended or threatened by your remarks aimed at them. So I'm really looking forward to your next piece since they are always very informational."

Judy nodded and took several notes while Edna was talking. When Edna was finished, she asked Judy if she understood what she was trying to say and if she had any questions. She explained that the feedback was not to criticize Judy's article, but to improve it and benefit Judy in the future. Judy asked for some additional tips and said she would revise the article for the next publication.

Estimated Time	10 minutes
Topic Summary	Case study. Review techniques used to successfully deliver constructive criticism
Recommended Activity	Discuss the results of the case study. Did Edna take the correct approach when speaking with Judy about her article?
Review Questions	How did Edna check for understanding with Judy when she finished talking?

Diffusing Anger or Negative Emotions

Unfortunately, constructive criticism is often accompanied by some form of anger or negative emotion, such as denial or embarrassment. The goal of constructive criticism is to help the employee grow and improve, not to hurt their feelings or downplay their work. Therefore, it should be delivered in the correct manner and without negative undertones. When criticism is delivered correctly, emotions can generally be set aside and both parties can focus on the issue.

Always Keep Emotions in Check

After you've checked your ego at the door, be sure to check on your emotions also. To effectively deliver constructive criticism, you must eliminate any personal emotions or feelings. Emotions can make you susceptible to bias and can make what you have to say seem one-sided or narrow-minded. View the situation from a business-like point of view. To a certain extent, the employee's feelings should be taken into consideration when delivering the information. You might not be able to save them from a little embarrassment, but outright humiliation can and should be avoided.

Tips:

- Consider the employee's feelings (put yourself in their shoes)

- Don't confuse the employee with the mistake

- If you are feeling angry or upset before confronting the employee, take additional time to think it over and calm yourself

Estimated Time	10 minutes
Topic Summary	Always Keep Emotions in Check. Discuss the different types of emotions and how they differ in particular situations.
Materials Required	15-Emotions
Recommended Activity	Complete the worksheet individually. Share your answers with the rest of the class.
Review Questions	How are emotions different from our egos?

***Emotions

Review the following situations. In the space provided, identify what type of emotion(s) it makes you feel.

1.) Your boss congratulated you on a job well done. _____

_____

2.) Your coworker forgot to bring the charts for your group presentation. _____

_____

3.) An employee spills coffee all over your desk of papers. _____

_____

4.) A colleague says she heard rumors that someone was going to be fired today. _____

_____

Module Four: What Not To Do

There are always helpful tips for what you're supposed to do when delivering constructive criticism, but there are often times that people don't tell us what we *shouldn't* say. Managers can learn all the right things to say and feel they may have everything they need, but knowing what sensitive topics and negative phrases to avoid can be just as crucial.

Attacking or Blaming

Constructive criticism is meant to attack the problem at hand, not the person. Blaming or attacking the employee doesn't resolve the issue, but can actually make matters worse. This can cause the employee to become defensive or even resentful, which in turn makes them lose their trust and respect for you as well as their job. When addressing the employee, remove thoughts of blame or personal attacks and focus on the actual problem at hand. Even though the employee has made a mistake, that doesn't mean they *are* the mistake or that it is a reflection on their character.

Tips:

- Avoid starting sentences with "You" – these sentences always end in blame.

- Separate the problem from the person – i.e. being tardy doesn't mean the person is lazy.

- Avoid words with negative connotations, such as "angry", "frustrated", or "disbelief".

Estimated Time	10 minutes
Topic Summary	Attacking or Blaming. Identify what kind of phrases and words tend to attack or cast blame and why they are not acceptable.
Materials Required	21-Attacking and Blaming Words
Recommended Activity	Complete the worksheet individually. Review answers as a class.
Review Questions	What are some examples of blaming or attacking an employee during criticism?

***Attacking and Blaming Words

In this part of the worksheet, check each box that is a phrase that tries to blame or attack someone.

☐   I thought you were smart enough to handle this project.

☐   These prints on your camera came out great.

☐   Why didn't you tell me the client files are in the shred box?

☐   You've shown me you're not ready to handle this kind of work load.

☐   Please don't forget to turn in your time card today.

☐   You always do this at the end of the sales quarter.

What are some negative effects that occur from using phrases that cast blame or try to attack someone's characteristics?

1.) _____

_____

_____

2.) _____

_____

_____

3.) _____

_____

_____

4.) _____

_____

_____

Not Giving Them a Chance to Speak

Generally, people have an inner need to be heard and feel as though others understand their point of view. If a person (or employee), feels as though this need is not met, they can become angry and resentful. Arguments can start since both parties try to talk at the same time, hoping to make the other one listen to them. One simple way to avoid this complication is by allowing the employee a chance to discuss the issue and add their input. After you speak, give them a chance to respond without interrupting. Be open to hear their opinions and concerns as well.

Tips:

- Allow time for one person at a time to talk uninterrupted for several minutes.

- Let the employee know they can express whatever they are feeling, positive or negative.

- Keep an open mind to receive the employee's feedback as well.

Talking Down

When delivering constructive criticism, it is important not to let the tone of the conversation become derogatory, or 'talking down'. Talking down not only insults the employee, but it dehumanizes them and makes you forget you are talking to a real live person. Using angry words or attaching a character label to the employee, such as jerk or idiot, will only put the employee on their defense and create arguments and conflicts. As a manager, when you are speaking with an employee, keep in mind that there is a person in that chair and that they deserve to be treated with respect. They are there for you to unleash your anger or frustrations on.

Remember:

- Avoid attaching character labels or name calling.

- Be aware of the tone of voice you are using – how do you sound to others?

- Approach the employee using a one-on-one level – treat them as your equal

Becoming Emotional

If your emotions tend to control your actions or responses, then take a few extra minutes to review the situation before delivering constructive criticism. These emotions can make it seem too easy to unleash on the employee and you may not be able to restrain yourself. Becoming emotional can not only make you seem unstable or bias, but it upsets the employee and can make them try to become emotional in retaliation. Before you can begin to address another

employee's behavior, you need to step back and take a few minutes to gain your composure and focus on the topic at hand. Going into a meeting with your emotions fully loaded will not get you the results you need.

Helpful hints:

- Avoid trying to personally attack the employee.

- Do not let emotions control the mood in the room – yours or the   employee's.

- Plan ahead – decide what you want to say and ensure that you've gained your full composure.

Module Five: During Your Session

After thoroughly preparing the information and process needed, the manager is ready to successfully deliver the needed constructive criticism. Remain businesslike and focus on the problem at hand. After both parties have had a chance to speak and express their position, both parties can move toward the corrective action and solution.

The Feedback Sandwich

The purpose of the feedback sandwich is to offer coaching and support while softening the blow of the initial criticism. It's referred to as a 'sandwich' because the manager should start with a compliment before introducing the criticism. Then follow up with another positive statement. This technique allows the employee to hear the necessary criticism, but also gets to hear the good points of their performance too. The feedback sandwich can be an effective tool to use, but if used in excess or without sincerity, the compliment process can seem cheesy and employees may only focus on the negative.

Step to the Feedback Sandwich:

- Prepare and outline what you want to say or address

- Identify the positive and make a compliment

- Present the criticism and facts

- Add another positive statement and encouragement

- Follow up with the employee periodically

Estimated Time	10 minutes
Topic Summary	The Feedback Sandwich. Learn the different parts of the feedback sandwich and how they can help deliver constructive criticism.
Materials Required	10-The Feedback Sandwich
Recommended Activity	Complete the worksheet individually. Share your responses with the rest of the class.
Review Questions	What is the purpose of the feedback sandwich?

*** The Feedback Sandwich

The purpose of the feedback sandwich is to not only deliver the needed constructive criticism, but offer some sort of positive statement as well to encourage the employee. Review each scenario below

individually. Identify the positive and negative of the situation and decide how you would deliver the information.

- *Susan recently published an article about local supermarkets. While it received good reviews, some of the stores were not happy that she openly published the names of their stores without their permission.*

Compliment: _____

Criticism: _____

Positive Statement: _____

- *Howard decided it was time to clean out the storage room that held many boxes of files. He accidentally threw away several client files that his team was working on.*

Compliment: _____

Criticism: _____

Positive Statement: _____

The end of the session is the key part that allows the manager and the employee to come together to make a plan of improvement or change. If the action plan is only made by one party, the terms can be one-sided and won't address the roles in which both parties need to take. While this can be a delicate subject to approach, with the correct planning and outline, you can form and implement a plan in no time.

Set Goals

When creating an action plan, one of the most important steps is to create goals to help the employee improve or make changes. Ask the employee what they want to accomplish and find ways to work together in reaching these goals. Set goals that are realistic and can be achieved by the employee in a reasonable amount of time. Then outline a plan and a sample timeline depicting what actions should be taken to achieve these goals. Offer ways you can help the employee reach these goals. Goals that are created to help the employee achieve and be successful are often referred to as S.M.A.R.T. goals. S.M.A.R.T. goals are used to outline what steps should be taken and how to follow through with it.

Common goals managers and employees make:

- Improve training or skill sets

- Decrease absences or tardiness

- Increase general job performance

- Reduce errors and future mistakes on trouble areas

Be Collaborative

Working together to correct a problem not only helps make the appropriate changes, but it can strengthen the team bond between the manager and employees. Knowing they will always have support from management encourages employees to work harder and come to you sooner rather than later if they have a problem. Allowing employees to be a part of the solution will make them feel as though they are contributing and will feel more willing to make the necessary changes and improvements.

Tips:

- Make sure you and the employee realize what needs to change or improve.

- Address what actions should be taken to achieve these changes.

- Ask the employee for input and what actions they can take to help.

- Form a plan together that both parties can agree to.

Ask for Input

Setting goals is not a one-way street when working with another employee. Both parties should know the purpose of the goal and realize what efforts will need to be made to accomplish them. If one person decides on the terms of a goal, it may come across as an order or demand rather than a mutual plan. As a manager, let the employee know what you want to see in regards to achievements and accomplishments, but also ask them what they want to gain from it. Have them input ideas and plans they feel swill help them succeed. Ask them to come up with things they can do to achieve their goals and then ask what you can do to be a part of it. When goals are made as a team effort and the employee feels they have your support, they will be more willing to work for it and succeed.

Be as Specific as Possible

Goals that are specific and precise will work better than goals that are generalized and vague. For example, when planning goals with an employee, the phrase "I'd like to see you do better on your reports each week" doesn't specify a purpose or needed action. Instead, something such as "I'd like to see you improve your editing and proofreading skills before you turn in your next report" expresses a specific action that needs to be taken, and a tentative time line. Goals sound more 'doable' when they outline what specifically needs to change and improve. When they are presented with unspecific needs or information, they can seem like a guessing game.

Tips:

- Name a specific action or topic that needs work

- If you have multiple topics, break them up individually. Accomplishing three smaller tasks is easier than one large one.

- If possible, give a time line in which actions should be done. Remember to be flexible.

Estimated Time	10 minutes
Topic Summary	Be as Specific as Possible. Review and discuss the need for specifics and details when giving instructions
Materials Required	18-Be More Specific
Recommended Activity	Complete the worksheet individually. Compare answers with the rest of the class.
Review Questions	Why is it important to specify actions and plans when making goals?

***Be More Specific

Below are some examples of basic instructions. Review each one and change them to be more specific.

Example #1: *I'd like to see your work output increase.*

More specifically - _____

_____

_____

Example #2: *I need you show a better work ethic in the office.*

More specifically - _____

_____

_____

Example #3: *I need you to review the company dress code before coming back to work.*

More specifically - _____

_____

_____

Ask for A Self Assessment

One of the more difficult parts of delivering constructive criticism is asking the employee to perform a self-assessment. While the manager may have plenty of comments or opinions about the employee and their performance, a self-assessment may seem like a graded paper the teacher gives in school. Employees are more likely to recognize their own mistakes when they

are not just being *told* to recognize them, but that they can *see* it for themselves. Ask the employee to take the time to analyze their skills and abilities and what actions they have recently taken. By forming skillful questions the employee can think over not only what helps them recognize their mistakes, but also perceive the criticism as a means to benefit their growth as a worker. Once they have finished their self-assessment, they are not only ready to own up to their shortcomings, but they are more willing to learn from them.

Stay on Topic

Sometimes we can have a lot of ideas and topics going through our head at once, or we try to multi-task between different areas, which can ultimately make us lose focus on what is important. When delivering constructive criticism, it is important to stay focused and stay on topic. Keep eye contact with the employee and avoid trying to do tasks on the computer or fiddle with paperwork. Deliver one topic at a time and completely finish with it before moving on to the next one. Trying to combine several topics into one speech can overload the employee and make them miss the main points. Also, be sure to leave past occurrences in the past. Bringing up problems from the past can distract from recent mistakes and can confuse the employee as to what he's supposed to be talking about today.

Tips:

- Avoid words such as "however", "although", and "but" since they can lead to other thoughts and topics.

- Keep eye contact with the employee. This will help you to focus on them and the issue at hand.

- When speaking with the employee, stop any previous task you were working on. Do not try to combine them.

Estimated Time	10 minutes
Topic Summary	Stay on Topic. Discuss various things and situations that can hinder us from staying on topic.
Materials Required	Flipchart/Dry erase board, marker
Recommended Activity	Brainstorm different situation or distractions that keep us from staying on topic with someone. Discuss how we need to prioritize these distractions and focus on the topic at hand. Write answers on the flipchart/dry erase board.
Review Questions	Why is it important to stay on topic when delivering constructive criticism?

Try to Avoid "You Messages"

When we're angry or upset, our self-defense mode normally wants to find blame somewhere else, or on "you". This is especially common when trying to deliver constructive criticism. Phrases such as *"You were late yesterday"* or *"Your poor attitude is affecting everyone"* can appear unprofessional and make it appear as though you are insulting the employee. Instead, focus on how it makes others feel, such as *"I felt disappointed when you were late yesterday because we went over some important topics in the meeting"* or *"Our customers were very upset when you greeted them in an unfriendly manner."* The employee will begin to see that you are trying to portray how their actions affect others instead of feeling as though you are blaming or attacking him.

Common "You messages" to try to avoid:

- *"Your job performance has been lagging lately."*

- *"You've been late every day for the past week."*

- *"Your disruptive behavior is starting to affect your coworkers."*

- *"You've been slacking off on your duties."*

Estimated Time	10 minutes
Topic Summary	Try to Avoid "You Messages" Review how words such as "You and "Your" can have negative undertones when used to address someone.
Materials Required	20-Eliminating 'You' Messages
Recommended Activity	Complete the handout with a partner. Review your answers together and then share with the rest of the class.
Review Questions	What is a negative effect of a "you" message?

***Eliminating 'You' Messages

In the following exercise, role-play each situation with a partner. Take turns repeated the following phrases. Write how the 'You' message makes you feel and then note if the other phrase makes you feel differently

'You' Message – *You've been late every day this week.*

Revision – *I'm disappointed that you haven't made it to work on time this week.*

Notes:

_____

_____

_____

_____

'You' Message – *You forgot to include your projection report again.*

Revision – *I'd appreciate it if you'd remember to include your projection report next time.*

Notes:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Module Six: After Your Session

Constructive criticism should not be done without a proper follow-up. Schedule some sort of follow-up meeting to check on the employee's progress and see if they have any additional questions or concerns. Make yourself available to the employee and let them know how they are doing. If goals were met and the employee has improved, congratulate them. If not, go back to the drawing board and see what other actions need to be taken. Don't leave the employee in the dark about their progress or shortcomings.

Set a Follow-Up Meeting

Follow-up meetings are important in letting an employee know how they are doing after you last spoke with them and created an action plan together. Review the employee's performance stats and determine if things have improved or if the action plan needs to be remade. Feel free to praise positive achievements in public, but remember to provide any additional constructive criticism in private.

Remember:

- Once a follow-up meeting has been scheduled, keep the appointment.

- Praise the employee in public, but give criticism in a private meeting.

- Encourage the employee to keep up the good work

Make Yourself Available

Once the employee is given the action plan and sent back out to the workplace, it is important to let them know they are not alone in their journey. Assure the employee your door is always open and that they are free to approach you with any questions or concerns. Periodically check in with the employee to see if you can be of any help. They may not need you at the moment, but they'll appreciate the gesture and know that you are there to help when they do.

Tips:

- Be open to listen to the employee and their needs.

- Maintain an open door policy – make sure your employees are aware of it.

- Always be approachable – remain interested in your employees and avoid becoming too distant.

Be Very Specific with the Instructions

When creating an action plan or setting up goals, instructions need to be specific and action-oriented. Vague instructions such as "Do better on the next report" don't address the problem, corrective action, or possible timeline needed. A better response would sound something like *"I'd like to see you improve your proofreading skills before you complete your next report"*, which

not only provides a specific problem that needs to be corrected, but gives a tentative time in which it needs to be completed. Let the employee know exactly what needs to change and ways to make it happen. General or vague instructions can often be misinterpreted and can cause the employee to exhibit regression rather than progression.

Specific instructions include:

- A set problem to be fixed or corrected.

- Steps or actions that should be taken.

- A possible timeline in which the task should be completed.

Provide Support and Resources

As part of making yourself available to the employee, also make available any additional support or resources they may need, such as other managers or training resources. As a good manager, don't forget to offer plenty of encouragement and personal support. An action plan would not be able to succeed if the employee does not have the support and resources needed to work it. Ensure the employee can always use you as a resource and if they need something they cannot find or get on their own, you will do your best to provide it to them.

Example of additional support and resources:

- Emotional support and encouragement
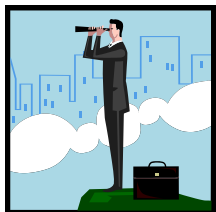
- Coworker and other management support teams

- Additional training times and materials

- Additional reading material – including manuals, brochures, pamphlets.

Focus on the Future

Past event and past performances are just that – in the past. One of the points of constructive criticism is to move forward and look to the future for improvements. Focus on what can be done or be changed now, rather than what did or didn't happen before now. This is the time for you and the employee to create a plan of action and potential goals the employee can do to change what is currently wrong. Plan on future strategies that are solution oriented. Forget what may have happened before and look toward a better tomorrow.

- Personal monitoring and observance

Measuring Results

When conducting a follow up session, decide how improvement and growth should be measured. Based upon the tasks being completed, different forms of evaluations can be done. Decide what task your employee was in charge of doing and review what they were supposed

to be working on. In many cases, written evaluations can be helpful, but sometimes managers choose to drop in and witness the employee at work. However you decide to complete it, the employee deserves to have their results and progress re-evaluated periodically and told how they are measuring up.

Sample ways of measuring results:

- 'Secret Shopper' surveys

- Personal, one-on-one meetings

- Written evaluations or reviews

- Personal monitoring and observance

Module Seven: Wrapping Up

Although this workshop is coming to a close, we hope that your journey to understanding how to deliver constructive criticism is just beginning. Please take a moment to review and update your action plan. This will be a key tool to guide your progress in the days, weeks, months, and years to come. We wish you the best of luck on the rest of your travels!

Create an Action Plan

Once the problem has been addressed, an action plan will help the employee to make the proper adjustments and improvements they need. Change can be hard for anyone, so the employee will need proper support from management to succeed. Make realistic goals the employee can achieve and focus on the areas of work the employee has control to change (their duties or department). Once a plan has been made, allow ample time for it to be put in place and monitor the employee to see how they are doing. It may also be helpful to schedule a follow-up meeting to check on their progress.

Tips:

- Give specific feedback and improvements that need to be made.

- Focus on goals the employee can achieve to correct the problem.

- Form an action plan that helps achieve those goals.

- Follow-up as needed.

Estimated Time	10 minutes
Topic Summary	Create an Action Plan Review the parts of an action plan
Materials Required	06-Creating an Action Plan
Planning Checklist	None.
Recommended Activity	Complete the worksheet individually. Review your results with the rest of the class.
Review Questions	What is the purpose of the action plan?

***Activity Handout "Creating an Action Plan"

Use the worksheet below to outline the different parts of an employee action plan. Use a scenario from your personal or work experience. Identify key parts such as the source problem and steps toward a solution.

Situation: _____

_____

Part One: Source of the problem_____

_____

_____

Part Two: Allow the employee to speak_____

_____

_____

Part Three: Select the corrective action(s)_____

_____

_____

Part Four: Set goals_____

_____

_____

Part Five: Follow up a plan_____

_____

_____

Keep Written Records

Written and documented records are often important when delivering constructive criticism. Written records not only help track the behavior or actions that need to be corrected, but also help document the actions that will be taken to correct the situation. Document employee behaviors and reactions to keep in employee administrative files and add to the action plan. The action plan can be a form of documentation once it has been written and can also be added to the employee's and manager's work files.

Example of written records:

- Exchanged emails/notes/memos

- Log of employee behaviors or actions

- Action plan with improvement ideas and strategies

- Signed forms signed by the employee (acknowledgement of feedback, actions plan, etc.)

Words from the Wise

- **Franklin P. Jones:** Honest criticism is hard to take, particularly from a relative, a friend, an acquaintance, or a stranger.

- **Mark Twain:** One mustn't criticize other people on grounds where he can't stand perpendicular himself.

- **Margaret Chase Smith:** Every human being is entitled to courtesy and consideration. Constructive criticism is not only to be expected but sought.

- **Ralph Marston:** You've done it before and you can do it now. See the positive possibilities. Redirect the substantial energy of your frustration and turn it into positive, effective, unstoppable determination.

Lessons Learned

- Identifying feedback and criticism

- Plan and prepare how to deliver constructive criticism

- Effectively prepare and deliver constructive criticism before, during and after each session

- Plans for improvements and employee follow-ups

- Tips on what not to say and do

Completion of Action Plans and Evaluations

Do a quick round robin and ask everyone to share one thing that they learned today. Then, ask the participants to make sure their action plans and evaluations are complete.

If possible, ask participants to buddy up and set up a follow-up system, so that they can check up on each other in the coming days, weeks, and months. If appropriate, provide your contact information in case they have any questions.