

A valuable gift: feedback

As a neutral Ombuds, I am often asked to facilitate a team meeting. That usually indicates that the team may need some help in becoming more collaborative, more effective, more productive or more motivated. It also could reflect an unresolved conflict that needs to be addressed.

My first task when meeting a team for the first time is to create a comfortable environment that allows all of the members the opportunity to voice what makes a “good” and “effective” team in their eyes. Although we know what makes a good team, the challenge is how to put in practice what we already know.

For example, we know that open and honest communication within the team is critical for its success. Here are some other factors important to a team’s success:

1. Strong leadership;
2. Appreciation of and commitment to the mission of the team;
3. Taking calculated risks;
4. Accountability for actions taken;
5. Accepting mistakes as teaching moments;
6. Celebrating milestones reached; and
7. Trusting fellow team members.

Team exercises can be conducted to highlight the importance of the foregoing factors for team success. One such exercise, described in this article, touches mainly on open and honest communication.

The duration of this exercise is a reflection of the number of team members. This exercise is performed in two parts and can be performed in person or on line. The online exercise has been created due to the 2020 pandemic.

Each team member receives index cards entitled *Feedback Cards* either via email or in person. All team members will have *Feedback Cards* with their own name as well as the names of other team members. The total number of cards received should be the total number of team members.

In the first part of the exercise, each team member is asked to complete the following sentence on the card with his/her/their own name:

One of my biggest assets is _____

One area I would like to improve in is _____

I enjoy my job because _____

In the second part of the exercise, each team member is asked to complete the following statements on the card of each of the other team members:

*As a colleague, I appreciate that you _____
because it helps our team _____
because it helps me _____*

*As a colleague, I prefer you do not _____
or do less of _____
because _____*

If the exercise is conducted in person, cards from all team members who have completed the second part are given to the Ombuds. The team members are asked to hold onto their individual cards that they completed for the first part of the exercise.

Team members are then asked to share their responses about themselves from the first part of the exercise.

Then the Ombuds anonymously reads out loud the comments reflecting the behavior appreciated by other colleagues, namely the positive feedback.

If all team members agree, the constructive feedback portion of part two may be shared anonymously and openly with everyone. Please remember the authors of both positive and constructive feedback are anonymous. No one member will know who provided the specific comments on the feedback cards.

If any team member prefers, the Ombuds can hold onto the constructive feedback card until that individual requests it. But one should not wait too long. The best time for an individual to receive constructive feedback is when that individual feels good about a recent accomplishment or strong and humble enough to receive it. Even if the individual does not agree with the comments, perception could often be reality to many.

No matter how prepared or how strong one feels, the constructive feedback may not be appreciated and even cause some resentment. But that is not unusual. From my own personal experience, those who have resented constructive feedback at first have later come around to appreciate that it was actually a very valuable gift.

March 2021

Eliane Markoff is Ombuds for Bentley University in Waltham, MA.