



The ABCs of Giving Personalized Feedback

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One of the most vital (and rare) qualities of effective business leaders is the talent to guide a workforce through feedback that both fuels collective goals and resonates with individual personalities. As we all know, not every employee responds to criticism in the same way—which is why successful managers maintain a diverse range of coaching techniques to spark *self-awareness* and inspire positive change.

Through constructive conversation, employees gain empowerment and envision advancement. This personalized feedback can be the gift that keeps on giving. By segmenting team members into **A, B, and C performance levels**, and delivering feedback accordingly, managers can develop a well-rounded coaching style to meet employees where they are in their development process.

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A-Players: Overseeing a company composed entirely of A-players would make you either the luckiest leader in business or, more likely, dreaming. Candidates from this group show minimal resistance, a high level of self-awareness and the ability to be self-critical. Ultimately, this allows leaders to delve into issues, and challenge and change behavior much more quickly. Usually,

a simple nudge can set these high-performing employees on the right track. However, leaders should be aware: a common mistake when managing A players is assuming they require no supervision, attention, or feedback at all. Here, the right balance is key, as a hands-off approach could be interpreted as neglect and lead to resentment, a slip in performance, or worse—job hunting.

B and C-Players: Giving feedback often becomes more challenging when coaching B and C-players. Members of this group might include high-potential workers who are slightly younger in their careers, employees who lack motivation and/or self-awareness, or those who are simply low performers. These categories of employees often have well-defined and built-up defense mechanisms that must be broken down in order for leadership to make a lasting impact—one that will both benefit the individual and the company as a whole. With B and C-players, the feedback/acceptance/change process can take a bit longer. These employees require innovative, out-of-the-box solutions to challenge their resistance, defensiveness, or ill-conceived notions of role responsibilities.

Here are a few tried and true techniques that can drive self-awareness and accountability:

- ❖ ***State the Obvious:*** During a one-on-one review, record the number of times your employee places blame onto another person or the environment, versus himself or herself. Use the data as a means for "*holding up a mirror*" to begin an honest conversation and an opportunity for the employee to be self-reflective.
- ❖ ***Go Fishing:*** Request that feedback-resistant individuals go on a "*fishing trip*." Ask them to seek direct input from peers, trusted colleagues, and supervisors about themes regarding their performance rather than any one issue in particular.
- ❖ ***Start from the Inside Out:*** Request that these B and C individuals practice looking at their own faults before pointing fingers. Have them begin the exercise by first asking: "What was *my* part in this issue?" This can be an extremely powerful tactic in forcing many to face their externalizing and blaming behaviors.

This final step is often the pivotal moment that leads the individual to self-awareness and self-correction—however, it can be challenging to exercise this coaching superpower” effectively. Often, a third-party coach is necessary to move this individual out of their defense mechanisms and toward introspection. An unbiased expert may have a better chance at breaking down these barriers of accountability than an internal manager or HR professional.

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