

Believe It or Not

With a coaching culture, employees can grow and thrive with constructive criticism.

Back when you had to leave your chair to turn the TV dial, there was a show on Sunday evenings called “Ripley’s Believe It or Not.” Remember it? The show included segments of people doing things so surprising or challenging that even the show’s title encouraged you to doubt its feasibility. Today, you can only find re-runs on YouTube. Yet, I recently read an article about the type of employee that might have been featured on the show — the one that thrives on negative feedback. Do you have one of those — an employee

so motivated that they beg you for criticism so they can improve?

This may seem as likely as someone volunteering to clean stalls, but I am serious. There are people who love to hear constructive criticism. The key is improvement, writes *Wall Street Journal* columnist, Sue Shellenberger, who calls these people “strivers.”

“People who thrive on feedback tend to be strivers who believe they can improve their skills and abilities,” she writes.

Very motivated types prefer to receive constructive critiques to grow.

I know that may sound unrealistic but improving employee’s receptivity to useful feedback isn’t an impossible dream for your operation. It’s about cultivating the culture of coaching.

Opening the discussion

When I am working as an executive coach, I ask if the individual is open for feedback. This accomplishes a couple of things. First, it lets the individual know some constructive ideas are coming his/her way and to be ready and open for improvement. The reaction to that question, whether in terms of body language, facial expression or comments, also lets me know how receptive the individual is to improvement.

As a farm manager or owner, offering feedback is an excellent test for you. You can visibly see if an employee is willing to change or if he/she is defensive and stubborn. You may not expect the employee to be delighted by tough suggestions, but if he/she is willing to acknowledge the need, you have a growth opportunity. If the person “sulls up” and pouts, that is important to know, as well.

This is all part of creating the culture of coaching and ongoing growth. Thriving on useful, constructive feedback geared toward improvement is natural for a few, but for most employees receiving feedback can feel negative. However, you can create the culture where your people, believe it or not, seek out “negative” feedback and strive to improve.

Read my tips for creating a culture of coaching around feedback in the sidebar. Then, try them out. **HW**

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Tips for Providing Feedback

1. Don’t deliver feedback in the heat of the moment. If the employee makes a critical error, make necessary corrections and save the constructive feedback for a later time.
2. Deliver the information one-on-one, but always include that person’s direct manager if you are not the supervisor.
3. If feedback is about a pervasive issue, the “three strikes method” works, but be certain the employee knows he/she has only so much time to improve his/her performance or behavior. Strikes don’t count if you keep them to yourself.
4. Ask for buy-in: use open-ended language such as, “Do you understand?” Also, ask the individual to describe the desired change in his/her own words and if there are any questions. Don’t assume the employee gets it.
5. Don’t let it go too far. For the rare employee that loves to receive feedback, make sure he/she doesn’t take an unwarranted license to give it to everyone else. Let the individual know that if he/she sees something of concern, it should be shared with you and leave it at that.
6. Be specific: don’t give negative feedback in broad generalizations such as, “You have poor work ethic.” Rather, provide clear examples that will help the employee improve or enhance a skill.
7. Use caution: when providing feedback on delicate areas, be thoughtful in your approach and have backup, if needed. For example, if you need to talk with a female employee about the appropriateness of her attire, consider having at least one other person present for the discussion.
8. Let people know that constructive feedback is truly a gift. First, you’re offering it because you believe the employee can handle it. Second, you’re offering it because you believe he/she is worth the investment in continual improvement. **HW**