The Situation-Behavior-Impact-Feedback Tool

“Providing Clear, Specific Feedback”

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Imagine that you recently gave some feedback to a member of your team. You told him that his line KPI's are great, but he needed to improve his people skills.

You follow up a few weeks later to find out why he hasn’t made any changes. You discover that he didn’t understand what he could do to improve – your feedback simply prompted more questions. He was left thinking “What’s good about achieving the KPI’s and how can I do more?” and “What’s wrong with my people skills?”

The Situation – Behavior – Impact (SBI) Feedback tool helps you deliver more effective feedback. It focuses your comments on specific situations and behaviors, and then outlines the impact that these behaviors have on others.

About the Tool

Developed by The Center for Creative Leadership, the SBI Feedback Tool outlines a simple structure that you can use to give feedback:

1. Situation.
2. Behavior.
3. Impact.

When you structure feedback in this way, your people will understand precisely what you are commenting on, and why. And when you outline the impact of their behaviour on others, you’re giving them the chance to reflect on their actions, and think about what they need to change.

The tool also helps you avoid making assumptions that could upset the other person and damage your relationship with them.

Applying the Tool

Let’s look at each part of the SBI Feedback tool, and think about how to use it to structure feedback.

1. Situation

When you’re giving feedback, first define the where and when of the situation you’re referring to. This puts the feedback into context, and gives the other person a specific setting as a reference. Think about using the 5 Bums on a Rugby Post!

For example:

“Yesterday’s KPI’s were up by 5% from the day before…”

“During the evening shift today I noticed…”

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2. Behaviour

Your next step is to describe the specific behaviours that you want to deal with. This is the most challenging part of the process, because you must communicate only the behaviours that you observed directly.

You must not make assumptions or judgments about those behaviours. These could be wrong, and this will undermine your feedback.

For example, if you observed that a colleague made a mistake, you should not assume that they hadn’t prepared thoroughly. You should simply comment that your colleague made mistakes – and, ideally, you should note what the mistakes were.

Don’t rely on hearsay or gossip, as this may contain other people’s judgments. Again, this could undermine your feedback and jeopardise your relationship.

The examples below include a description of behaviour:

“During yesterday morning’s DRM, when you talked about the night shift KPI’s, you were uncertain about why a line had a negative score, and your calculations were incorrect.”

“At the team meeting on Friday afternoon, you ensured that the meeting started on time and all your research was correct, and each of the managers’ questions were answered.”

Tip: Aim to use measurable information in your description of the behaviour. This helps to ensure that your comments are unbiased.

3. Impact

The last step is to use “I” statements to describe how the other person’s action has affected you or others.

For example:

“During yesterday morning’s DRM, when you talked about the night shift KPI’s, you were uncertain about why a line had a negative score, and your calculations were incorrect. I felt a bit embarrassed because my manager was there. I’m worried that this has affected the reputation of our team.”

“At the team meeting on Friday afternoon, you ensured that the meeting started on time and all your research was correct, and each of the managers’ questions were answered. I’m proud that you did such an excellent job and put us in a good light. Keep up the great work!”

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Next Steps

Once you've delivered your feedback, encourage the other person to think about the situation and to understand the impact of his or her behaviour. Allow the other person time to absorb what you have said, and then go over specific actions that will help him or her to improve.

Also, where someone has done something well, help them think about how they can build on this.

Key Points to Remember

SBI stands for:

1. Situation.
2. Behaviour.
3. Impact.

To use the tool, describe the “when” and “where” of the situation. Next, describe the other person’s behaviour, only mentioning actions that you have observed. Then, communicate the impact of his or her behaviour on you and others.

Finally, discuss what your team member needs to do to change this behaviour in the future, or, if their behaviour had a positive impact, explore how they can build on this.