Tips for a Successful Feedback Session

Feedback is:
- based on on-the-spot observations
- a way to inform and teach
- a tool to improve workplace performance

The Value of Feedback

When feedback is direct and skilfully done—observational rather than judgemental—and when an employee is open to hearing and accepting it, it improves performance and strengthens team relationships. Feedback is an exchange; it is about giving and receiving.

Elements of Skillful Feedback

Structure — A feedback session should have structure, with the employee's performance compared to well-defined goals. But it should also feel like a brainstorming session.

Collaboration — Encourage your employee to take an active role. Ask open-ended questions that allow both of you to come to an agreement about the employee's overall performance: What aspects are successful? What needs improvement? Then both of you can develop an agenda for your session.

Nothing personal — The actual feedback happens when you, as a manager, share your own observations of the employee's performance. Any important part of your employee's job performance can be discussed, but avoid making it personal. Unless they affect job performance, personality traits are not appropriate for feedback.

Descriptive language — Avoid an emotional reaction by keeping your language descriptive but not personal, using words such as "the diagnosis" instead of "your diagnosis." Deal with specifics, making use of real examples. Focus on the decision made, not the decision maker. When you do have to provide a subjective opinion, make it clear and specific. Start your observation with an "I" statement, e.g. "I felt " or "I saw."

Focus on work performance — Even when you give positive feedback, avoid making it personal. Your employee's work performance should always be the focus, not the employee as a person. Try not to overwhelm your employee with too much information, and focus only on behaviours that can be improved.

Message received? — Always verify that the message has been received. Invite questions or discussion, and have the employee paraphrase what you've said. Work with the employee to help them interpret the feedback and create an action plan to address the feedback.