

# HOW TO PROVIDE CORRECTIVE DIRECTION

BY BILL HOGG

When discussing the “How to’s” of building an engaged culture, we hear lots of talk about ‘reinforcing the positive’ and ‘catching people doing things right’, but what happens when people are doing things wrong and we need to provide corrective direction. Specific steps need to take place to get the person moving in the proper direction while still keeping them positive and motivated.

Most importantly, you must focus on the situation or issue versus the person, while sharing a more appropriate course of action. We all need to avoid falling into the trap of confusing criticism with constructive feedback.

Constructive feedback is information-specific, issue-focused, and based on observations, while criticism is a personal judgment about a performance effort or outcome, usually given in a general and vague manner, focused on the person, and based on opinions or feelings

These steps will help you have more success.

1. **Describe:** Start by describing what the person did accurately and concisely. Be objective and neutral -- remember, how we say something is just as important as what we say. Provide specifics of what happened and do not exaggerate or minimize the situation. Focus on the positive contribution.
2. **Explain:** Explain the impact of the behaviour on the customer, team or organization. These need to be observations of what you have seen or heard -- not your interpretations or opinions. Observations are factual and non-judgemental. It is helpful to start focused on ‘I’. ‘I notice’, ‘I have seen’ or even ‘I have been told’. This will help keep the discussion issue focused. Avoid using ‘but’, ‘although’ or ‘however’ to link this to the first section. These words create contradictions and send a mixed message that effectively negates any positive message you started with.
3. **Suggest:** Suggest specific changes that you would like to see made and explain what you want the person to do differently. The more specific, the more likely they person will be able to implement the suggestion next time.
4. **Commit:** Seek a commitment to change. Be clear on the consequences of continuing in this vein. Seek an agreement about the new, modified behaviour. In extreme cases, be clear of the consequences of not making these changes -- but again be objective and neutral to minimize this sounding like a threat.

Example: One of your team is being described as harsh or bossy when providing direction to other team members.

**Describe:** Bill, I really appreciate that you have taken ownership of this project and are providing clear, well thought-out input on what next steps are needed. I wanted to let you know how valuable this is to the team and the overall success of the project.

**Explain:** I notice that sometimes when you provide direction to other team members, you are very quick and specific when giving input -- which sometimes creates the impression that you don’t value their input and think that only your way is the correct way.

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**Suggest:** I'd like to suggest that you take some time to understand why they did it the way they chose and what next steps they are considering. Then building on their ideas, share some additional thoughts on how they can accomplish their goal.

**Commit:** That way, they will feel that you are adding to their thoughts and helping them be more successful. Does that make sense? Would you give that a try next time and let me know how it works?

Feedback should be given, as close as possible to when the performance incident occurs so that the events are fresh in everyone's minds. When feedback is given well after the fact, the value of the constructive feedback is lessened.

The exception may be when giving negative feedback. Sometimes when a negative incident happens you may need time to get your thoughts in order before you give negative feedback (coming on too strong or in an angry manner will negate any good you hope to achieve). Giving the feedback tomorrow rather than immediately will come across as far more constructive -- and tomorrow is still timely.

Lastly -- and hopefully these go without saying -- your feedback should be person-to-person versus in writing. The very nature of feedback is a mentoring/coaching activity, which should be done verbally and informally. You should also provide positive feedback in the same manner at least as often as you provide corrective feedback.

By focusing on the positive and keeping the discussion fact based when providing correction, you are able to modify and build new behaviours, without challenging their current behaviours. What do you think? Is it worth a try?

*Bill's passion is improving business results by working with leadership teams to change employee behaviours. He does this by equipping leaders with the principles, processes and tools to cultivate and influence an engaged customer-focused culture that recognizes improved performance and productivity. For additional information please visit online at [www.billhogg.ca](http://www.billhogg.ca) or email [bill@billhogg.ca](mailto:bill@billhogg.ca)*

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