Reading: C1

Giving and receiving positive feedback

Read a magazine article about giving feedback at work to practise and improve your reading skills.

Before reading

Do the preparation task first. Then read the text and do the exercises.

Preparation task

Match the definitions (a–h) with the vocabulary (1–8).

Vocabulary	Definition
1. ..... to have an eye for something	a. to speak to someone in private
2. ..... innate	b. the capacity of the living brain for continuous alteration of the neural pathways in response to experience
3. ..... plasticity	c. to make something difficult or unpleasant sound more attractive and acceptable
4. ..... cynical	d. existing from birth and not learned or taught
5. ..... to have a word with someone	e. to be particularly perceptive about something
6. ..... to counter the effects	f. to develop a skill or talent by working hard at it
7. ..... to hone	g. distrusting the motives and intentions of others; believing the worst of others
8. ..... to sugarcoat something	h. to neutralise or reduce the bad effects of something by an opposite action

Reading text: Giving and receiving positive feedback

Your manager stops you and says she needs to have a word about your performance in the recent project. You worry about it all weekend, wondering what you might have done wrong. When you step into her office on Monday morning she begins by praising you for the good work you've done on the project, and you wonder if this is the obligatory praise that starts off the typical 'feedback sandwich'. You know how the feedback sandwich goes: say something nice, say what you really want to say, say something nice again.

In an attempt to inject some positivity into their feedback, many managers rely on sandwiching negative feedback between two positive comments. However, when feedback becomes such a routine, employees can start to perceive positive feedback as simply a form of sugarcoating the negatives, thus diminishing its value. Instead, positive feedback should not simply be seen as something to cushion the negative, but should be delivered so as to reinforce and encourage good performance. Below are three tips to help you make positive feedback count.

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1. Don't always follow positive feedback with negative feedback

When positive and negative feedback always appear to go hand in hand, the positives can become devalued and ignored. Ensure there are times when positive feedback is given for its own sake and resist the temptation to offer constructive criticism.

2. Cultivate a 'growth mindset'

Psychologist and 'growth mindset' proponent Carol Dweck spoke of the plasticity of the brain and our ability to develop skills and talents that we might not have been good at to start with. Many of us tend to focus our praise on the end result and seemingly innate talents, e.g. 'You really have an eye for details' or 'You have a real talent for organising events'. However, research suggests that by focusing on the process of how things are done – praising effort, experimentation and problem-solving strategies – we can encourage the development of new skills and the continued honing of talents.

3. Create a culture of offering positive feedback

Make giving positive feedback part of your team/department/company culture. Don't just wait for special moments like appraisals to give feedback. Offer informal positive feedback when making small talk or when walking down a corridor. Feedback doesn't have to only come from the higher ranks either. Encourage peer feedback among team members and colleagues and actively ask them for positive comments on each other's performances on tasks.

It might take time to counter the effects of an environment where there is a cynical view of positive feedback, but in the long run, by embracing positive feedback, you can not only enhance working performance but also enrich the quality of life in the workplace.

Tasks

Task 1

Circle the best answer.

1. What does the 'feedback sandwich' involve?
    a. Giving positive feedback by accompanying it with negative feedback
    b. Giving negative feedback by accompanying it with positive feedback
    c. Creating a feedback culture in an organisation
    d. Devaluing positive feedback
2. The writer believes that the 'feedback sandwich' ...
    a. can encourage good performance.
    b. makes negative feedback more painful.
    c. makes employees fearful of feedback.
    d. is too predictable to be effective.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

3. The 'growth mindset' idea is that ...
    a. we can become good at things that we might initially not seem to have a talent for.
    b. we should focus on honing the talents that we are born with.
    c. the end result is more important than the process.
    d. we must not tell people that they are good at certain things.

4. How can we create a culture of positive feedback?
    a. By offering feedback only during informal occasions such as when walking down a corridor
    b. By making sure that only positive and not negative feedback is given
    c. By asking your employees to offer positive feedback to their colleagues
    d. By not conducting appraisals for employees

5. A cynical view of positive feedback ...
    a. is irreversible.
    b. can make the quality of working life richer.
    c. can be healthy.
    d. can be changed gradually.

6. What might be a good title for this article?
    a. The power of a growth mindset
    b. The power of positive feedback
    c. The power of positive thinking
    d. The power of the feedback sandwich

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Task 2

Are the sentences true or false?

	Answer	
1. In the story at the beginning of the article, the writer describes a scenario in which the employee assumes they are going to get negative feedback.	True	False
2. Overusing the 'feedback sandwich' can result in a mistrust of positive feedback.	True	False
3. We should not try to inject positivity in our feedback or we might devalue it.	True	False
4. We should never give positive feedback and negative feedback at the same time.	True	False
5. Carol Dweck believes that the brain is flexible and can be trained to learn new skills.	True	False
6. We should give positive feedback when employees make an effort and try new things.	True	False
7. By offering positive feedback in a variety of situations, we can get our employees used to getting positive feedback.	True	False
8. You can improve the performance of your employees by embracing their mistrust of positive feedback.	True	False

Discussion

What are your tips for giving motivating feedback?

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Answers

Preparation task

1. e
2. d
3. b
4. g
5. a
6. h
7. f
8. c

Task 1

1. b
2. d
3. a
4. c
5. d
6. b

Task 2

1. True
2. True
3. False
4. False
5. True
6. True
7. True
8. False

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