



Learning to Provide Feedback a Big Win for U.S. Grocery Chain

Zenger Folkman's FUEL Workshop Teaches Leaders How to Better Provide Positive, Re-directive Feedback

THE CHALLENGE

Feedback—both positive and re-directive—is one of the most important vehicles for growth and development. Without feedback, we continue in our habitual patterns of behavior. Positive feedback reinforces behavior and leads to conscious competence, while re-directive feedback allows individuals to see the impact of their behavior and choose to change. When leaders provide any type of feedback, their employees are more likely to feel committed, valued, and engaged in their work environments with a strong opportunity to grow.

In September 2011, a US food retailer with approximately 1,600 stores conducted an engagement survey. The results showed that while employees rated the opportunity for development as very important to them, the grocer was only doing an adequate job in providing it. In addition, its business leaders rated high on driving for results and stretch goals, which while positive overall, potentially have some drawbacks.

“When our executives push results and stretch goals, they get focused on only rewarding those who go above and beyond, and forget to give that confident feedback when employees reach original goals, make improvement, etc.,” said the grocer’s development manager. “We needed to teach our leaders to provide this positive feedback anytime it was warranted.”

Having successfully participated in various leadership development programs over the years, the grocer’s executive team decided the next step was to help its mid-level managers and leaders improve. The intent was to help those that fell into this category—vice presidents, directors, and managers—become more comfortable in giving employees effective, in-the-moment feedback.

Fortunately, Zenger Folkman, the leadership development company the grocer had used with great success for other workshops, had a quality feedback training program built on extensive research: FUEL for Feedback (part of Zenger Folkman’s *The Extraordinary Coach* program). Working closely with Zenger Folkman, the organization tailored FUEL to create a custom four-hour workshop that it called *Providing Effective Feedback*. They launched a pilot program that included 125 leaders in August 2012, and it expects to put more than 5,000 additional leaders through the program within the next two years.

THE SOLUTION

The *Providing Effective Feedback* workshop is based on Zenger Folkman’s FUEL model and is consistent with the training company’s 360-degree leadership assessment program that many of the organization’s leaders have already gone through. The workshop is designed to help their leaders improve team productivity and develop others by:

THE CHALLENGE

- With significant emphasis placed on reaching stretch goals, leaders were missing opportunities to provide effective, in-the-moment feedback. As a result, employees felt less valued and engaged in their work environments.

THE SOLUTION

- The US food retailer worked with Zenger Folkman to create a custom four-hour workshop called *Providing Effective Feedback*.
- The program utilizes the FUEL for Feedback model that is contained in *The Extraordinary Coach Workshop*.
- The *Providing Effective Feedback* program teaches participants the importance of providing three times the amount of positive feedback than re-directive feedback in order to achieve high performance.
- Participants are given a framework for presenting effective feedback.

THE RESULTS

- The response has been overwhelmingly positive with vast improvements in providing positive and re-directive feedback.
- Over 550 employees have been through the program, with another 5,000 additional leaders expected over the next two years.



- Understanding how consistent, specific feedback pays off
- Learning how great leaders use feedback to enhance team performance
- Learning how to hold powerful feedback conversations that drive action
- Practicing how to provide positive/ developmental feedback in real-world situations from the grocer's work environment

Prior to launching the first workshop, three of the organization's training and development managers participated in a three-day certification program, enabling them to facilitate the program internally.

During the workshop, participants role-play both positive and re-directive feedback across the four components of FUEL:

- **F**rame the Conversation
- **U**nderstand the Current State
- **E**xplore the Desired State
- **L**ayout a Success Plan

According to Zenger Folkman, research has shown that individuals should receive three times the amount of positive feedback than re-directive feedback in order to produce an environment most conducive to high performance (in fact, some research suggests the ratio should go to 5.6 to 1). To reach the minimal balance of 3-to-1 positive feedback, leaders are directed to first ensure that recipients are open to feedback. Next, leaders should avoid always coupling positive and negative feedback together. Finally, leaders should not wait for "above and beyond" performance before providing reinforcing feedback.

"If coaches (or leaders) open themselves up to personal feedback they will have more effective coaching discussions and they will also become much better coaches," wrote Jack Zenger in the 2012 article "Bringing Science to the Art of Coaching." "Our research confirms that the best leaders- as-coaches not only excel at providing feedback, but also excel at asking for feedback. The very nature of asking for feedback allows the coaching relationship to embody the spirit of a collaborative, two-way conversation."

THE RESULTS

Since the first workshop in August 2012, more than 550 additional employees have participated in the program. The response from the workshop has been overwhelmingly positive. Participants have praised the program and provided highly positive feedback on the workshop evaluation form:

"The workshop content was very relevant for direct report, peer or supervisor feedback; the session provided many a-ha moments."

"For me, the most valuable aspect of the workshop was the understanding of how to phrase or frame the feedback and how to get the employee to engage with the solutions or options."

"It was a very effective workshop that brought out a few challenges that I have had in the past. Now I have the tools to work with those challenges. Thank you."

"I thought I did a good job – even excellent job – of providing positive feedback. I'm quickly learning I was mistaken!"

"The best feedback class I have ever attended!"

"I found the 3-to-1 guidance valuable in that it afforded me the opportunity to reflect on feedback given in the past and certainly will provide the platform for the future."

"What you learn in this workshop has the potential to improve your relations across every aspect of your life."

Those who were certified to facilitate the *Providing Effective Feedback* workshop have also observed significant results. The trainers voted the FUEL program as their favorite workshop to deliver. One facilitator commented:

"When you have participants, even at the VP level, shocked that the four hours has already gone by, that's a good thing. When we deliver a workshop and we get calls from our executives saying they want to have a conversation with a subordinate, that's a win. We are definitely poised to reach our business goals with this program. We can't wait to see the positive changes in our entire organization over the next two years."

The true gauge for success of the *Providing Effective Feedback* workshop comes from speaking directly to high-level leaders to see if they are noticing improvements.

So far, these leaders say they are seeing vast improvements in providing positive and re-directive feedback. Based on these current results, as they roll the program out to the 5,000 additional leaders over the next two years, they anticipate it will prove an invaluable resource for the entire organization.

Zenger Folkman helps organizations flourish by increasing the effectiveness of leaders at all levels. Our unique, strengths-based development methodology enables leaders to move faster and higher. Each offering is solidly grounded in research, utilizing our extensive empirical database. The end results are statistically significant improvements in how leaders lead, how their employees engage and how their companies profit; allowing both leaders and organizations to soar to new heights.