

## 4.2 The “Art” of Giving and Receiving Feedback

Most of us bristle at the prospect of criticism, so it is also important to reassure the other person that you’re not hassling them, but rather trying to help. In simple terms, this means taking the following approach:

- **Describe the behavior.** Be specific—do not put someone down or be vague. State the facts as you see them.
- **Avoid loaded terms that produce emotional reactions and raise defenses.** Be specific and use clear examples rather than vague generalizations. If you say to someone “You’re always late” they can avoid the central issue by arguing that “always” is not strictly true. Rather, “You were 10 minutes late on Monday, and 30 minutes late on Wednesday. Is there some reason for this behavior?”
- **Explain the consequences.** You also need to describe what happened as a result. Again, the key is to stick to the facts, rather than sit in judgment (e.g., “We need to have a full staff in order to open the area for security and customer service.”).
- **Build on the other person’s strengths.** You can help the other person keep the feedback in perspective by including positive comments about their overall behavior (e.g., “Your overall performance is one of good teamwork and general punctuality. However, there seem to be these occasional diversions from an otherwise good performance.”).
- **Invite the other person to respond.** Think of feedback as a way of helping people to explore their behavior and see for themselves what needs to be done. You should resist the temptation to tell individuals directly what they should or shouldn’t do. The usual response to direct advice is often rejection, resentment, denial, or argument. A better approach is to avoid telling people what they should do, but rather invite them to develop their own action plan (e.g., “Is there some way you could work toward 100% punctuality?”).

All this takes practice, and the ability to communicate develops over time. We will explore the whole process of giving and receiving feedback in a lot more detail in this module.