What feedback works and what doesn't

By Curtis Sprouse, President, EurekaConnect LLC

Professional development requires that people seek insight with respect to their performance. Without feedback, people will struggle to recognize what needs to be developed and what is working well. Athletes are taught to study game film at a very early age. I remember watching endless hours of high school football games, so that I could better understand what constituted effective play and what did not. My coaches spent endless hours preparing to discuss the game film with me and my teammates. We would spend an entire week of practice preparing for an opponent with specific abilities which we would need to address to be effective. These teachings were general in nature, targeting technique and execution, but they also required us to read situations and react.

The challenge of running an effective business continues to grow, yet we do little to provide individual objective, accurate, and actionable feedback on an annual basis, let alone the weekly bases the way that I encountered in high school and college. Yes, we are constantly providing others subjective feedback such as: "You did a good job," "You were not effective in that meeting," "Your behavior will cost us that deal," "You are not a good listener," but do we understand why we are observing these actions, good and bad?

The best form of feedback is objective feedback, as it provides us with facts. Utilization of an <u>assessment instrument</u> is helpful in that it can provide valuable insight into each person, but one must be careful to select a program that is measurable and thorough. Many programs lack the clarity and granularity to define the "why." Knowing why people are acting and reacting in a specific way has a significant bearing on how they will need to develop and how they will need to be coached. Objective data derived from a series of assessments will also increase receptivity as it is based on a tested and proven methodology.

Third party feedback can also be valuable when it is provided by multiple reliable sources. If the observer is biased in their opinion of a person this can result in damaging data that could potentially lead to incorrect conclusions and actions relative to personal and organizational development.

Our work and research identifies this dynamic all the time. When working with two companies who were engaged in a multiyear alliance, we found that the executive leadership had placed cultural labels on the teams, a U.S. operating style vs. a European operating style. The perception was that the challenges and problems that were materially problematic were a result of one team moving too slowly, not having the ability to set goals or take control of the situation. This determination was made in large part by executives who did not work with the individual team members, were responsible for correcting the problem and took steps to do so with incorrect data.

Our assessment, using a series of instruments, identified that the perceptions were incorrect. The team that was identified as being too slow, not having the ability to set goals, and an inability to take control was actually capable of doing so; however, they were reacting to the frustration of being asked to model a less effective, slow moving team that struggled to set goals and hold people accountable. The talented team was avoiding, compromising, and accommodating as a result of frustration.

When the data was presented to each team the response was dramatic. The executive team was able to target solutions, based on skills and understanding of the team and each individual contributor. Functional teams were realigned to make sure that all teams possessed the right compliment of talent. Professional development was measurably impacted over the three years the team was studied, as team members took responsibility for their behavioral profiles.

Responsibility is a key component of success. When a company is able to provide accurate objective analysis and make each person responsible to their peers, this is when significant changes occur. When I was in high school, I watched my previous week performance with my teammates. The coach critiqued my performance in front of my peers. The film did not lie; it provided an objective record of my actions and reactions. I, with my peers, was made responsible and provided direction and instruction by my coaches. These same elements used by high school athletic team can change corporations, transforming them into world class organizations.

About Eureka Connect Behavioral Dynamics:

EurekaConnect Behavioral Dynamics © (ECBD) is an approach that involves the assessment of an individual, team, or organization, via validated tests, to define 17 behavior traits, both genetic and learned, as well as 14 behavioral models. With this program, ECBD objectively identifies why individuals and companies have not achieved optimal outcomes and identifies ways to improve efficiency and effectiveness, driving revenue and profitability, as well as personal achievement.

Along with our partners Giombetti Associates, we leverage data across multiple industries to define "what and why" people do what they do via their personalized behavioral dynamics assessment score. Our approach uses three fundamental principles for life long success:

- Learn Continuously striving to expand self-awareness and relevant business intellect.
- Grow Develop skills, refine strengths, apply proven methods to achieve objectives.
- Lead Use the knowledge and experience to innovate in order to reach new levels of success.