How should I give feedback to my employees?

Employees need consistent feedback for optimum performance. Providing feedback reinforces what's working, improves what's not working, and presents a timely opportunity to recognize employees and say "thank you." The easiest way to provide feedback is through regular (even daily) rounding on employees. Rounding is a means to give attention to important initiatives (e.g., bedside reporting, discharge instructions, etc.) and to employees. Employees do great things every day. When we consciously devote the time to observe them, we discover which behaviors need to be affirmed and which behaviors need to be tweaked.

If employees aren't used to it, an environment with such oversight sounds intimidating. Employees fear managers looming over their shoulders in judgment. Nobody likes to be judged. On the other hand, nearly everyone likes to improve.

Employees are open to receiving feedback when they don't feel like they are being attacked. Employees ENJOY being coached to success. Employees WANT to do a great job. It's up to leaders to help them do that. Leaders can establish trust with employees by incorporating positive feedback into the feedback structure.

Feedback should always include recognition for the behaviors employees have mastered or improved. Managers should strive for balance – employees need to be corrected, but they also need to be recognized for what they are doing right.

Some leaders use a clear 3:1 feedback structure that is weighted on the positive side; some even use a 4:1 ratio. Regardless of the ratio, a clear structure that incorporates positive feedback promotes a learning environment. Construct a plan for delivering feedback by answering these questions:

- How often and to whom will I give feedback?
- What types of activities will I/we observe? What will I pay close attention to?
- How many positive statements of reinforcement should be in the feedback?
- When will I practice giving feedback in a safe setting (e.g. role playing in a meeting)?
- How will I track the feedback I need to give and have already given?

A clear structure for feedback helps promote an environment where employees are happy to learn, not fearful of being judged. Observing employees and providing feedback gradually closes the variation gap of doing something and doing something well. It validates to employees that what they are doing is important. It validates to leaders that what employees are doing is being done right.