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How to Give Feedback to People Who Cry, Yell, or Get Defen ive

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ditor's Note: SHR has artnered with the Harvard Business Review to bring you relevant articles on key HR to ics and strategies.

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There's no denying that performance review season can be a headache for managers. The process of writing reviews and delivering feedback takes a lot of time (especially if you do it thoughtfully) and can be particularly anxiety provoking if you have someone on your team who tends to have a dicult or negative emotional reaction to feedback. So how do you get ready to give feedback to someone who might cry, yell, or get defensive?



Advice for All Tough Feedback Sessions

Remembe the "why." Focus on all the good reasons you're giving the feedback. Remind yourself and your employee by saying things like, "I need to share this with you because I want you to be successful here" or "I want to see you keep growing."

Kim Castelda, a senior vice president at the software company Bullhorn, oversees talent and human resources for 600 employees worldwide. She leads a training program on delivering dicult messages, certifying those who have exemplified a high level of skill in handling the toughest situations. dditionally, twice a year she surveys employees to ask whether they're receiving positive and constructive feedback from their managers. Says Castelda, "I've rarely met someone who didn't want to be successful, and giving feedback is an essential part of that. We want our people to be the best at this, so we hold them accountable."

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think about how we show up for these conversations. Leaders should walk in centered, prepared, and organized." Don't wing it. You'll feel better prepared if you do your homework in advance and ground your assessments in observations, data, and concrete examples. Invest the time to be as thoughtful as possible.

Handle eactions in the moment. Sound preparation won't stop the other person from reacting negatively, but it can help you to respond calmly and effectively when the emotions arise.

Move the conve sation to a p oductive place. The goal is to diffuse the emotional reaction so that you can productively give the feedback and, together, come up with ideas and actions to ensure the person's success. This may mean having a second meeting, re uesting that you regroup after the person has had time to calm down and collect themselves. ddressing the emotional reaction shouldn't shortchange the other parts of an effective feedback conversation, including: sharing the why, naming the issue clearly, offering examples, listening and hearing the other person out, and coming to a shared agreement on next steps and actions.

When Talking d

It's easy to get flustered or frustrated in the face of tears or when the person says things like, "I never do anything right." In these situations, Castelda a

If the employee's behavior is a recurring pattern, you should address the person's reactive tendency head-on. You might say something like, "I notice every time we sit down to discuss feedback, you get [upset, angry, defensive]. I have your best interests at heart. What can I do to help you receive feedback with more openness? In here's what I need in these interactions." Break the vicious cycle of avoiding discult feedback conversations. Says Castelda, "Be careful not to stew on things or bottle things up. I ive constructive feedback as things come up. It ends up being smaller."

integrity, and calmly and effectively responding in the moment, we can move to the same side of the table and help the other person.

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