

***Fire Up! Your Employees and Smoke your Competition;
How to Invite, Incite, and Ignite Employee Performance***

By Jay Forte



Section 3: IGNITE Performance

Millennial managers IGNITE performance when they create powerful relationships with employees through daily powerful performance feedback and recurring career conversations. This contact connects employees emotionally to their managers.

Chapter 9: Speak to Me About Today – Using Powerful Performance Feedback and Coaching

“When teaching, light a fire, don’t fill a bucket.”

Dan Snow

Note: Before starting this chapter, go to www.FireUpYourEmployees.com, click on “Beyond the Book” and print the supporting exercises and worksheets for chapter 9. This text includes the information you need; the website gives you access to the exercises, worksheets, and activities you will need to fully complete this chapter and to advance your learning through practice.

It is time for the final component of the Fire Up! ProcessSM – IGNITE. To date, you have:

- INVITE – you created a powerful employee-focused culture and learned how to hire the *right* employee (based on talents) – to connect employees *intellectually* to their roles.
- INCITE – you have activated employees’ performance by job sculpting and creating performance expectations that are tied to financial metrics to encourage employees to think and act like owners – to connect employee *emotionally* to their roles.

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It is time to pull it all together and IGNITE the employee's passion for extraordinary performance. This happens through the emotional connection and relationship built between you, the manager, and the employee through recurring performance feedback and regular Career Conversations (development).

Let's review this critical phrase, "Employees quit people before they quit companies." The converse is also true - employees commit to people before they commit to companies; they just need a reason to commit. Employees respect and connect to their managers when these managers spend time, attention, and effort on employees. There are no stronger bonds for performance and loyalty than the successful employee-manager relationship. And as quickly as people seem to quit people, they also remain loyal to people – when justified.

In the book *Human Sigma*, authors Dr. John H. Fleming and Jim Asplund show that customers become loyal (not just "satisfied") when an emotional connection is created with a company, product, or brand. My experience is this also applies to employees. Employees become loyal (engaged, committed, high-performing) when they not only connect to their work (it matches their thinking), but they also have a personal and emotional connection to their manager. Your connection to your employees by constant encouragement, education, coaching, and feedback builds the important emotional bond. This bond IGNITES performance and encourages loyalty. Let's work on the first step of igniting employee performance through a new and more performance focused feedback process.

Performance Feedback

Every employee wants and needs a performance status or update; it is a well documented human response to look for the support and approval from another for performance. Studies have shown the most rewarding thing you can do for your employees is to notice quality performance and comment on it – a personal thank you for exceptional performance or a caring and supportive response for problem performance is one of the most powerful forms of employee motivation.

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In either case, what matters is your time and effort to inform, applaud, educate, and improve the employee. Savvy managers understand the work environment well enough to know what IGNITES an employee to perform and to become loyal to an organization – and that is to understand and know what value is for each employee.

Although value is unique to each employee, there are three universal performance truths:

1. All people appreciate environments of care, trust, opportunity, and contribution.
2. People want to be treated in the way that *they want to be treated*. People want to be noticed and appreciated for their individuality and uniqueness.
3. Employees will always want information about their performance to either determine how to improve or to feel appreciated.

One of the best and most effective tools available to management is performance feedback – the process of constantly coaching, educating, monitoring, and evaluating employee performance. This allows a continual flow of information about performance, the opportunity to have a dialog with you, the constant focus on improving, and a strong sense of care and belonging. This is in line with the Fire Up! ProcessSM of setting performance expectations and performance plans. Employees need constant performance contact as they implement their performance plans and sculpted job components.

Successful performance feedback has rules to ensure its effectiveness because, done poorly, it can do irreparable damage to employee relationships. The most significant asset any organization now has is the intellectual capital (both the mind and the heart) of the employee. The quality of the relationship between management and employee will determine the level of engagement, contribution, and commitment. The more frequently successful feedback is provided, the stronger the bond between you and the employee.

Let's review some of the attributes of successful performance feedback:

- Strong teams need and use successful feedback to keep the team on track and focused on achieving its goals.
- Feedback allows employees the ability to modify their behavior and performance and maintain self-respect, self-esteem, and dignity.

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- Successful feedback focuses on behavior and not on personality (the *what*, not the *who*).
- Successful feedback provides instruction, not inflammation.
- Successful feedback waits for or responds at the teachable (or applauding) moment.
- Successful feedback requires that both parties are good communicators and effective listeners.
- Feedback can be corrective or complimentary.

Each employee is different. That means that though you may introduce and use the same steps to assure your performance feedback is complete, how, where, and when you handle the performance feedback will be dependent on both the situation and the employee. This is the reason it is so critical for you, in today's economy, to get to know your employees. This encourages you to not only place them in the right role, allow them to use their talents, and own their performance, but to understand how to coach and educate them.

Managers are now like educators; they are the “guide from the side, not the sage on the stage.”

You now see the role of the manager is significantly different from in the past. You now help employees perform by assisting them manage and achieve their performance plans. You will now know early in the process if their implementation plan is reasonable, can be implemented, and the skills needed to implement are resident in the employee. You are still the most important influence on an employee; you are now the coach, educator, and supporter as employees take more and more control over their performance and responsibility for results. An intellectual workplace is built on thinking – employee thinking. Your role now as manager is to IGNITE this thinking so employees perform well, feel competent and confident. As employees expand their contribution and think and act more like owners, you move more to the background. You now ensure that each employee has what he/she needs to build his/her plans and achieve great results.

Some managers feel this focus on soft skills and attention on employees is too coddling and too concerned with how employees feel. Remember, in this intellectual age, how

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employees feel impacts how they perform – happy employees outperform unhappy employees. This also means the employee must feel important, must always be learning and growing, and must feel connected to his/her work and workplace. The relationship between you and the employee is a core component to creating employee workplace contentment. *There is nothing more powerful in millennial performance than the relationship (connection) between the manager and the employee.* All other relationships (employee to employee, employee to customer, employee to supplier) will be affected by the employee-manager relationship. Done well, as evidenced by strong, recurring performance feedback, the employee will feel a personal commitment to the manager. This encourages the employee to step up, to perform more significantly, and to work to impress the manager. If the quality of the feedback is average or not productive, this environment can extinguish the flames of any employee passionate about his/her work.

Though this process of performance feedback is not intended to be academic (it needs to be practical), its components must be presented in a structured way to ensure the performance feedback process is complete and successful. This process has three steps; to it I add an opening and closing statement to remind us we are dealing with people and their feelings are important; we must win them in to the feedback. This opening and closing ensures that the employee will not become defensive and, therefore, be able to hear the feedback and be open to its message. All together, it makes an easy to learn, five-step process that works in all situations – home, life, and work. Once you try this, be sure to use it with your teenagers, parents, neighbors, spouse, or partner. It works because it focuses on behaviors, not personalities, and always is focused on performance.

Let's review the Performance Feedback process and then practice to become proficient; refer to the Performance Feedback worksheet included as a part of the worksheets printed from the website at the beginning of this chapter:

Step 1: Start with a *cookie* (positive comment) – no one likes to feel assaulted with feedback or commentaries about performance – it encourages them to be defensive. Remember that all feedback is about people, behaviors, and emotions. So start each performance feedback with a positive comment, something that shows respect and

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understanding of who the person is and wins the employee into the discussion. This is critical whether the feedback is to applaud or to educate (improve).

Step 2: Describe the current behavior or situation (give great details) – describe what is currently happening, the behavior you want to reinforce or redirect, and the specific situations where you observed the behavior needing feedback. Be specific, brief, and direct. Select the appropriate place to host the feedback (if negative, choose a private place; if positive, a public place may be acceptable). Remember, the goal is to change behavior that needs changing or encourage successful behavior to continue. The only way this can happen is if the event is summarized in enough detail for the employee to corroborate the facts and be ready to continue good behavior or improve bad behavior.

Step 3: Describe impact and consequences (find the hook or the attention-getter for the feedback recipient) – describe the impact and consequences of the current behavior, noting the effect the behavior had on results, customers, or employees. Be specific and quantify details. The more detailed and accurate the information, the more meaningful the feedback will be. This is what is called the *hook* or the *attention-getter*. Realize that no adult changes his/her behavior unless he/she sees a personal reason or benefit to change. The impact in this case should not only deal with the organization, but should also be a personal hook for the employee (or feedback recipient).

Step 4: Create a plan to continue great behaviors or change negative behaviors (let them have a voice in the response) – work with the employee to both suggest options that would improve a negative event or reinforce a positive event; be sure the employee has a voice in the process, otherwise the implementation of the idea will be ineffective. Remember you are working to encourage employee ownership, so once the employee sees the event and understands, the employee should be responsible for suggestions to correct, improve, or continue. As with performance expectations, the more the employees invent their responses, the more they own the results; the same works with performance feedback.

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Step 5: End with a *cookie* (positive comment) – regardless of the subject of the performance feedback (positive or negative), employees will process the message better when the performance feedback event both starts and ends on a positive and personal tone. Be sure to reassure the employee of the value of the discussion in the feedback. It sets the stage for an open and honest relationship and dialog about performance. If an employee fears a conversation with you, the concept of successful feedback will be lost. If the employee sees that all feedback is supportive and values the employee, is firm and fair about performance, and focuses on using the feedback to constantly improve, then employees will actively solicit feedback. This way, everyone focuses on improvement; the benefit is greater customer service and organization performance.

Before we begin practicing this process, let's review some of the things we should do, or not do, to ensure consistently effective performance feedback.

Giving Feedback

Imagine this – Your employee has always done a great job handling problem customers. In fact, you don't know how this employee manages to stay so composed when customers become aggravated and raise their voices. But today, something happened – you are interrupted at your desk by the sound of two very loud and angry voices involved in a bitter disagreement about pricing. You quickly respond and take over the situation and are able to settle the issue with the customer. Now it is time to address feedback with your employee, for we are at the *teachable moment*.

Stop! You aren't ready to give this employee any feedback yet – there are several things we need to discuss first. For this feedback to be effective and about performance, we need to remember it must be directed to behavior – go for just the facts. But having just handled this situation, you are emotionally charged. These emotions will override the positive benefits of the feedback if it is not controlled and managed. Anger may be an emotion that can be discussed, but the feedback cannot be done angrily. This is one of the most difficult aspects of effective feedback – emotional intelligence and self-control.

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There are many disruptive behaviors that can derail effective feedback. Without control, these disruptive behaviors undermine the feedback process and the benefits of both correcting behavior and building a better relationship with you will be lost. Ensure your success by identifying any of the following behaviors in your feedback style and make modifications where necessary. So before you can deliver effective feedback, you need to manage yourself and your emotions – if you do not, you will create another encounter similar to the one the customer service employee had with the customer. These disruptive behaviors have been adapted and edited from *Coaching Through Effective Feedback* by Paul J. Jerome.

Disruptive Behaviors

The aggressor:

Disruptive behavior: Aggressors talk about personality and character traits instead of behaviors. They threaten, embarrass, and respond emotionally and angrily. They use the feedback to vent instead of to teach, educate, or coach.

Examples of the aggressor's comments include:

- “*You never think.*”
- “*You are so stupid.*”
- “*You are always so disorganized.*”

If you see this behavior in you, what can you do to correct it?

The yacker:

Disruptive behavior: Lengthy lectures that move from topic to topic without a clear and concise reason for the feedback. The facts are unclear and are hidden by too many words and frequently too much emotion. There is no opportunity for the feedback recipient to break into the commentary and, therefore, either learn from the event or offer additional facts about the event.

Examples of the yacker's comments include:

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- *“This is what happened to me when I was starting in a position like yours and even though it is not exactly the same, it is similar enough to tell you this story. When I first started in your position...”*
- *“Do you know why your response was not okay with the customer? Well, I’ll tell you why. Sit there and let me finish.”*

If you see this behavior in you, what can you do to correct it?

The careless:

Disruptive behavior: The feedback giver is completely inconsiderate of the information or the feelings of the feedback recipient. The careless says what is on his/her mind without regard to audience, time, feelings, or place. This leads to feedback recipient embarrassment, anger, and disrespect for the feedback provider.

Examples of the careless’ comments include:

- *“Let’s discuss it late on Friday so you can have the weekend to think about it”* (and get angry).
- *“Many of us do not like the way you handle Smith Company”* (in front of an office full of people).
- *“You still haven’t mastered the computer system! My pet gerbil could handle this transaction”* (in front of a customer).

If you see this behavior in you, what can you do to correct it?

The extremist:

Disruptive behavior: This feedback giver exaggerates for effect and is famous for using superlatives such as *always*, *never*, and *every*. Facts are not used unless they support the extreme and are frequently ignored. The extremist’s feedback comes from an emotional response that uses exaggeration to make a point. There can be no learning from this event since it encourages the feedback receiver to become defensive or disinterested.

Examples of the extremist’s comments include:

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- “*You always come in late.*”
- “*You never have completed anything on time, ever.*”
- “*Every customer has a problem with the way you greet them at the register.*”

If you see this behavior in you, what can you do to correct it?

The negatron:

Disruptive behavior: This feedback giver sees everything as a negative, generally because of personal experiences or disappointments. This perspective invades the feedback as it finds fault with things and people. All solutions offered have flaws; there are no right answers. This downer personality does not present learning options so, over time, the feedback recipients tune this feedback giver out and the contact is ineffective for either behavior improvement or relationship building.

Examples of the negatron’s comments:

- “*It will never work – I’ve seen it all before.*”
- “*You never seem to get it; why are we even trying this with you?*”
- “*If I tell you a hundred times, you will still never catch on.*”

If you see this behavior in you, what can you do to correct it?

Emotional self-awareness is a critical component of all great managers. When you understand that all contact with an employee must help the employee learn and build your relationships, you will start to notice aspects of your interactions that get in your way. As you move through the balance of this chapter, commit to noticing your behavior as much as you notice the behavior of your employees. As you learn to use the five-step feedback process, continue to assess your response, particularly the way you respond emotionally to what you see and experience as a manager.

Remember, all feedback must result in a win-win event; the employee learns and the (employee/manager) relationship improves. Let’s pull the performance feedback process

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together by reviewing a full example. Let's say you overheard your employee Bill on the phone with a customer; Bill raised his voice, was short-tempered, and unhelpful. Here is how the feedback could be presented using the Performance Feedback process to address the issue, act on the teachable moment, offer Bill information, support, and an opportunity to own his performance.

Performance Feedback Process Example:

Step 1: Cookie – Bill, you have some of the best customer service skills in the industry. Our customers are always very impressed with our service levels when they deal with you.

Step 2: Describe the current behaviors and situations – Bill, I heard you on the phone with Stanton Company. You were short with them, raised your voice, and told them to call back when they knew the part numbers they wanted. You also hung up without saying thank you. Did I hear this correctly? (Give Bill an opportunity to respond).

Step 3: Describe the impact and consequences – Bill, Stanton Company is one of our largest and best customers. They continually send other customers to us, and if we do not treat them with our best and most supportive service, they will not refer others to us. In this competitive environment, we need their support. They were critical in helping us achieve our profit targets, which resulted in bonuses for everyone on the team – including yours. Our relationship with them is critical to our success.

Step 4: Identify alternative behaviors – Bill, what do you think you should do with Stanton right now? (Allow Bill to offer ideas and to own the solution). Great, Bill, I like that idea, please get right on it. Mostly remember how important the relationship is with each of our customers. They call us because we know what we are doing and we treat them better than anyone else – it is how *we* do business.

Step 5: Cookie – Bill, you are an important part of the great service this team gives our customers. Thanks for making the difference you do; please keep doing your best to help us be the best in the industry. Thanks.

Start with a cookie – a positive statement. Handle the feedback using the next three steps. The goal is to help the person receiving the feedback own the solution (if something needs correcting) or ways to keep something great going. Then end with another positive

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comment to reassure the employee and ensure that the relationship was supported in the process. This creates one neat package – performance coaching – sandwiched between two positive statements. This is how to connect with the thinking employee. This is how to encourage the employee to improve, feel supported, and come back stronger. And, in the process, build a stronger trusting relationship with you.

Consider how Bill felt after this event – having been educated instead of reprimanded. This does not mean you can't be or shouldn't be direct and strong with your employees. Powerful feedback is not about dealing timidly with the issues. Instead, it acts as a successful format to deal with any issue, up to and including firing if that is the right response. The goal is to use the format to be complete and develop a rapport with the employee and to improve performance. You don't coddle employees when you respect them as people, value their feelings, and hold them accountable for their actions. Successful feedback must both address performance and relationship building as the same time. This now places additional responsibilities on you to manage your emotions and to stay focused on the value of the employee and the coaching and educating for performance improvement.

Things to consider:

- What is your organization's current feedback process? Is your personal feedback process different from the organization's process? Why or why not?
- How do employees respond to your feedback?
- What is the most successful aspect of your feedback? Why?
- What is the least successful aspect of your feedback? Why?
- Do you see any of the disruptive feedback behaviors in your approach to providing feedback?
- What is the value of starting and ending all feedback with a positive comment?
- What do you think about the statement that feedback should be a win-win event – it should provide information and education and build the relationship between the manager and the employee?
- Is it necessary to start and end your feedback process with a positive comment if you are providing positive or applauding feedback? Why or why not?

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Time for Practice

From the worksheets you printed for this chapter from the website, access the Feedback Performance worksheets. This practice exercise will provide four employee situations for which you must provide effective feedback. Use the copies of the Performance Feedback worksheet and complete one for each feedback event. Update your Action Plan with action items to improve your feedback performance. Complete this activity before moving on.

Fan the embers – A summary and review

1. All successful feedback is about performance, not personality; it is about behavior, not character traits.
2. The Performance Feedback process has five steps:
 - Step 1: Give a cookie (positive comment).
 - Step 2: Describe the current behaviors and situations (give great details).
 - Step 3: Describe the impact and consequences (find the hook for the feedback receiver).
 - Step 4: Create a plan to continue great behaviors and change negative behaviors (let them have a voice in the response).
 - Step 5: Give a cookie (positive comment).
3. Be aware of any disruptive feedback style you may have; identify when it is happening and create a plan to correct it.
4. Performance feedback is most successful when it is done at the teachable moment – the point when the feedback event took place and the time when the learning from the event will be most effective.
5. Employees must always have a voice in determining a feedback response; this encourages their ownership of the plan to correct a skill or performance shortfall or a process to maintain successful performance.
6. Performance feedback is not limited to performance errors; performance success should also generate performance feedback. Feedback on successful performance encourages the performance.

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7. The emotional connection and relationships building that results from the dialog and coaching between employee and manager is what ignites the employee's performance.