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HOW TO EFFECTIVELY GROW YOUR PEOPLE THROUGH FEEDBACK

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Welcome back to the Career Reset podcast. It's great to have you here. I'm your host, Mel Savage.

For the next few weeks, four or five weeks, I really want to focus on performance development. It's Q4, and lots of people are talking and thinking about their performance development, whether you're getting a review, or you're thinking about building your plans for next year in terms of what you want to achieve. It's that time for annualized thinking about performance development.

And so I want to do a few episodes, I think, probably five episodes around this topic in general. And these episodes are going to be helping you whether you're someone who's managing your performance on your own, or through a company. I really want to help people think about how to engage their boss or their manager in this process if you haven't done that already. And ideally, you want to be doing this on an ongoing basis, not just at the end of the year.

Now it is the end of the year. So if you haven't been doing it all year, no biggie, you can start any time. And these podcasts are going to help you get through this part of the year, if you are having an annual review, as well as starting to think about how you want to attack performance development, starting in January moving forward as an ongoing opportunity.

So some of the things we have coming up. Today, we're talking about how to effectively grow your people through feedback. So this is for you as a manager, how to help your people grow. So so important, because people development is a core leadership competency, that as you grow in your career, it's something that you really want to become proficient at. So I'm going to be talking about that today.

But coming up, I have a couple of guests and a couple of great topics. So we have Linda Watt, who is the Director of Training and Learning at the University of Guelph, and she's going to be talking with us about how to lead performance development for yourself and for your people. I'm going to be talking about the top three leadership competencies that you need to focus on at any level. I also have the former Senior Vice President, and Chief People Officer from McDonald's Canada talking to us about how to take control of your leadership style.

So this leadership podcast, you're going to be really crucial as you think about your development plan going into next year. Where do you want to focus? How do you want to grow your leadership style? And finally, I'm going to

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be doing a podcast around mentorship. So when to get a mentor, what to use them for, how to find one, how to be a good mentee. Those are things that are coming up.

People Development, like I said, is a core leadership competency. And it's quite often something a lot of people learn through trial and error. I have nothing against trial and error. In fact, I'm always talking about trying stuff and learning to improve after you try it, like assessing what happened and keeping on going forward. And that's great. Ideally, though, you also want to look for opportunities to accelerate your performance and understand what you're growing towards.

You want to set yourself a goal for the kind of people development leader that you want to be, what are the parameters for success for you, and how can you get there in the fastest way possible? What's your approach going to be? And then trial and error that approach versus just blindly trial and error. I've worked with a lot of people who are C suite execs at all different levels, really, but even C suite execs who definitely could have worked on their people skills.

I got to be perfectly honest, I sucked at it for years as well. I made so many mistakes. I was the trial and error person. I wasn't sure what kind of leader I wanted to be. I didn't get a lot of leadership training. I didn't even seek out a lot of leadership training. I always use the excuse, I'm too busy, got to get the work done. But that's not a good approach.

So I'm telling you right now, I sucked at it for a lot longer than I needed to. I made all the rookie mistakes, thinking I was large and in charge, trying to control everything that was going on, focusing on what wasn't working versus what was working and optimizing the strengths of my employees, dropping feedback bombs on people. I made all these mistakes.

So where I'm coming to you from today is from the experience of my own trial and error. And of course, working with some amazing people in the industry. And take the time since then to really research what makes a great people manager. There's a lot involved in being a good people manager. But I want to really zero in on something today that you're likely doing all the time, in your job as a manager. And that's giving ongoing feedback.

And what we're going to be talking about today is how to do it in a way that inspires action, and encourages consistent growth versus upsetting people, shutting people down, and getting them disinterested in growth. That's definitely where you don't want to go. And I have to say, the art of giving feedback is really an art. Some people will say it's an art and a science. But honestly, I think it's an art. An art that is further complicated by the digital space, where it's really tempting to give someone some feedback via text or in an email.

And feedback is a huge responsibility. So if you're someone who gives feedback, performance feedback of any kind, digitally, I beg you to stop. Because people need an opportunity to have a two-way dialogue. And having that human connection is critical, even if it's over video. So digital is okay as long as you can actually talk to the person one-on-one if they're not in the same office as you are in the same space as you. You need to be able to have that connection, both visual and audio to be able to have a good connection, a good feedback session.

Linda Watt is someone that I'm going to be talking to next week about performance development. She is the Director of Training and Development at the University of Guelph. And she actually doesn't call it feedback, she positions it with her team as feed-forward.

I know when I say that there are a lot of people out there cringing. Some people hate that *'jargony'* spin. It's not feedback, it's feed-forward. What are they going to think of next? And I get that. No one likes *jargony* spin. But

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sometimes, reframing things is really important to change people's approach to a specific topic. And when it's something as critical as feedback, I think it's okay to do whatever you need to do to help people think of how they can give feedback more effectively.

When she talks about feed-forward, what she means is the fact that you don't want to waste a lot of time trying to dissect and interpret what happened in the past, but really only use it as context for how you can move forward. And I love that it's a very forward motion-oriented piece of feedback versus trying to say, you did this and it was someone's fault. You don't want to get into that, it's not helpful. So it's just about, here's what happened, how can we move forward from here based on the results that we're looking for?

So for this episode, I'm really going to be focused on the feedback givers. I'm going to touch a little bit on the receivers as well, but largely on how the feedback givers can initiate a good feedback dialogue. I'm going to start with how not to do it. And by how not to do it, I'm not going to give you a crazy extreme example. I'm going to share with you a common way that people do it that they think is the right way to do it and that they think is a constructive way to do it.

So we're going to start there and break some myths down there. Then I want to talk about the feedback mindset. Then I want to talk about really moving forward and how you want to structure an effective feedback session. And because we're covering quite a bit on this podcast, I also want to include a download for you, I'm actually going to give you a download on the structure of an effective feedback process, you can get that download at thecareerreset.com/11.

Before I go into it, I really want to put this feedback in context. Feedback is not reserved only when someone does something '*undesirable*' or worse, '*wrong*.' Feedback is also when someone nails it. Feedback is also for someone when they do an amazing job. And you can use those opportunities for feedback to be constructive and inspirational and reinforce growth behaviors. And I want to call that out at the outset because I'm going to spend the majority of time today on when someone doesn't quite nail it. But I want you to know that both types of feedback are important.

Let's start with how not to do it. An overarching blanket description of this is when you basically drop feedback on someone and then think your work is done. Unfortunately, even though people have the best intentions, what most feedback givers end up doing is destructively dropping constructive feedback on people and then walking away.

Let me break that down. Destructively dropping constructive feedback on people. What I mean by that is, that their intention is to be constructive in the feedback, but the way that they're doing it ends up actually being destructive to the person getting the feedback.

Here's what often happens when someone gives feedback. I'm going to walk through it in four common stages that people take that really inadvertently become destructive, or have the opposite effect to what they intended. It ends up not inspiring people, it doesn't drive action, and ultimately, it really doesn't get the result that anyone is looking for.

The first stage is obviously when someone decides to give feedback. It could be a planned feedback meeting, like a status meeting that you're having with one of your subordinates. Maybe it's consistent timing, maybe it's a review process, or maybe it's an ad hoc decision to call someone in and give them feedback. Whatever the

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timing, the feedback giver decides to give some feedback. So far, so good. The intention is to help the person perhaps see a blind spot, and help them grow.

The next stage is dropping this constructive feedback. And let's say that, again, your intention is good and you want to give it in a kind and thoughtful, constructive way. Maybe you pull someone aside after a meeting and say something like, *'Hey, Julie, I know you have a lot of good ideas on the subject, but you didn't offer anything up in the meeting. I want you to know that you shouldn't be afraid to speak up and share your ideas, just jump in and say your piece. Don't worry about what anyone else thinks. Because you have a lot to add. And we could definitely benefit from your ideas.'*

Sounds awesome, sounds really nice. It starts with a strength. She's got a lot of good ideas, you sandwich the opportunity in there that she didn't speak up, and you want her to, and then you end on the benefit. The benefit is that we can all benefit from her. But already, there are some challenges there.

First of all, it's a one-way dialogue. As the manager, you're diagnosing the problem, and you're offering the solution. There's no curiosity there. You don't ask why. You don't listen to what's going on in Julie's head, or what her style is. You're not making it easy for the feedback giver to have an opinion, because you're coming in with your observation, the challenge, and the solution all at one go.

Obviously, the feedback giver has good intentions. But by doing it this way, you're opening the door for things to go sideways for the feedback receiver to shut down because they don't want to disagree with their boss on their boss's solution. And ultimately, you're not going to get the results you want.

Here's another example. Let's say you've recently given someone a review, and one of the growth opportunities that you identified was that they need to be a less controlling manager. So here's an example. *'Dave, I know your intention is to make sure we get great results. But your team doesn't feel like they have the space to learn and grow, because you're telling them what they need to do and how to do it. I want you to know this is a normal phase most new managers go through. But now I'd like you to focus on becoming a more empowering manager and spend time teaching your team how to effectively get things done on their own.'*

It was a long example but basically, I'm setting up the idea that the manager is saying, *'Look, I know, we talked about that you struggled with this. It's normal that you're struggling with this, but you got to start becoming a more empowering manager because your team isn't happy.'* That's that's the introduction. In both cases, in this case, as well, it sounds constructive, it's thoughtful. The person delivering the feedback is trying to be sensitive, trying to normalize the situation by even saying something like, *'It's normal, all managers go through this.'*

But again, it is a one-way dialogue. If you're the feedback giver in the situation, it would be normal if you felt you've done your job well. But really, what you've done is risk that your constructive feedback could become destructive because it is a one-way dialogue. So stage two is actually delivering the feedback.

Stage three is watching the constructive feedback turn destructive. I also called this the *drive-by* feedback. In this stage, you sit back and watch. You've delivered your feedback to the person in the most constructive way, you know how and you're being sensitive.

As the manager or the boss or whatever, you're sitting back, and you're waiting for the feedback receiver to do something about it. And it's up to them. You've told them what they need to do now they have to go and do it. But

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the biggest challenge with this is that the feedback receiver or the person you've given feedback to is not going to get it right overnight.

Let me give you an example of what I'm talking about. You said to Dave that he needs to start becoming an empowering manager. But right now, he's a controlling manager. Well, if being an empowering manager, let's say is a 10/10, on a scale of 1 to 10, being an empowering manager is 10 on that scale. But Dave's current performance as a controlling manager may be 4/10, or 5/10 on that scale. Going from 5/10 to 10/10 is a really big jump. It's a really big gap. Dave's not going to make it, unless he's Tom Cruise jumping between buildings in *Mission Impossible*, it's not going to happen.

So the intention should be to actually agree to all the little small steps and all the little small wins between the 5/10 and the 10/10 up the empowering manager. But it wasn't set up that way in this discussion. It's just been set up saying be more empowering. So you're setting the person up for failure because the normal situation is people are going to work towards being an empowering manager, but they're going to have a lot of stumbles and missteps along the way.

And there hasn't been a lot of room made for that. You're either a controlling manager or you're an empowering manager. There is no shared visibility into what the steps along the way are. And you might say, *'I know, I'm not expecting them to be perfect. I'm just giving them the challenge to push towards.'* Yes, people may say that, but most feedback givers unconsciously still expect a massive improvement right away.

So the next time Julie's in a meeting, and she doesn't speak, some managers might think to themselves, *'She's not hearing the feedback that I'm giving her. She's not trying.'* Similarly, the next time you see Dave in a meeting, and he's being dictatorial, or one of his people comes and gives you some feedback, most managers would think, *'Geez, we just chatted about this. What is he not getting? Why isn't he taking this seriously?'* Unintentionally, by giving the feedback this way, you're setting the person up for failure.

Because one, the feedback receivers are going to make a ton of blunders while they're figuring it out. And frankly, they may not even know where to start, because that maybe wasn't part of the conversation. They're not going to go from a 4/10 or a 5/10 overnight. And there are no shared expectations and how to methodically move up the performance scale.

Meaning, how are you judging their progress? How are they going to be judging their progress, and making sure that how you're judging their progress and how they're judging their progress are actually aligned? So now you decided to give the feedback, you gave it in what you thought was a constructive way. And now the person is maybe not getting it because the gap is too big, and there haven't been some shared expectations.

Now you're in phase four, where the constructive feedback becomes destructive. And the main reason for that is the feedback giver gets frustrated that the receiver is just not getting it. Maybe there might be other people raising the same feedback that you gave, Julie, or Dave, and they say, *'Why didn't Julie speak in the meetings, or I noticed that Dave is still being controlling.'* And that just reinforces to the manager that this person isn't really trying.

Because there wasn't a two-way dialogue because there weren't shared expectations in the beginning, because there wasn't an agreement on how to move forward from there, and a combined solution from there, the feedback becomes destructive. It's unintentional. The manager wants to help. They're being nice about it. But nice isn't enough. People development is really about rolling up your sleeves and getting your hands dirty.

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I'm not saying, get right in the mud with your people. But you're their lifeline. There's a rope between you and them. While they're in the mud, you're making sure they don't they don't drown, and that you're pulling them along. You're not just a safety net, you're not just there to save them. Although that is your role sometimes, you're more like a GPS system that's constantly nudging them in the right direction.

So what can you do to truly make your constructive feedback constructive? The first thing I want to talk about is mindset. Because I always say success is 80% mindset. So I'm always going to start with mindset. And then I'm going to give you a five-step process, which also will be available in the show notes as a download, and you can get that at thecareerreset.com/11.

Let's talk about the feedback mindset. Mindset is important because what you think actually shows up in your actions, in your words, in your demeanor, some more than others. People always tell me that they can read me like a book. For most of my career, I tried to mask my actions, Mask what I was thinking, and not let it show up in my body. But that's a really hard thing to do. It's actually easier to change your thinking than it is to control your mouth or control the actions that are coming out of your body.

So when you go into a feedback conversation, I want you to maybe not do it on the fly, and certainly don't do it when you're emotional, or you're riled up in any way. Take a breath, go for a walk if you need to, and change your mindset. Go into the feedback with the kind of mindset, first of all, that you care about this person's development.

If you think about this person in a caring way, that is going to show. Don't think about them, that you're the manager and they're the employee. Think about them like a human being and that you care about them. The other thing to avoid is *judginess*. Go in non-judgy, go in curious, go in listening, go in assuming innocence, and just try to understand what's going on with the person. So first, start with your mindset, then I would say there are five really simple steps to getting someone set up for success when you're giving them feedback.

Step one is to seek to understand what's going on. As the feedback giver, your very first job is to understand. So dig deep into what the challenge is with this person. Don't assume that you know what's holding them back. Don't assume that you know why Julie's not raising her hand in the meeting. Instead of saying, *'Julie, you've got a lot to add, I want you to speak up.'* You could say something like, *'Julie, I know you have a lot to add on this topic. But you don't say anything in the meeting. Why is that? What's holding you back from sharing your ideas?'*

That's it, then stop talking. Let them answer, because maybe why you think they're not talking is not the reason, and let them share what's going on with them. So step one, seek to understand.

Step two, align with the desired behavior. You can approach this in a number of different ways. But the end state is that you and the feedback receiver agree on a desired outcome and a desired behavior. So you agree on the goal, and you agree on what a 10/10 role model behavior looks like in that situation. So, you're sitting with Julie, or you're sitting with Dave, and you agree to what an empowering manager looks like, or what the challenges of being an empowering manager are, or what's the best way for Julie to add value to the team?

Step three, agree to some small steps. Help the feedback giver realize that it might take them a few steps to get to where they need to go and that you're okay with that, and you're going to help them get there. The important thing is they know they don't have to get there overnight, and that you are there to help them. This is going to make them less stressed. And they're going to start to see lots of smaller successes along the way versus beating themselves up when they don't get it perfect every time. It's also going to help you see all the smallest successes along the way as well.

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So you can say something like, *'Julie, what could be the first small step you could take towards that goal? What would be realistic for you to start implementing right now?* The other thing I want to say about this is this is not about making them feel comfortable. People don't grow in a state of comfort. It's about finding that sweet spot of just being uncomfortable enough to create forward momentum without crashing and burning. Because when people feel too uncomfortable, they won't do it. They'll stop, they'll freeze.

You want to help find the sweet spot. And sometimes it could take a couple of go's to find it. But you want to find the sweet spot where they feel a little uncomfortable, but not so uncomfortable that they're not going to try it, they're not going to move forward. So you want to keep helping on pushing them to find that right sweet spot. So that was step three, agree to some smaller steps along the way.

Step four, offer to help. Ask how you can help them with the small steps they've committed to. Maybe they need your help clearing some space for them. Maybe Julie would appreciate it if you would call her out in the meeting. Who knows what she's looking for? So that's a discussion that you're having. More often than not, the person getting the feedback is going to say they don't need anything right now. And if they say that, it's mostly because they don't really know how you can help them, or maybe they're embarrassed to ask for help.

So if you have an idea, offer it up. Don't be pushy about it, don't force it on them. But throwing out an idea might get them thinking about the best way that you can help them. But there is a secret way that you can help them that you probably don't want to tell them what you're doing. And here it is. You want to notice when they get it right or even when they're trying to get it right. People like the feeling of winning, they love the feeling of being appreciated. It's pleasurable, like chocolate, or sex, it hits the same part of the brain.

Once people feel that sense of appreciation, they want more of it. It's motivating to get positive feedback. So rather than pulling someone aside after a meeting and saying, *'You could have done this better.'* Pull them aside after the meeting and say, *'I really noticed that you were trying to go for that small step. Way to go. How do you think it went?'* Use it as an opportunity to have a dialogue, a motivating dialogue. Your people are going to love it.

Step five is just staying involved and checking in. Make a note to follow up and see how it's going. Arrange a coffee or a call or one of your scheduled checkups just to see how it's going, and ask them some open-ended questions just to get them talking. How are things going since we last chatted? What's been working? What successes have you seen? Where have you struggled the most? What have you learned about yourself in the process? How can I help you? What do you want to do next? And if you are like I said, seeing improvement, mention it.

So the five steps are really: 1 - Seek to understand, 2 - Align on the desired outcome, 3 - Set goals for one small step at a time, 4 - Offer to help and reward the desired behavior, and 5 - Stay involved on a consistent basis.

As I said before, I'll give some detail under each of these points as a download in the show notes. So this is for the feedback giver, again, not the receiver, and you can get those at thecareerreset.com/11.

So I really hope this has been a good primer for you. Giving effective feedback is a learned behavior. And not every company, not every person spends enough time really learning about it, or training on it. So we can all pick up bad behaviors and even with good intentions, we can pick up bad behaviors and get unintentional results. And then we teach those behaviors to other people.

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So stop the cycle. This is the benefit to you to really learn how to give feedback better, because you're not only going to be a person that people want to work for, because they trust that you're on their side, but you're going to grow stronger leaders, and it's going to pay off and the results of your team in the long run.

Next week, I am speaking to Linda Watt. And as I said before, she's the Director of Learning and Development and Consulting Services at the University of Guelph. And we have a really informative discussion on performance development that you do not want to miss. She is revamping what performance development means and how to do it, and not making it an annualized process. I loved talking to her about this.

There are amazing tips in there on how to handle your performance development for yourself and as a manager of people. So it is chock a block full of such great information. I don't want you to miss it. So make sure you check that out. And you can subscribe to the podcast at thecareerreset.com/podcast, so you don't miss a thing.

Thank you so much for joining me this week. I always appreciate you. Bye for now.

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