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Honesty is best policy to bring out staff's full potential

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Great leaders give critical feedback. They tell it like it is. They are heard. They inspire action. Leaders who give targeted, real-time feedback — good and bad — support and challenge their people to develop.

Giving critical or corrective feedback can invite negative reactions: denial, hurt, blame and anger are possible responses. Most of us are not eager to upset others, which makes it easy to justify delayed responses or missed feedback opportunities. However,

avoiding the tough stuff can have major consequences. Leaders must make the effort. They must confront their own comfort and confidence levels when faced with having hard conversations. Withholding critical feedback is like asking someone to complete a crossword without providing all the clues. It is not possible.

Sue (not her real name) worked as a community support manager. She moved through leadership roles in various divisions within five years. Sue was liked as a person but not respected in her role. She sat on decisions, was easily overwhelmed and was seen as a

bottleneck to progress. She did not deliver.

When June was appointed as division head, she quickly noticed the issue. June gave Sue the feedback no one wanted to give. She respectfully yet firmly laid out the situation. Sue was shocked and distressed by her apparent underperformance. Missed feedback opportunities meant Sue was not given the chance to modify her behaviour.

After a few months of coaching support, things were looking up. Sue's projects were on track and she noticed a change in how others treated her. Sue thanked

June for her candour and willingness to invest in her growth.

Without critical feedback, we

do not know what we do not know; we become blind to our potential. The better you are at giving critical feedback, the faster and deeper people will develop. Here's why:

People need challenge. John Demartini, an American researcher and bestselling author in human behaviour, says: "People grow at the boundary of support and challenge." We need just enough challenge to keep us growing and developing, and just enough support to feel encouraged and on track. One without

the other can lead to boredom and stagnation or burnout and stress.

People need clarity. We cannot see our behaviours as clearly as others can. Sometimes we are not as good as we think we are and other times our performance deserves more credit. Without an outside perspective, we remain blind to our development opportunities and strengths. It is a leader's role to provide the clarity we cannot see for ourselves.

People have courage. They actually want the bad news that their leaders do not want to give them. In 2014, business management consultants Zenger Folk-

man surveyed 899 individuals globally about their relationship to feedback. They found people wanted corrective feedback more than praise. Of those, 72 per cent said their performance would improve if their manager provided corrective feedback.

Leaders who sit on feedback because they do not have time, do not think it matters or are reluctant to have a hard conversation, stifle the growth of their people.

Anneli Blundell is co-author of Developing Direct Reports: Taking the Guesswork Out of Leading Leaders.