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Interact Report

**MANY LEADERS SHRINK
FROM STRAIGHT TALK
WITH EMPLOYEES**

February 2016



Survey Methodology:

This survey was conducted online within the United States by Harris Poll on behalf of Interact from January 7-11, 2016 among 2,058 adults ages 18 and older, among which 1,120 are employed and 616 manage any employees in the workplace. This online survey is not based on a probability sample and therefore no estimate of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

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A tough performance review is uncomfortable for the employee. But the manager on the other side of the desk is likely feeling just as squeamish about delivering the news, according to a new survey conducted online among 1,120 employed U.S. workers, 616 of whom manage employees in the workplace, by Harris Poll on behalf of Interact.

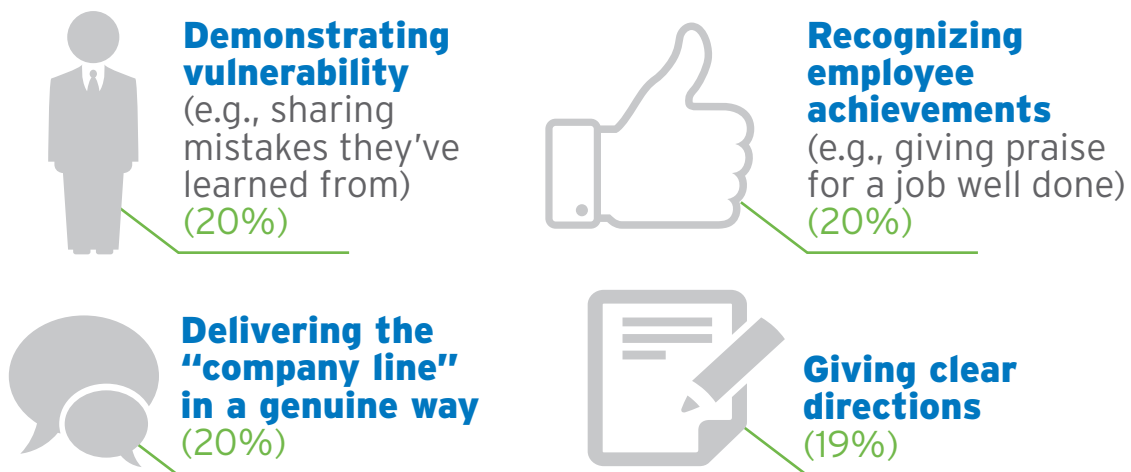
It is widely known that people thrive when given expectations and feedback. If we get it right, feedback can create collaboration, a

culture of connection and sustainable change. With so much to gain, why do leaders shrink from straight talk?

Because even at the leadership level, the fear of hurting people's feelings and facing drama and retribution can cause us to behave in a way that drums up more tension. Our own nervousness causes us to tense up and overdramatize the conversation. We set ourselves up for a fearful response with demands like, "Come in and shut the door. I need to talk to you." We create an environment of conflict.

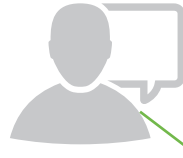
Over a third (37%) of America's business leaders reporting they are uncomfortable having to give direct feedback/criticism about their employee's performance that they might respond badly to.

Survey results showed that leaders who manage employees in the workplace are uncomfortable on a number of communication fronts, including:





**Crediting others
with having
good ideas**
(16%)



**Speaking face to
face rather than
by email**
(16%)

In their everyday interactions, leaders are clearly not making the connections with their workers that can give them a competitive advantage.

A stunning majority (69%) of managers say there is something about their role as a leader that makes them uncomfortable communicating with their employees.

Leaders who aim to become more comfortable communicating with their employees, whether sharing good or not so good news, are those who do the following:

1. Be Direct, Be Kind

Being direct does not require being unkind. Making someone feel wrong, or feeling superior in some way, is off track. However, offering feedback is an opportunity for growth and can be an incentive for an employee to be more of who they are. At the same time, a direct conversation falls apart when beating around the bush. It should include specific examples of behavior to illustrate the issues.

2. Listen

Listening provides a space in which people can feel respected. Ideally a direct feedback conversation is meant to spark learning on both sides—managers and employees must understand the situation together in order to make positive change.

3. Don't Make it Personal

Imagined slights and malice are toxic. It is easy to take things personally in a direct feedback conversation. Acknowledging the emotions being felt will offer the recipient a relief valve for any stress they might experience.

4. Show Up, Be Present

Show up, be fully present—and don't rush off after having a tough conversation with an employee. Be brave enough to allow moments of silence to come into the conversation. Follow up afterward so that afterthoughts don't create imagined distance and hurt feelings.

5. Inspire Greatness

Communicate the brilliance of the recipient and the aspiration for who they can become. Respectful, direct feedback restores the individual and the team to sanity. It costs absolutely nothing except an emotional investment of honesty, taking the risk of a bad reaction...and being uncomfortable.

The stakes are too high for leaders to avoid having difficult conversations with their employees. In the absence of direct feedback, negative or positive, we become less powerful and ineffective. Team communication breaks down. Leaders become irrelevant. But for leaders who get it right, feedback can create collaboration, a culture of connection and sustainable change. ●