Tips for Providing Upward Feedback

Upward feedback is a cornerstone and a best practice in leadership development. According to Allen Church of Colombia University, organizations using upward feedback often enjoy gains in both managerial effectiveness and employee job satisfaction. Emory will be implementing upward feedback into the annual performance review process beginning with the FY15 cycle.

So what is upward feedback? At Emory, it is a process for providing feedback about your supervisor to your supervisor's leader, regarding strengths and any areas for development. Direct reports are asked by their supervisor's leader to provide comments to the following questions:

- What do you see as your supervisor's greatest strengths?
- What area(s) do you think your supervisor should develop in order to be more effective?
- Are there other comments about your supervisor that you would like to share?

How to write comments: When responding to these questions, it is easy to reflect on only your most recent interactions with your supervisor, but it is best to think collectively of your supervisor's behavior throughout the year. Reflect on strengths and any areas that can help them improve. If you have suggestions for improvement, explain *why* you would like changes and *why* these things are important to you or *how* changes would add value. Also, write responses that are specific but not so detailed that you could be easily identified.

Example 1 (vague vs. specific):

- *INEFFECTIVE: When Joe meets with me in our one on one meetings, he is never prepared.*

- *EFFECTIVE: Joe could be more effective if he made sure that he reviewed and updated materials in advance and was prepared for meetings.*

In Example 1, the ineffective comment is too vague and the supervisor has no specifics on where to make improvements. In the effective comment, the supervisor is provided feedback on how improvements would help make the leader more effective.

Example 2 (specific vs. overly detailed):

- *INEFFECTIVE: When I gave a presentation to the group, Jane told me I didn't do a good job. It would have been more helpful if she would have told me what I could do better next time or how to improve my presentation.*

- *EFFECTIVE: Jane could be more effective if she gave more specific constructive feedback that includes what someone needs to do differently to improve their performance.*

In Example 2, we see that the ineffective feedback is too personal and the supervisor could easily identify who wrote the comment.

Example 3 (positive feedback; vague vs. specific):

- INEFFECTIVE: Shaundrea is a great leader! I love working for her.
- EFFECTIVE: Shaundrea meets with me regularly to understand my needs, provide support and give direction; this enables me to do my job well, which I appreciate!

In Example 3, just like Example 1, we see that vague positive feedback is not nearly as helpful as the specific positive feedback. The latter is much more informative regarding what supervisor behaviors the leader should recognize and reinforce.

Other things to consider while writing feedback:

- Remain professional – Any feedback is personal, so remain professional and balanced; resist the temptation to lay on the criticism.
- Be succinct: your supervisor's leader may have a lot of comments to read, so stay focused and as brief as possible without sacrificing specifics.