

# Practice Points

## The Sandwich Technique

Let's take a closer look at the old saying "It's not what you say; it's how you say it." I believe that it is an important combination of both what is said, and how it is said, that makes a vital difference if our communication is to be effective.

To prove this point, think of people who you enjoy working with, and people who you enjoy socializing with. Imagine you need to hire an entirely new staff. Who would you hire? Your answer probably included, "people who are easy to get along with."

Building good customer rapport and strong relationships are important business skills. The ability to be successful in relationships can make the difference of "sink or swim" in any industry, any opportunity, and in our overall happiness.

Learning to be effective in your communication with another is important. Learning to relate to the person and build good rapport with them is equally important. If you have to convey information or feedback that is positive, it is easier to maintain good personal relations with people. However, if you need to reprimand or provide constructive feedback or even discuss issues that are negative, being effective and building rapport becomes much more difficult, but even more important.

It's often said that "people are hired for their technical skills, but fired for their lack of personal skills." If you want your staff to have good personal skills, it's important for you to model them yourself. One technique that I recommend when approaching delicate communication with others where you must reprimand, discuss performance issues or overcome some type of conflict is called, "The Sandwich Technique." This technique sandwiches your constructive feedback in between two positive statements. Like a sandwich that you would eat, the meat is sandwiched between two slices of bread. The meat of the conversation that you need to have is sandwiched between two genuine positive statements. (See box at right.)

There are several reasons that this technique is successful.

First off, the recipient of this communication is not put on the defensive with the opening line because it is positive. People like to hear positive reinforcement regarding their efforts, and this first positive statement grabs their attention. (Using their name also encourages positive rapport, because people like to hear their name used in a positive way.)

With an open and positive mindset, one is more able to accept feedback. (Notice I use the word feedback, or constructive criticism, for this portion of the sandwich. If you are coming from a genuine desire to help the person, and not attack the person, your words should suggest that you have an

interest in them, and you are helping them grow, learn or become better in some way.) People appreciate being helped. They don't appreciate being attacked or criticized.

Lastly, people who feel good about themselves produce good results. Ending the conversation on a positive note is motivating for both the sender and receiver of the message. The sender leaves the conversation satisfied with the result, and the receiver leaves the conversation with at least two points of valuable, positive feedback, and something to improve upon.

When I teach this technique to a group of adults, two magical things happen:

- The participants gain confidence in their ability to communicate their feelings or issues.
- The participants become motivated to approach discussions that they have been procrastinating having because they felt uncomfortable saying something negative.

Maintaining positive communication takes practice, but the rewards are great. Whether it be your personal life or your professional life, the ability to get along with people is key to your success.



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Sandwich Technique	Example
First a positive, genuine fact or comment.	"Sally, you are the best receptionist we have had in a long time."
Then the constructive feedback in a firm but fair tone.	"When you arrive late for work, it throws off our team's focus. It is imperative that you are ready to work the second your shift begins, and there is no exception to this rule."
Finish with a positive, genuine fact or comment.	"We all value your contribution to our team, Sally."

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