

## Sensitive Feedback

This article was published on August 10, 2010 09:00 am



**Sensitive Feedback**  
How to help your team  
look their best.

Remember the situation where a colleague's bad breath was turning clients away? How did you deal with it? Did you fix the problem or create a bigger one? Here are some strategies for delivering feedback and gaining a positive outcome. Story by Elena Reed.

What do you do when you have a staff member with the appropriate skill set, yet needs fine tuning in other areas? Ignoring ill fitting, unkempt clothing or other personal hygiene issues is not an option. After all, it is in your professional interest to have things tweaked before your team member meets with your client.

Giving feedback, particularly to the opposite gender, can be tricky. The process needs to happen in a sensitive manner, preferably without making the person feel uncomfortable.

Here are five easy steps, using Mark Hortsman's 'feedback sandwich' technique, which will assist you to give sensitive feedback every time.

**Step One: Ask for permission.**

**Say:** "May I give you some feedback?" Don't say: "I need to tell you something."

**Step Two: Comment on the choice they made and not the issue.**

**Say:** "When you choose to [wear a shorter skirt/ style your hair traditionally/ relax your grooming (as in oral hygiene)]..."

**Don't say:** "Your skirt is too short", "Your hair is dated", "You have bad breath."

**Step Three: Describe the negative consequences.** The 'what happens is...' clause.

**Say:** "When you choose to wear the shorter skirt what happens is you make a personal statement rather than a professional one." "When you choose to style your hair traditionally what happens is others may wrongly judge you as being outdated." "When you choose to relax your grooming, as in oral hygiene, what happens is clients may get the wrong impression of you."

**Don't say:** "Your skirt is too short. It makes you look cheap"

"Your hair is dated. It makes you look old" "You have bad breath. It's hard to be around you"

**Step Four: Call to action**

**Say:** "Will you be able to do something about it?" Then pause and listen.

**Don't say:** "Can you change your skirt/ have a haircut/ see a dentist?"

**Step Five: Offer some tips if appropriate**

**Say:** "By the way, here is the Dress for Success Checklist that helped many of our team members and I hope it may be of value to you too." Leave it there and change the subject

**Don't say:** "I guarantee if you change your skirt/ cut your hair/ see a dentist..."

Here is a sample of a team leader giving 'sensitive feedback':

**Team Leader:** May I give you some feedback?

**Staff Member:** That's fine.

**Team Leader:** When you choose to relax your grooming, as in oral hygiene, what happens is others may get the wrong impression of you. Will you be able to do something about it?

**Staff Member:** Really? I brushed my teeth this morning!

**Team Leader:** That's a great start. By the way, here is the Dress for Success Checklist that helped many of our team members and I hope it may be of value to you too."

Nine out of ten times your staff will get it and change their inappropriate behaviour. It's in everyone's best interest to be open yet gracious when offering feedback, to help them put their best foot forward.

Are you ready to deliver feedback but need some help? Download Elena Reed's free Dress for Success Checklist (Tips for Women and Men) at [www.sold-magazine.com.au](http://www.sold-magazine.com.au) Feel free to print it and use it for your professional purposes as long as the content remains unchanged.

**Elena Reed** is an image and business etiquette specialist who focuses on conference presenting, team building workshops and executive coaching. She also runs workshops on colour and style for men and women as well as individual consulting including closet clean, personal shopping and head to toe makeovers.

[www.evolutzia.com.au](http://www.evolutzia.com.au)

 [Download Attached PDF File](#)

 [Download Attached PDF File](#)