



## Ask a Consultant

BY EVELINA SILVEIRA

*Dear Diversity@Work:*

I am a human resources manager working in a large manufacturing company. Most of the employees are immigrants, and I am really finding it difficult to give them feedback on their performance. It seems that I can tell the Canadian-born worker the same thing, but they don't get argumentative or defensive when I do. What could I be doing wrong?

*Stressed*

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*Dear Stressed:*

I can see why you would feel frustrated and disillusioned. In fact, you are not alone. I have heard this experience repeated many times in different workplaces. Their sensitivity to feedback or constructive criticism can possibly be explained in a number of ways. I will suggest a few interpretations. North Americans tend to be very direct with their communication and that can come across as harsh and rude to a major part of the world. Your Canadian-born worker would be accustomed to this type of communication and would find the directness easy to understand. However, implied or indirect communication is likely more common for your immigrant workers. They would expect you to let them know very politely that you want them to change their behaviour, but in a round about way. These differences, as you have experienced, can create a great deal of confusion, conflict and misunderstanding in the workplace.

Here are a few tips for intercultural feedback proposed by Lee Gardenswartz and Anita Rowe:

1. Be sure that when you are giving feedback, that you make reference to the observations about behaviours and conditions, instead of making judgments about the person. Instead of "The report is incomplete," say "I would like to see a glossary and summary added."
2. Strive to use the passive rather than the active voice. Instead of "You forgot to turn off the photocopier," try "The photocopier was turned on all night."
3. Make things simple by telling the employee what you want to see happen, not what you don't. Instead of "That's not the way to do that," try "How about trying it this way?"

I am sure that by following these tips, things should improve. You will also want to be proactive in assisting your employees understand why Canadians communicate the way they do. After all, they are going to come across this type of direct communication wherever they go, and you can help them to prepare for it. **D!**

*If you have a question for Ask a Consultant, email it to [evelina@yourdiversityatwork.com](mailto:evelina@yourdiversityatwork.com). Evelina Silveira is the founder of Diversity At Work, [www.yourdiversityatwork.com](http://www.yourdiversityatwork.com), a business dedicated to diversity management training and consulting.*