Practice offering better *feedback*

At your next team meeting, take turns role-playing the examples and listen for the differences.

✔ Do make sure that the feedback isn't mired in criticism; find valid strengths to comment on.

For example: "Lily, I noticed that you seemed annoyed with that caller. I know that we all have off days, but I've always been impressed with your ability to remain cool even under pressure. What happened during the phone call?" Once the facts are on the table, decide on a course of action.

✔ Do restrict your remarks to observable actions, not personality.

For example: "Doug, after we examined the patient, you left the room without saying goodbye to the client. When you slammed the door, you startled the patient." Stick to the facts rather than more combative statements like, "Wow, you're an angry person."

✘ Don't use extreme words like "you never" or "you always."

For example: An employee fails to remind clients about dental cleanings. If you say, "You always forget to ask about dental cleanings," you've lost the employee's attention. Instead, try, "It's very important for the health of the patient that you mention dental cleanings during visits." Use this approach so the employee doesn't feel threatened and understands the importance of asking.

✘ Don't use the word "why." It puts people on the defensive.

For example: Saying, "I noticed you didn't give Ms. Smith her prescription," is less threatening than saying, "Why didn't you give Ms. Smith her prescription?"

✔ Do remain supportive and make the employee feel valued.

For example: "Your insights during our team meetings provide us with a lot of food for thought. I've noticed lately you seem to be distracted during these meetings. We miss your contributions."

Source: Veterinary Hospital Managers Association