



By Richard D. Czerniawski

SO, WHAT'S GREAT ABOUT IT?

I caught an episode of “So you think you can dance” on TV the other night. I’m fascinated by what these dancers can do with their bodies and how effortlessly they move through the air. As a martial artist, I envy their body mechanics and incredible athleticism. If only I could move as they do—unfortunately, only in my dreams.

I also have a keen interest in the judges and their judging. They provide a meaningful learning opportunity regarding how to assess performance—their criteria (at least what they are looking for)—and how to provide feedback. There are numerous ways to provide feedback, but I prefer coaching. Coaching is concerned with identifying and providing direction regarding what one needs to see in any performance that will make it more productive.

The particular episode I viewed focused on selecting the top 5 male contestants for going forward into the finals. The previous week they chose the top 5 female dancers. The feedback given by the judges tended to be evaluative versus coaching. In other words, at this stage, they pointed out what the dancers did incorrectly. Their minds and comments were geared at elimination.

There was one particular situation in assessing a dancer’s performance that went like this:

- Judge 1: *Watch your shoulders.* (coaching)
- Judge 2: *The leaps were so bad.* (evaluation)
- Judge 3: *I expected a little more—something from you that connected me to you as a performer.* (coaching)
- Judge 4: *I didn’t see the work you put in, pointing your toes—it didn’t happen—those jumps weren’t good.* (evaluation)

OK, but what struck me the most was the comments from, and exchange between two judges as the performer left the stage—judge 2 and the lead judge, #4.

- Judge 2: *Great job!* (This is the judge who commented that the leaps were so bad.)
- Judge 4: *It wasn’t a great job, he stated solemnly. We’re now in a top 10 situation where we have to pick five dancers. It’s always tough.*

Why did Judge 2 say it was a great job when it obviously wasn’t? Why is it that in more instances than not, a manager—regardless of the functional area—will start off providing feedback by saying,

great job? We all know it is not a great job, particularly when those providing the feedback identify several things that they don't like, or feel are incorrect. Perhaps, we need to get straight on what is and isn't a great job, develop the courage to be honest and learn to coach so that we, those receiving the feedback, and the work can be more productive.

I believe the sobriquet "great job" is for those cases where the performance is far above the norm and nearly flawless. It should be reserved for when the work is significant and expected to have a positive, major impact. It is to be used when there is little to no direction needed and, when needed, minor in character. It is when anything that needs fixing can be done immediately, on the spot.

Now, what's the big deal? Why should it hurt anything to say, *great job*, when the work is not great? For one, it's patently false, and those receiving the feedback know it whenever you come back with a litany of things you want to be addressed. For another, it lowers expectations and encourages others to submit what is not their best work. Additionally, it provides mixed signals, which can interfere with taking seriously any direction you provide. Moreover, in the worst cases, it kicks the proverbial can down the road, necessitating many more meetings and discussions on the same subject.

Resist the knee-jerk reaction of declaring *great job* whenever the work is less than great!

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