Barriers to Effective Evaluation, Feedback, and Change

Which of these is specific to performing arts? And how might we specifically address them?

Lack of Formalized Process
In most businesses, performance review is an annual process, and promotion, compensation, training needs and disciplinary action depends on it. **When does it happen in performing arts? When does it not? Why not? How to incorporate it into our structures and culture?**

Gossip
> *From Gossip-Free Zones, Problem Solving to Prevent Power Struggles, by Holly Elissa Bruno*
> Gossip is communicating about a person who is not present with the intention of harming the other's reputation; listening to gossip is gossiping. Gossip is neither: 1) sharing accurate, necessary information; nor, 2) holding an opinion about another person. Gossip is an outmoded way to indirectly gain and maintain power, at the expense of community.

Do we gossip in the performing arts? Why? How do we shift that paradigm?

Lack of skills in feedback
Where/when do we learn how to do this? Are we skilled at it in the performing arts?

Here are some tips from Forbes, by Ekaterina Walter
Genuinely care. Here is the important part: they need to know that, as a leader, you truly care. People know when you are putting up smoke and mirrors. If they know you are not genuinely concerned about their growth, they'll tune out.
Clearly paint your vision. You need to be clear about what you want done and why you want it done. You need to paint the clear picture to help them envision future post-change and their role in it.
Provide real-life examples. Make it relevant to them by providing examples, as well as lessons from your own experience.
Be honest. Whether positive or negative, feedback must be honest. People see right through the BS. You can't sugarcoat it: "What you've done is fantastic, but…" You must lose the "but"s! Period, end of story. Be considerate in your delivery, but don't embellish.
Be credible. If you want the feedback to be credible and for your employees to listen to you, you have to spend time in understanding what they do, take time to observe how they do it. You can't be the new guy barging in and trying to drive change without knowing and appreciating the work of your people. You have to spend time building the rapport and putting in the sweat if you want your employees to respond to your direction and to your feedback in a meaningful way.
Lead by example first. You gotta walk the talk. If you want to council people, you have to be able to lead by example (or at least not showcase the negative example). If you recognize that that's the area you are also deficient in, offer that up and identify it up front. It's all about being transparent. People get it.

Do these work for us? What else would work?

Social Threat

Most of us find the prospect of a feedback conversation daunting at the best of times, even in the context of a friendly relationship. Hearing someone say "Can I give you some feedback?" is almost guaranteed to elevate our heart rate and raise our blood pressure. These are common signs of a threat response, a cascade of neurological and physiological events that occur when we encounter a situation that we perceive as threatening. Neuroscientists have determined that we respond to threatening social situations in the same way that we respond to actual threats to our physical safety and have coined the term "social threat" to describe these experiences.

David Rock is an executive coach who's made an extensive study of recent neuroscience research to understand its implications for organizational life, and he developed the SCARF Model to characterize interpersonal situations that are likely to trigger a social threat. SCARF stands for status, certainty, autonomy, relatedness (i.e. the extent to which we perceive others as members of our social group) and fairness. Whenever our status, certainty, autonomy or perception of fairness is diminished, we're more likely to experience a social threat. And an encounter with someone we perceive as unrelated is also more likely to trigger a social threat.

A threat response predisposes us to act quickly on limited information, and while this classic "fight or flight" behavior is well-adapted to literal threats to our physical safety, it often serves us poorly in interpersonal situations that we perceive as threatening. When we're in the grip of a threat response, our ability to understand complex information and respond to it thoughtfully is seriously compromised. We seize on what we believe to be the most important data and take action on that basis. While this set of responses surely served us well in our evolutionary environment, it undermines our ability to safely navigate challenging interpersonal situations—such as feedback conversations.

How does social threat play out in a performing arts environment and how do we address it?

Minnesota Nice

From Why I Hate the "Sandwich" Technique for Delivering Feedback by Art Petty

I absolutely hate the use of the "sandwich" technique in delivering constructive feedback. It involves delivering praise, offering the specific constructive criticism and then closing off with more praise. The criticism is "sandwiched" between two points of praise.

5 Reasons Why the Sandwich Technique is a Truly Bad Practice:

● It is a crutch that is solely for the benefit of the giver, not the receiver.
● It obfuscates the real message.
● It confuses the receiver by watering down the key message.
● It destroys the value of positive feedback by linking it with the negative. Don't forget that positive feedback is a powerful tool for reinforcing the right behaviors and the sandwich technique devalues this tool.
● It is insulting to the receiver and borderline deceitful. "Bob, you did a great job on XYZ, but… ." It's like a pat on the back followed by a sucker punch followed by another pat on the back.

My guidance:

● Overcome your fear of delivering constructive feedback by planning your discussions, and importantly, planning and practicing your discussion openers by getting politely and clearly to the point.
● Follow the single-behavior/single discussion rule.
● Ensure that you are focusing on the behavioral issue
● Link the issue to business impact
● Identify the proper and required behavioral change
● Jointly develop a plan to drive the change
● Follow up to discuss progress and next steps.

Are we too nice? Can we ever be more direct in the performing arts?