© 2018 LEADERSHIP IQ 36 SIP #4 – Stop using Compliment Sandwich

**Don’t Use A Compliment Sandwich To Deliver Constructive Criticism**

One of the worst management techniques ever created is the Compliment Sandwich. The Compliment Sandwich was created as a way of giving somebody constructive criticism:

"Bob, you're just so talented. You're so smart. You might be the smartest person in the department. Your behavior on the team the past couple weeks has been pretty bad. Your colleagues are starting to get pretty irritated with you because you're sarcastic, and caustic, and everything else. You're just so bright. I just want everybody to appreciate how big that brain of yours is."

Now, here's the problem with this method of delivering constructive criticism. Actually, there are several problems with delivering constructive criticism this way. First is, if I'm Bob, what I just heard was “I'm great, I'm smart, I'm talented, wah, wah, wah, wah, I'm great, I'm smart, I'm talented.”  I heard a compliment, Charlie Brown's teacher (wah, wah, wah), and then another compliment.

***I didn’t hear the constructive criticism because neurologically, we just don't really hear the stuff in the middle.*** We hear the stuff at the beginning because that's kind of out of nowhere. We hear the stuff at the end because that's the last message. That's the thing that sticks with us. We really don't hear the stuff in the middle so the constructive criticism gets lost.

If you were given a chance to present to your board, and there were 3 people who were going to present and the board was going to pick the best project to get funding, would you want to present first, second, or third? Some people say, "I'd like to go first and set the bar." Other people say, "I'd like to go third and close it out." Nobody says, “I'd like to go in the middle” because that's the spot we forget.

The other big problem is that the compliments and the criticism are incongruous with each other. That means they don't fit well together. This does not mean that you have to call your employees into your office and just verbally bludgeon them to deliver constructive criticism: "You're a jerk and everything you do is terrible." You don't have to do that, no, that's not going to work either.

What you can use instead of a Compliment Sandwich is you could use **a softening statement along with your constructive criticism.** And a softening statement basically says, “This is a serious message I have to talk to you about. I don't want you to miss the feedback, but know that this is coming from a place of being helpful and caring about it. Why am I saying this? Because this is really important feedback and if you don't make these changes, I'm really concerned that this is going to do damage to your career.”

What that says is, "Bob, I care about you and I'm giving you this feedback not because I'm a jerk, not because I couldn't think of anything better to do today, but because I want to see you be successful.” A softening statement also leaves no uncertainty about the fact that this feedback that you are about to give you is really, really important.

Source: <https://www.leadershipiq.com/blogs/leadershipiq/compliment-sandwich>