



Giving and Receiving Feedback

QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE FOR MANAGERS

A key ingredient in effective performance management and development is the skill of giving and receiving feedback. This is vital in order to focus people's energy and efforts towards achieving goals in the most effective way – providing clarity and alignment. Feedback can either be constructive, i.e. identifying errors or areas for improvement, or appreciative, i.e. recognising successes or where someone's contribution has been valued. Exchanging feedback openly and working in partnership with others is an indicator of mature culture in managing performance and development.

KEY BENEFITS OF FEEDBACK

- Constructive feedback provides the opportunity for ongoing performance improvement.
- It prevents performance from going off track or becoming misaligned, wasting valuable time, energy or resources.
- Appreciative feedback and recognition builds someone's sense of being valued.
- It helps to reinforce positive habits and encourages more of the performance that you want to see.
- Feedback builds self-awareness and helps us become mindful of the impact that our actions have.
- When shared in the right way, feedback helps strengthen the quality of working relationships you have with employees in your team.
- It is a key way of maintaining connection with what is happening in our workplace so we can respond in an appropriate and agile way.

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WHEN TO SHARE FEEDBACK

1. Where possible, it is best to give feedback “in the moment”, right after you have observed the action so that it is front of mind.
2. Share feedback on an ongoing, day-to-day basis. Don't feel that you have to wait until formal performance management and development reviews to share feedback with an employee. Feedback becomes less useful if you store it up over time.
3. When you notice something changing in someone's performance – this could be a positive trend, where encouragement and recognition will help sustain the uplift, or a negative trend where you need to explore the underlying issues or obstacles.
4. Be conscious of the ratio of appreciative to constructive feedback you share with employees in your team. At times we can be prone to monitoring for difficulties and therefore may tend to give more constructive feedback than positive recognition. This can have a negative impact on someone's confidence or engagement. Using more appreciative feedback than constructive feedback tends to draw out better performance from people.

HOW TO SHARE CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK

Like any good quality conversation, it will always be better to discuss performance feedback face-to-face, in person rather than over the phone or in writing. This gives it more impact and helps to prevent misunderstandings. Share feedback in private, in an appropriate location rather than in group meetings or an open-plan office with others around. Some tips for delivering constructive feedback include:

1. Situation – start by outlining when and where specific actions happen, who was involved, what was happening at the time to help anchor the feedback to a particular context. It can be helpful to ask the person how they think things went at this point to make it a two-way conversation.
2. Behaviour – pinpoint what you observed the person do or say, and how they did it. It is better to discuss examples that you have observed directly yourself. If feedback comes “second hand” from others, while it may be valid there is more opportunity for misunderstanding and misinterpretation. Be as specific as you can and have the relevant supporting information available to illustrate the point.
3. Impact – describe what happened as a result of the person's actions and why it is important for them to change something. It is useful to anchor the impact back to specific performance goals or standards that have been agreed to illustrate how the behaviour was not aligned.

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4. Check for awareness – ask if they were aware of what they did and what impact they had. This is also the opportunity to gather more information from the person. It is important to listen carefully to what they say and how it fits with your observations. Be open to learning more from the person which may give you a different perspective. If they don't recognise or acknowledge the feedback, you might need to go back to your supporting information and try again.

5. Invite a response and suggestions – ask the employee what they think they could do differently instead. While they may need some assistance, it is better if they can generate some alternatives as this build more ownership for making a change.

6. Seek agreement to follow up actions – ask for commitment to specific things they will stop doing and what they will now start to do instead, outlining relevant timeframes to implement and any support required to help. You may need to allow them some time and space to reflect on things before they are ready to do this part. If people receive constructive feedback when they are not expecting it or are not skilled in how to take it on board, they can react emotionally rather than respond thoughtfully. Give them time to process what they have heard and come back to you later if that is what they need.

HOW TO SHARE APPRECIATIVE FEEDBACK

The basic principles of sharing appreciative feedback are the same as those for sharing constructive feedback, but there are a few differences to be mindful of. While everyone likes to know that they are on track, some people may feel uncomfortable receiving appreciative feedback around others. Some tips for delivering appreciative feedback include:

1. Timing - Firstly, choose a time and place where you can have a good quality conversation that is not rushed.

2. Be specific - Use the situation-behaviour-impact approach to describe what it is that you want to recognise about their performance and why.

3. Be authentic - Most importantly, remember to be sincere. People will sense if you attempt to convey appreciation that you do not mean. So find something you can genuinely appreciate – their time, their effort, the challenges they're experiencing, even their good intentions.

4. Close – a key difference with appreciative feedback is that you are not closing a with action planning. A key message you conveying is that you have valued their input – so simply saying, "thank you for this" to close helps to make this clear.

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HOW TO RECEIVE FEEDBACK

A key element of working in partnership with employees in your team is to ask for feedback about your management approach and take this on board to improve the way you work together. If you ask for feedback from others and show that you have listened to it, you are more likely to see them reciprocate this in return in the future. Some tips for how to receive feedback include:

1. Listen carefully – if someone is sharing constructive feedback that we were not expecting, we might be prone to react rather than tune in to what they are trying to say. Being quiet, letting them speak, and being conscious of your listening can help you get the full message rather than jumping to conclusions.
2. Reflect back what you have heard – a key skill in receiving feedback is to summarise what you interpreted as the key messages the person was trying to get across is important in order to build a common understanding.
3. Check for understanding – ask if you have understood what they meant to say accurately. There are many ways in which communication can go wrong, so you might need to go back and forth a little in order to get the right message. Use the situation-behaviour-impact approach to try and draw out more information where helpful.
4. Look for the constructive message – listen carefully for what you could learn from this feedback and how it might be helpful for you in achieving your goals. Say, “thank you” for sharing the feedback with you so that you have the opportunity to use this. To help make the feedback even more constructive, you might ask if there are specific things that you they would like you to start, stop or continue doing.
5. Share your perspective – there may have been situational factors that the other person was not aware of which influenced your actions. This might broaden their understanding on what happened. Nonetheless, it is important to respect their perspective and observations as real for them and not to discount them.
6. Agree to follow up actions – make a commitment to how you will take the feedback on board and where you may need their help to adapt your approach in the future. You may want some time and space to reflect on this first so that you respond thoughtfully rather than reacting in the moment.



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KEY POINTS

- All employees need feedback to help align our efforts towards performance goals – both constructive and appreciative feedback. We have an obligation to share feedback as part of performance management and development.
- Feedback is most useful “in the moment”, as soon after the event or action as possible. The more you store it up, the more it deteriorates in quality and relevance to the person. Good quality feedback needs to be specific, linked to relevant goals and/ or standards, and have supporting information to help illustrate the point. Using questions to make feedback a two-way conversation and check for understanding helps to achieve clarity and alignment.
- Feedback presents us with an opportunity to improve and keep developing, but it is up to the individual how they respond to this and take it on board.