

Receiving and giving feedback

QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE FOR EMPLOYEES

A key ingredient in effective performance management and development is the skill of receiving and giving feedback. Receiving regular feedback is vital in order to help you focus your 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 your contribution has been valued. It is also important for you to share feedback with your Manager, as this helps them understand and fine tune how they work with you and support your performance at work. Exchanging two-way feedback openly and working in partnership with others is an indicator of mature culture in managing employee performance and development.

KEY POINTS

- Constructive feedback provides you with the opportunity for ongoing performance improvement - It helps prevent your performance from going off track or becoming misaligned, wasting valuable time, energy or resources
- Appreciative feedback and recognition helps you know when you are on track and where your contribution is valued - It helps you to establish positive habits and encourages more of the performance that your Manager needs from you
- Feedback builds self-awareness and helps us become mindful of the impact that our actions have
- When shared in the right way, giving feedback to your Manager helps strengthen the quality of working relationships you have with them
- 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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HOW TO RECEIVE FEEDBACK

A key element of working in partnership with your Manager is to gather and receive feedback about your progress then take this on board to improve the way you work. There are some skills involved in receiving feedback which can help you make it flow easier and work for you:

1. Listen carefully – if someone is sharing constructive feedback that you were not aware of or expecting, you 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 your Manager was trying to get across. This is important in order to build a shared 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. If you are not sure what they mean, ask for specific examples and details about the situation(s) they are referring to, what they observed you do or say, and what impact this had.
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 they would like you to start, stop or continue doing.
5. Share your perspective – there may have been situational factors which your Manager was not aware of which influenced your actions. This might broaden their understanding of 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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HOW TO SHARE FEEDBACK WITH YOUR MANAGER

While the focus of performance and development conversations with your Manager tends to be about your individual performance, it is also important that you are able to share feedback with them so they can understand team member perspectives and develop their management approach.

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 your Manager. Feedback becomes less useful if you store it up over time.

HOW TO SHARE CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK

Like any good quality conversation, it will always be better to discuss 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 your Manager how they think things went at this point to make it a two-way conversation.
2. Behaviour – pinpoint what you observed them do or say, and how they did it. Be as specific as you can and have the relevant supporting information available to illustrate your point.
3. Impact – describe what happened as a result of their actions and why it is important from your perspective 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 your Manager. It is important to listen carefully to what they say and how it fits with your observations. Be open to learning more about the situation your Manager was in 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 your Manager what their thoughts are and try to outline what you would find more helpful from them in the future that will assist you.

6. Agree to follow up actions – You may need to allow them some time and space to reflect on things before they are ready to come back with a commitment to follow up on what you have shared. Give them time to process what they have heard and come back to you later once they have considered alternatives.

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 from team members, so you will need to be sensitive to this. 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 share your appreciation for 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.
4. Close – A key message you conveying is that you have valued their approach – so simply saying, “thank you for this” to close helps to make this clear.



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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 receive feedback and take it on board as part of participating in performance management and development.
- There are some skills involved in receiving feedback which we can practise, and these help us to respond thoughtfully rather than react defensively.
- 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 you as an individual as to how you respond to this and take it on board.