



Delivering Effective Feedback for Managers and Team Leaders

Enabling High Performance Series

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What do you do when you are unhappy about an employee or a teammate's performance?

Do you wait for things to get terrible to talk about them or do you deal with it on the spot?

Do you just refer the problem to your direct supervisor to let her handle it?

More importantly how do you help people around you learn from mistakes or change their unproductive behaviors?

Research shows that teams become more productive when the communication with the team has become direct, honest and constructive. Knowing how to give feedback in a constructive manner can be one of the most essential tools needed to build high performance within a team or an organization.

This article introduces a specific format for delivering effective feedback that has been used successfully with thousands of people all over the world. Readers are given specific examples and recommendations to begin to master the technique and integrate it to their daily work activities.

Why do only few people give feedback? First and foremost because [they do not know how to give it](#) without creating a backlash, an unpleasant response or an open conflict. Second, they do not realize that giving feedback builds trust and deeper work relationships. They unfortunately identify feedback with personal criticism. Third, they ignore that it is central to developing a supportive and learning environment.

Now, if you are in a leadership position, the issue is more critical. You need to give and receive feedback. Evaluate your own performance on this issue: would it make sense to have a tennis coach that never says anything? Would it be acceptable if the coach

only talked about bad shots with no specific information on what to do better? Would it make sense if that coach only mentioned areas of improvement at the yearly performance evaluation meeting?

As a manager or team leader, knowing how to communicate about problems with staff is not only crucial, [it is simply your job to give clear and specific feedback](#). If you are in a leading position, employees and teammates expect to know if their actions produce good results or not. A well constructed piece of feedback helps them identify a pattern to adjust, improve or stop. When the feedback is positive, it helps them repeat a successful behavior. It helps them align their actions with the results you expect. [It helps them succeed](#).

Over time, most employees develop respect and loyalty towards managers that regularly tell them how they perform. They know where they stand at all times and it helps create a cooperative environment.

Your suppliers and your contractors will also need input from you. By tackling problems early on, your giving-feedback habit will allow you to avoid extreme situations when it is too late to communicate effectively. Give feedback regularly or face unpredictable performance all around you.

Why do you need to give feedback regularly?

Here are a couple of reasons:

- People often see feedback as negative judgment and criticism. It can be the exact opposite. By using a clear format for giving feedback, people can learn to precisely identify what to do between
- Feedback can be used as a training tool. By coaching others to behave the expected way, delegation becomes easier and more natural. It can allow achieving more while doing less yourself
- It enables you to regulate the dynamics of a team. Feedback informs, reinforces and helps adjust behaviors for optimal team cohesion. By not giving feedback, you might be discounting how valuable your input is
- People around you will start imitating you and giving each other useful input in a constructive manner
- In working with teams, the more you communicate, the more effective and fun things become. Giving feedback helps you do that in a precise fashion
- Finally, [*giving feedback is an ultimate act of giving*](#). You deliver it because you want to succeed and you want people around you to succeed as well.

How do I give feedback?

Here is a format that consistently delivers excellent results. Please stick to this format until you feel that it works for you. The article gives you specific examples later on.

Step 1: Ask for permission

Step 2: Give the facts with no judgment

Step 3: Describe the impact of the behavior (good or bad)

Step 4: Request or suggest. Highlight the benefits

Step 5: Test the understanding. Cooperate on building the solution

Step 6: Thank each other

Step 1

Ask for permission. It sets the stage for the exchange. The person you want to talk to might not be ready at this moment. It is also a way for you to check that this is the right time. If it is not, ask when you can have this conversation. When they become ready for it, they are at least willing to hear it.

Step 2

Give specific facts and information. Give facts that cannot be argued such as "It is over 20 minutes past the agreed upon time", "The report does not give any number of the sales projections I asked for", "you use the word jerk towards me", or "I saw you speak for 2 hours with Sylvia in the hall way". [*This is not the time to give your judgment; stick to the facts.*](#) Positive feedback will also give specific facts not judgments: "Your presentation highlighted 3 key strategies that we will use from now on", "you work 30% longer than the others" etc.

Step 3

Describe how the behavior impacts you and others. It lets the receiver know what has been created. Say how you feel, how you view this or what damage now exists. In this step, you are talking about you, your team, your organization, not the person. [*Give yourself full permission to be honest and express your feelings*](#) here.

This can be a shock for the receiver. He/she may have no idea about what has been going on. For this particular step, [*using self responsible "I" statements*](#) has shown to be very effective. Avoid "You", "We" or "They". "You" statements will often be perceived as direct attacks and will encourage an attacking response thus interrupting the process. "We" may diminish the value of your statement.

This may seem un-authentic to you. Just practice giving feedback and see the results. Many people are not used to learning about the impact of their action; they are unaware of what comes across. This is like reflecting back to them the result of their action. It may be the first time this happens to them. This is a leap in awareness.

Step 4

Request and suggest that this behavior be changed to produce better results (or be continued if it works). Simply and directly suggest a better way. If it is positive feedback, suggest that they do it again. Requesting can be a hard thing to do for many people. This is why doing this requires courage and determination. This is where your commitment towards creating success will kick in. Also presenting the benefits of the change can create a positive perspective to the feedback receiver.

Step 5

Clarify and agree on a better behavior/solution. This step ensures that the receiver has understood what is going on. This invites an open dialogue to plan for future cooperation. Both parties have a chance to discuss the matter in full detail and evaluate if there is indeed a gain of mutual benefit from this interaction. If not, at least you have courageously tried.

Step 6

Thank each other. If the feedback has been delivered in a constructive manner, both parties often agree that this was a very valuable interaction. The receiver has had the courage to listen and understand. The giver has had the courage to stand up, to organize their communication and deliver it. Both parties need to be thanked and acknowledged for that. Good work!

When do I give feedback?

You give it as soon as you realize there is an opportunity for giving useful feedback or when your intuition tells you that something is wrong. You do not need to wait until you have the right analysis, words or prepared speech. You give it authentically and directly as soon as you can. There are many different ways to say it, the most important thing to keep in mind is that you want to build on the working relationship and improve behaviors. When you consistently deliver positive or negative feedback, you are learning to master the art of leading people with honest communication.

What if it happened a long time ago? Well still, give it. At least, it helps clear your mind and make sure that you have been heard.

Example:

Over time, you will be able to create your own style and find your own words. Here is an example; Mary is giving feedback to John:

Step 1

- "John, do you have a minute? I would like to give you my input on what happened in our meeting yesterday". "Yes Mary, I have a minute".

Step 2

- "During our meeting with this important client, I saw you step out in the middle of our conversation to smoke a cigarette. You did not ask us, inform us and you stayed out there over 20 minutes"

Step 3

- "I am afraid this client noticed it and took this badly", "I was absolutely shocked to watch you step out with no warning", "I am really angry about this", "this is unacceptable behavior as far as I am concerned", "I am not sure we can work together effectively if this type of thing continues".

Notice here that we are using "I" statements and not "You" statements. For instance "I am really angry" is a more effective than "You make me really angry".

Step 4

- "I feel like reporting this to our management but I prefer suggesting that you pay more attention to that next time. Actually, I request that you do. This would help me see our work together mutually supportive."

Step 5

- "Did you understand what I just said? Is there anything you want to say about this?", "what is your perspective on this?", "Am I missing anything?"

Step 6

- "Mary, thank you for saying that. I did not realize that this would such an issue. I will be careful next time." "Well John, thank you for acknowledging the issue and listening to me".

For now, this simple example is there to help understand the format of the communication. [You will have to practice often](#) and develop your own style and find the words that fit you better. Well, start now!

Tips for success

- Ask to receive feedback from others around you first
- Deliver feedback in person and one-on-one for maximum effectiveness. Avoid email at all cost for this purpose
- Do not use feedback to attack. Use it to build a better working relationship
- Focus on the behavior that they can improve not on something that they do not have control over
- Make sure that the feedback addresses a behavior you have personally observed
- Ask yourself who the feedback will help. If it is just you, I suggest you hold back and think a bit longer about what to say
- Make sure that the recipient really understands the problem. Give as many specific facts as needed that are indisputable to describe the situation
- Try to only use "I" statements. Do not say "you are being disrespectful", say "I do not feel respected"
- Do not say "you are lazy", say "I view this as laziness"
- Do not say "You are making me angry", say "This behavior makes me angry"

For positive feedback, you can say:

- "I am delighted by this"
- "I am pleased with the way you handled the situation"
- "I feel that I can rely on you in the future"

An exception can be made; you can say:

- "You come [across to me](#) as unwilling to work on this"
- "You come [across to me](#) as arrogant and intimidating".
- Show that you [are just focusing on the behavior of the person not their character or personal traits.](#)

You can ask people to hear the feedback and to not engage in a discussion about it. You can stop after step 4 or even after step 3. Sometimes, the feedback is so right on target that the receiver needs time to pause and reflect. It can be best for people to receive it then think about it and finish the discussion later.

Feedback is a gift

This is not about pleasing people, being polite or accommodating. It is about effectiveness, not forgetting the true objectives, not wasting time and resources, and avoiding mistakes in the future. So deliver feedback as such: with honesty and complete respect for the person that receives it. This is an opportunity to show that you are committed to working together well.

Many may perceive your input as unfair criticism; many may find the words you use harsh, many may deny the facts. Still, a non-negotiable element of leadership is that you consistently develop people through feedback. However, if someone does not want feedback, you can elect to simply not give it. It will be their loss.

Learn to ask for and receive feedback and you will become a much better feedback giver. [*Ask to receive more feedback than you*](#)

[*give*](#). Over time, you will be able to discern the indirect or vague feedback that people give: it is a great source of information that will help you adapt and refine your leadership style. As a matter of fact, extremely few people are trained to deliver feedback, you will have to seek it, decipher vague signals and inquire even more to get to the heart of it.

When receiving feedback, thank the person for their willingness to be honest with you. [*Do not proceed to explain, justify or correct*](#). Just take it in and move on. Best is to say something like: "Thanks for the feedback; I will think about what you just said".

As a receiver, do not give feedback about the feedback you have received. Pause and ponder first about what you have just learned about yourself.

Limitations to feedback

Giving feedback helps improve unproductive behaviors and helps resolve conflicts. As such, it is a very valuable tool. However, it does not help resolve the deeper motivations behind the behaviors. This would require using more formal frameworks for personality analysis, team dynamics, group cohesion or project

troubleshooting. Becoming a feedback expert also requires that the manager develops masterful skills in active listening and problem analysis. Don't hesitate to contact us for more information on those. Finally, not everyone is willing to receive feedback. I suggest respecting that.



Conclusion

Giving feedback is a skill that gets developed with practice. Do it often and you will find your own words over time. This is one of the most common complaint from top employees in an organization: "Nobody gives me concrete, solid and usable feedback. They just tell me things are going OK".

The ability to deliver effective feedback has been shown to be one of the most important tools available to a manager. By using it well and often, your entire organization learns to improve, to self-correct and to challenge itself. As a manager, I suggest that you actually teach your team to give each other feedback using this

particular format. It works and I have seen it use effectively by thousands of people all over the world.

Just give feedback even when you are scared or intimidated by the situation. Once it is done congratulate yourself for your courage and commitment. There is nothing wrong about being afraid or hesitant. It takes a lot of energy and commitment when you are not used to this. Do it deliberately, not by reaction or to reprimand. Do it to create quality around you. Over time, people around you will be grateful for your style of leadership. These people will want to keep working with you.

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