

Principles of giving and receiving great feedback

“There is a single, more powerful indicator of one’s ability to excel than any other. It is not years on the job, qualifications, or professional development hours. It is, quite simply, attentiveness to feedback.”

- K. Anders Ericsson

What is feedback?

Noun; information given in response to a product, performance etc., used as a basis for improvement, the modification or control of a process or system by its results or effects

Giving Feedback

Try to make it a Positive Process and Experience - The purpose for giving feedback is to improve the situation or performance. The best way to do that is to recognise and encourage good performance. There is a role for constructive critical feedback but this should be used sparingly. You'll most often get much more from people when your approach is positive and focused on improvement.

Content - Content is what you say

1. In your first sentence, identify the topic or issue that the feedback will be about.
2. Provide the specifics of what occurred.

Without the specifics, you only have praise or criticism. Start each key point with an "I" message, such as, "I have noticed," "I have observed," "I have seen," or when the need exists to pass on feedback from others, "I have had reported to me." "I" messages help you be issue-focused and get into the specifics.

Manner - Manner is how you say the feedback. As you may know, how you say something often carries more weight than what you have to say — manner is an important element when giving feedback.

Be Specific - Tell the person exactly what they did well, or what you noticed, e.g. "I noticed the quality of your analysis on that report was excellent; well done!"

If you are commenting on behaviour that needs to be improved, comment on what you observed, not your interpretation of it, e.g. "I observed you slam the phone following your conversation and I heard you swear."

Do not judge, but ask for clarification about what was happening from their perspective, "Can you tell me what was happening for you in that moment?" This ensures you focus on what you saw and heard whilst opening up space for discussion and collaboration on moving forward with the issue.

In contrast, if you just tell someone "Slamming the phone down was unprofessional", they maybe unsure exactly what you mean by this, Were they too loud, too casual, and intimidating?

Timing - Give the feedback as soon as possible so that the events are fresh in everyone's minds. When a job has been well done, acknowledge that straight away. When positive or constructive feedback is given well after the fact, its value is lessened. The exception to this is if the situation involved is highly emotional. Here, wait until everyone has calmed down before you engage in feedback. It is best to avoid letting yourself get worked up and risk saying something you will regret later.

Give feedback often - Use feedback regularly to acknowledge real performance. Try to catch and respond to employees doing the job right just as much as you can. Similarly, if you need to, respond in a timely manner to them doing something not quite right. People then know where they stand all the time and there are few surprises.

Praise in public and private, offer constructive feedback in private only

While public recognition is appreciated, public scrutiny is not. Establish a safe place to talk where you won't be interrupted or overheard.

Use a sandwich approach - Talk about positives too - If you are going to give constructive feedback it can helpful to sandwich this between two things positive to put the person at ease. It also lets them "see" and remember what their 'success' at such issues looks like and this helps them to take the right steps next time.

Doing things differently - Make sure you both know what needs to be done to improve the situation. The main message should be that you care and want to help the person grow and develop. Work with the person to set goals and make plans to monitor and evaluate progress.

Follow Up - The whole purpose of feedback is to improve performance. You need to measure whether or not that is happening and then make adjustments as you go. Be sure to document your conversations and discuss what is working and what needs to be modified.

Inviting Feedback from others on your own performance

*High performers not only seek more feedback, they **follow up**. Unlike their proficient peers, they need to know whether it was right... whether their alterations helped."*

- K. Anders Ericsson

We need to pay more attention to how we can invite, encourage and adapt to feedback on our own performance.

Some things to consider:

- Consider and reframe your defences to feedback
- Invite feedback into your own performance in real time - not only at the end of a project or process.
- Do it in all contexts, meetings, internal/external etc.
- Maximising fine tuning to feedback is a greater investment than any other.