

Focus on Feedback

Why is feedback important?

Everyone learns from the right kind of feedback. Knowing what you did well means you are more likely to do it again. Realising what you did badly enables you to prevent it from happening again.

People in general are not telepathic - they cannot read your mind. If you want them to change or improve the way they work, you must tell them why they need to change, what they need to do differently, and how they can do it. So, they need feedback, which is:

- 🌈 Fast - as soon after the event as is possible
- 🌈 Regular - reports both good and bad results
- 🌈 Objective - focusing on action, not personalities
- 🌈 Specific - gives sufficient detail for action
- 🌈 Supportive - helpful, non-threatening

Objective and positive

Being able to give objective and positive feedback is an important key skill to develop. Feedback should focus on behaviour, which the individual can change, not their personality, which they cannot. It is worth considering different styles of feedback and their potential impact. Say you overhear one of your team handling a difficult phone call with a customer. Voices are raised and it obviously ends with your colleague losing his temper. You could say either:

A. *"You didn't handle that very well, did you?"*

Or

B. *"It sounded as though you've just had a difficult call. Can you tell me what happened?"*

Which do think will be more effective?

Saying 'A' is unlikely to motivate the individual or make him/her want to improve.

Saying 'B' will engage the individual and encourage him/her to tell you what the problem was.



Giving praise

Managers are often reluctant to praise their staff because people sometimes react in an embarrassed way, or give the impression that the praise was unjustified. Suppose that one of your team has just prepared an excellent report, which solved a recent, challenging operational problem. You could say either:

A. *“That was a really good report.”*

Or

B. *“I was pleased with the analysis in your report, especially the way you pinpointed the exact cause of the fault. Could we use the same approach elsewhere?”*

Which do think will be more effective?

Saying 'A' may make the individual squirm and feel embarrassed. He/she may even say 'It was nothing really.'

Saying 'B' when you're specific about why you liked the report helps him/her to repeat the performance, and asking the question deflects any risk that they might belittle the outcome.

Option B uses the 'What, Why and Question' approach.

“I was pleased with the analysis in your report [what], especially the way you pinpointed the exact cause of the fault [why]. Could we use the same approach elsewhere? [question]”

Confronting a development need

Managers are often reluctant to confront 'challenging' situations because they do not know how to deal with them. The best advice is to ask questions, rather than launch in. Imagine you recently attended a meeting with one of your team and she handled a situation with little tact, and upset people from another department. Back in the office after the meeting you could say either:

A. *“What on earth did you say that for? We'll never get their co-operation again!”*

Or

B. *“I was disappointed with the outcome of the meeting. How do you think you could handle things differently next week to regain their co-operation?”*

Which do think will be more effective?

Saying 'A' is likely to inflame the situation and make her defensive.

Spoken in the right tone, saying 'B' should help the other person to assess the situation for herself without becoming too defensive, and to come up with some plans for the future.



About to give some feedback?

Whenever you prepare to give feedback, remember this eight-point plan.

1. Preparation

- 🌀 How will the feedback affect him/her?
- 🌀 Will it hurt just enough to help development?
- 🌀 What exact words will you use?
- 🌀 How would you feel if someone said that to you?
- 🌀 What can you say to maintain his/her self-esteem?
- 🌀 Is the timing right? If not, is it best left unsaid?

2. Check your invitation

- 🌀 Feedback is most effective when the recipient has asked for it
- 🌀 This does not mean just saying: 'Can I give you some feedback?'
- 🌀 So, encourage him/her to ask for your feedback

3. Watch carefully

- 🌀 How is the recipient taking the feedback?
- 🌀 Watch for changes of expression and position
- 🌀 Are there any changes in eye contact and sideways glances?
- 🌀 Avoid making judgements -- so never say: '*You should...*' or '*You ought to...*'
- 🌀 Only offer your solution as a last resort
- 🌀 Instead, describe what you see or share ideas

4. Small doses

- 🌀 Small doses are best - soon after the event
- 🌀 Give some positive feedback first to encourage him/her to change
- 🌀 Try to limit negative feedback to two or three items
- 🌀 This means that you have to decide priorities - which is most urgent?

5. Be specific

- 🌀 Be very specific with your feedback - it is not a guessing game!
- 🌀 Describe what you have observed, not why you think it happened
- 🌀 Focus on behaviour not the personality
- 🌀 Help him/her see what things could be like if he/she changes

6. Don't judge

- 🌀 Present your information uncluttered with any judgements
- 🌀 If asked to judge, try to offer at least two possible interpretations
- 🌀 Use 'more of / less of' instead of 'either / or' - it is more helpful
- 🌀 Explore alternatives but try to avoid giving answers



7. Improve your evidence

- 🔄 Remember your data reflects your prejudices and agendas
- 🔄 Continually strive to build up a more complete picture of events
- 🔄 If he/she rejects your feedback, it is just possible that he/she may be right
- 🔄 Do not become defensive: go and collect more information

8. Offer support

- 🔄 Offer your support in any changes you have discussed
- 🔄 Focus on his/her strengths
- 🔄 Leave the other person feeling he/she can rely upon you



The SARAH Model

Effective feedback may come as an unpleasant surprise and may cause an emotional response:

S = Shock

A = Anger

R = Reject → Rationalise → Reflect → Realise

A = Acceptance

H = Help

Providing good examples and evidence when delivering feedback will make it more difficult to reject.

People may require help in changing behaviour or training to help them to do things differently.



SOON Feedback/Challenge Model

Always in privacy, always with respect for the individual, and never by email

Situation

- 🌈 Talk about a specific event
- 🌈 The event was recent – talk about it as soon as possible after it takes place
- 🌈 Avoid generalisation and distortion e.g. “This stuff is always happening” or “You are always doing this”.

Observed behaviour

- 🌈 Describe specifically what I saw you do or heard you say
- 🌈 Not my interpretation of it, and not someone else’s report about it
- 🌈 If possible, give an exact description e.g. a quote

Outcome

- 🌈 Describe the specific outcome or impact of the behaviour
- 🌈 This needs to be the actual impact, not what we believe the impact might be
- 🌈 What has actually taken place as a result of the action we are discussing?

Next steps/need to talk about it

- 🌈 This will depend upon who you are talking to
- 🌈 Always start with an assertion that you know this would not have been deliberate
- 🌈 To a direct report: this can involve questions about what’s troubling them and an agreement with the person about how they will behave in future
- 🌈 To a member of your peer group who you know well: comment on it being out of character and ask what might be wrong
- 🌈 To a member of your peer group not known to you, or someone more senior to you: focus on the impact of their actions, and your desire to help by making them aware of their impact.



Feedback

A Definition of Effective Feedback

Specific information provided following an observed event, about either task or behaviour – provided to improve or maintain performance.

The E²C² Feedback Tool

E = Evidence

- 🔄 Evidence should be factual, specific and based on observation
- 🔄 People often provide feedback based on non-factual information and therefore end up being challenged by the receiver of the feedback

E = Effect

- 🔄 Effect relates to the impact of the behaviour that you have evidenced
- 🔄 Avoid phrases such as "You made me feel" and take the emotion out of the situation using factual impacts which cannot be disputed

C = Change

C = Continue

Change or Continue relate to what you want them to do as a result of the feedback. You either need the individual to change something or to continue doing something.

By concentrating on the individual, you are totally focused on their development. This shows that feedback is important and that you are giving them your most valuable commodity - time.



E = Evidence

Evidence should be factual, specific and based on observation.



E = Effect

Effect relates to the impact of the behaviour that you have evidenced.



C = Change

Change relates to what you want them to do as a result of the feedback.

OR

C = Continue

Continue relates to what you want them to do as a result of the feedback.

