




Six Characteristics of Effective Feedback



In Private
Feedback should be given in private if your comments can be embarrassing, and a formal feedback meeting should always be held in private. While some people like the attention that comes from sincere praise or celebrating an accomplishment in front of others, some do not, and no one wants negativity shared in front of their peers.



Specific
Avoid general statements when you deliver feedback. "You seem unmotivated," is not nearly as helpful as, "You arrived late to work at least three days a week, your last two assignments were late, and you did not attend the new employee lunch last week."




Balanced
Balance in this context is about designing the feedback session so that, even though there may be constructive criticism required, the employee does not feel attacked, or that all you have to say about his work is negative. If you are not comfortable with this, or not good at small talk, write some comments down ahead of time to keep yourself focused. Your employee will appreciate that you get to the heart of the meeting quickly instead of letting any anxiety build.



Documented
Base your comments on documentation, facts, and your own observation. Don't rely on what another manager or a colleague told you, or what someone overheard.



Personal (In the Right Way)
Compliments or criticisms that are directed generally toward the team are meaningless to an employee. "We just don't seem able to get out error-free invoices," is not as constructive as, "Three of the last invoices you sent out had errors in them." Describe the behavior that is unsatisfactory, rather than judge a person because of it. Base it on their actions, and don't make a personal attack on the individual.



Relevant
Keep the conversation focused on feedback that is relevant and job related, and to things which the employee has control over. For example, complaining about the way a letter looks when the employee only has access to an ancient printer that adds lines to everything only adds to the employee's stress and frustration.

Tips on Accepting Criticism



Listen attentively.
Make sure you understand the criticism and what needs improvement. You may even want to paraphrase the other person's remarks.



Ask for details.
Find out as much as you can about the incident(s) described. Ask lots of open ended questions to gather all the information that you can.



Find something to agree with.
You don't need to say that you were wrong if you weren't, but it does do a lot for your own integrity for you to say that you were wrong if you were.

Of equal importance, you need to acknowledge the person's right to criticize and to recognize the importance of the person's concerns. If you cannot agree with the other person about any aspect of the criticism being offered, you could be perceived as rejecting the person as well.



Try not to take their comments personal-
If they've learned anything about offering feedback, they will know they need to speak to your behaviors and not your personal self, but not everyone knows this. Consider that they are being brave and offering feedback (not an easy thing for most people to do) as an opportunity to improve yourself.

Good Questioning Techniques

Open Ended Questions

- ✓ "In your own words, evaluate your accomplishments this quarter."
- ✓ "Tell me about your complaint."
- ✓ "Tell me how I can help you achieve your goals."
- ✓ "What do I have to give you to get what I want?"
- ✓ "Describe how you think the project developed."

Closed Questions (when used appropriately)

- ✓ "Does this make you angry?"
- ✓ "Do you think this appraisal is fair?"



Hypothetical Open Questions

- ✓ "Let's change roles for a moment. Suppose you were supervisor of this department and someone came to you with a complaint similar to yours. How would you like to handle it?"
- ✓ "If you learned a process or procedure that that could free up one hour of your time each week, what do you see yourself doing during that hour?"

Direct or Specific Questions

- ✓ "Is the accusation against you accurate?"
- ✓ "Did you accomplish your top priority this year?"
- ✓ "Do you think you should receive a promotion?"

Third-Person Questions

- ✓ "Do the employees in our department think the raise is fair?"

Active Listening Tips and Techniques



Set the Time and Place
Be mindful of other people's expectations (as well as your own) for privacy. No one wants to be criticized in front of their peers, but even if you are offering praise, some people prefer it privately. Any kind of formal performance appraisal, a discussion on expectations, or constructive criticism, needs to be offered privately. We recommend that you keep this meeting short and focused. There is no need to schedule an hour meeting for something that can be covered in a shorter time. On the other hand, if you expect that the individual will have thoughts to share, make sure you allow ample time for this. Consider the employee's schedule, too.



Prepare Documentation
If this is a formal performance evaluation, you may have a form that your employer prefers. Otherwise, you need to have data available for the individual to back up what you have to say. Keep in mind that positive data and results are important, too.



Start the Meeting
Keep the tone of the meeting professional and polite. Even if you are upset about something, the meeting needs to be conducted properly. Use the six characteristics of effective feedback during the meeting.



Outline the Change or Offer Praise
After a little small talk, move onto the purpose of the meeting and your feedback. If the feedback is positive, be genuine in your praise. If possible, demonstrate improvement from the last meeting. If changes or improvements are needed, engage in discussion with open questions. Ask the individual for their thoughts on what they can do differently and get the commitment to change. In order to avoid overwhelming the individual, ask them to work on no more than two or three improvements at one time. Round the conversation out by complimenting them on their positive results (no one does everything poorly), attitude, commitment, and anything else that is suitable.



Follow Up
This is the step that many people miss, but it's an essential part of the feedback framework. If you say that you will follow up with the employee in ten days to check in and see how things are coming along, make sure that you do. Lack of follow up on your part will make it look as though you don't really care about helping the employee to succeed. It will also negatively impact levels of trust and employee engagement.

NOTE: Informal feedback will be offered in a way that is very similar to formal feedback, except that you will likely only focus on one topic, and you do not need all that documentation that a performance appraisal, or similar formal meeting requires.

Probing Techniques



1
Ask an open question.



2
Pause.



3
Ask reflective or mirroring questions.



4
Paraphrase.



5
Use summary questions.

Verbal Probes

- ✓ "Tell me more about that."
- ✓ "That's interesting. Tell me more."
- ✓ "Really?"
- ✓ "Why?"
- ✓ "Can you give me a specific example?"

Non-Verbal Probes

- ✗ Raising the eyebrows as if you are surprised
- ✗ Nodding
- ✗ Frowning
- ✗ Pursing the lips

Tips on Managing Your Body Language



Facial Expression
This needs to be pleasant, or at least neutral. The face should be relaxed instead of tense to convey that you are comfortable and supporting the conversation taking place.



Smiling
Smiles are always welcome and help people to relax. When we are tense, however, our smiles can look like grimaces. Practice smiling in a mirror and get comfortable with offering more smiles. This shows that you like what you are doing and that you enjoy the process underway, as opposed to demonstrating that you see giving feedback as a dreaded task.



Eye Contact
When you speak with people, your eye contact needs to be steady and confident. Don't stare people down, but do look at them. While there are cultural aspects to eye contact, during feedback it's our position that you need to look at people so that they see you are being genuine.