

The Art of Feedback: Building Relationships that Work

Introduction

Feedback is structured information that improves individual and team performance. It identifies what's working, what's not, and how to align behaviours with shared goals. Leaders who master feedback create high-performance environments where accountability and care work together. When done well, feedback strengthens relationships, builds trust, and fuels growth. Yet many leaders and teams avoid it, fearing discomfort or misunderstanding. The reality? **Workplaces that create a culture of effective feedback experience higher engagement, stronger collaboration, and better performance.**

Why Feedback Matters:

- Employees who receive regular feedback are 3x more engaged at work (Gallup).
- Organisations with a strong feedback culture have 14.9% lower turnover rates (Workplace Research Institute).
- 72% of employees say their performance would improve if managers provided corrective feedback (Harvard Business Review).


This guide walks you through how to **give and receive feedback in a way that builds relationships, rather than breaking them.**

Step 1: Reframing Feedback – It's About Growth, Not Criticism

One of the biggest obstacles to effective feedback is mindset. Many see feedback as negative or a performance review tool rather than an opportunity for **growth and alignment.**

Reframe your thinking:


- Feedback isn't about pointing out flaws—it's about **helping someone succeed.**
- Giving feedback shows investment in someone's development, not judgment.
- Receiving feedback means someone sees potential in you.

 **Key Takeaway:** When feedback is positioned as a tool for growth, it strengthens trust and creates a culture of learning and accountability.

Step 2: The Foundations of Effective Feedback

Great feedback is **specific, timely, and actionable**. Follow these principles to ensure your feedback is well-received:

- ✓ **Be Clear & Specific:** Avoid vague statements like "Good job." Instead, say, "Your presentation was well-structured and engaging—your use of examples really helped illustrate your points."
- ✓ **Make it Timely:** Feedback should happen as close to the event as possible for maximum impact.
- ✓ **Balance Positive & Constructive Feedback:** Feedback isn't just about improvement—it's also about reinforcing what's working well.
- ✓ **Check Your Intent:** Are you giving feedback to genuinely help, or out of frustration? Approach with curiosity, not blame. For further insight, check how this aligns to the values of the team.

 **Action:** Think of a recent time you gave or received feedback. Was it clear? Was it timely? What could have made it more effective?

Step 3: How to Give Feedback That Lands Well


Feedback is most effective when it follows a structured approach.


When faced with a situation where there needs to be a **course correction** for behaviour or actions, try the **SBI Model (Situation-Behaviour-Impact)**:

1. **Situation** – Describe the specific moment in time and place.
 - a. *"In yesterday's team meeting..."*
2. **Behaviour** – Explain what happened. Be specific, this is about data-points, not reactions.
 - a. *"You interrupted a colleague before they finished speaking."*
3. **Impact** – Share the effect of the behaviour.
 - a. *"That made it hard for them to fully express their idea, and we may have missed valuable input."*

4. **Then Listen** – Give the other person space to respond.

If they react defensively, resist the urge to push back. Instead, ask, "Can we take a moment to reflect on the key points here?" This encourages reflection and shifts the conversation from reaction to understanding.

 **Key Takeaway:** Keeping feedback objective and impact-based removes emotion and makes it easier to receive. We may challenge ideas, not criticise the person!


 **Practice:** Write an SBI-style piece of feedback for someone on your team. Reflect before sharing, and if you have doubts, ask your leader for advice.

Step 4: Receiving Feedback – Turning Insight into Action

Just as giving feedback is a skill, so is receiving it. Many people react defensively or dismiss feedback instead of seeing it as a gift.

Steps for Receiving Feedback Well:

- **Listen actively** – Don't interrupt or rush to defend yourself.
- **Ask for clarification** – "Can you give me an example?" helps refine the feedback.
- **Reflect, don't react** – Take time to process before responding.
- **Thank the giver** – A simple "I appreciate your feedback" encourages an open dialogue.

 **Key Takeaway:** Feedback is a learning opportunity. Leaders who seek and embrace feedback grow the fastest.

Step 5. How to Give Feedback Up – Managing Up with Influence

Leaders also need to provide feedback **to senior leaders or peers**. The same principles apply, but with a focus on **strategic framing**:

- ✓ **Lead with business impact** – How does this affect team performance or results?
- ✓ **Use data or observations** – Keep it factual, not emotional.
- ✓ **Provide a solution, not just a critique** – What action can be taken?

Why? This fills a key gap—**giving feedback up the chain is often avoided**, yet it's critical to leadership effectiveness. You may need to set up some Rules of Engagement before getting started, to ensure that you're on the same page.

Step 6: Embedding Feedback into Your Culture

Embedding feedback into workplace culture isn't just about communication—it's about building leadership systems that reinforce accountability, care, and trust. High-performing workplaces integrate structured feedback into performance reviews, coaching, and team check-ins. To make feedback part of everyday workplace interactions:

- ✓ Encourage **regular check-ins** where feedback is shared openly.
- ✓ Normalise **peer-to-peer feedback**, not just manager-led feedback.
- ✓ Lead by example—**give and request feedback consistently**.
- ✓ Build **psychological safety**, so people feel comfortable giving honest input.

💡 **Final Thought:** A workplace that embraces feedback isn't just more productive—it's more connected, innovative, and resilient. **Start today by giving one piece of thoughtful, constructive feedback that strengthens a relationship.**

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