

Feedback

Feedback should be a two-way, participative activity where everything that is said will be viewed as helpful and developmental. This means that the feedback should be carried out in a relaxed atmosphere, unhurried, free from tension and characterised by openness and honesty. A private and confidential setting is vital. Statements that are judgmental, accusing and patronising will immediately encounter resistance and a range of defensive behaviours, with the result that the objectives of the feedback are unlikely to be achieved.

Feedback objectives should be as follows:

- Ownership of the feedback by the recipient
- A commitment to change where desired
- Some contracting of an action plan for implementation after the feedback session.

We tend to refer to “negative” and “positive” feedback. When giving feedback on learning, it is better to use the terms “supportive” and “corrective” feedback because these fit better with the developmental ethos of coaching.

Supportive feedback is about acknowledging and praising positive behaviour, and encouraging the learner to continue using this behaviour

Corrective feedback is about helping the learner to recognize and explore solutions to problem areas

Giving feedback – some points to remember:

1. Get the timing right

Feedback should be given regularly, and in a timely fashion.

Immediate feedback

Give immediate supportive or corrective feedback to learners as you observe them properly implementing newly acquired knowledge and skills or making mistakes in doing so.

Opportune feedback

Relay feedback from other people at the earliest opportunity. For example, colleagues may comment (positively or negatively) about something your learner has said or done when you were not present. You should pass on that feedback at the earliest opportunity.

Timetabled feedback

Feedback may be given following the completion of specific period of training or project. This is more formal and more comprehensive feedback, so requires proper preparation and sufficient time.

2. Make it specific

The focus should be on behaviour, not on personality. Discuss specific actions and behaviours, and their impact.

In giving supportive feedback, be specific by saying exactly what has been done well, and how it affected you, the work area or the team. Encourage further improvement

by discussing how the learner can build upon what they have done and take it to the next level.

When giving corrective feedback, get to the point quickly, and be specific. You should state what the problem is, and where appropriate, how the problem is affecting them, you, your work area or the team. You should have specific facts at your disposal to support your comments. This avoids personal attack. Specific feedback reinforces good behaviours and helps to change undesired behaviours.

3. Mind your language

Own what you say.

Use the 'I' word and take responsibility for what you are saying. Use phrases such as - 'I want...', 'I think ..', 'I would like ..', 'I don't like...', 'I know that ...'

Avoid unhelpful phrases

Phrases such as:

'You are....'

'This is poor performance....'

'You're very weak in this area...'

'I have rarely seen a performance that bad....'

'That was awful...'.
...are personal and/or blaming.

Rather than saying, "You really messed that up", say "I'm concerned that when you did that job, you didn't use the correct tools. This meant that the job took longer, and that delayed the process, and frustrated the team." This is more specific and focuses on the issues.

Be assertive

Be aware of your rights as well as those of the other person. Don't be aggressive or overbearing but don't be apologetic or meek and mild when giving feedback.

Use positive non-verbal communication

Display appropriate body language, especially in terms of eye contact, body positioning and physical mannerisms. Also use positive tones of voice and sounds.

4. See mistakes as learning opportunities

Let the recipient identify any weakness or mistakes for themselves, and consider the benefits of change. Helping them to identify the situation for themselves is a most powerful and effective way to give feedback and will increase greatly the chances of acceptance by the coachee.

Explore options for improvement. While you might know what you want in terms of outcome, you should ask for suggestions from the recipient which will encourage ownership. (You should only present your own ideas if the situation and learner requires a directive or advising approach). Useful phrases here are:

- 'What do you think you should do?'
- 'How can you resolve this?'
- 'Let's consider the options.'

5. Agree next steps

Discuss the next stages in the learner's development, and agree actions to be taken, by when and by whom.

Obtain (if appropriate) a commitment to change with the recognition that if change is possible, the onus is on the coachee.

Establish the level of support required from you as coach.

Record the outcome of the discussion. It may be useful to draw up an action plan, or if appropriate, an improvement plan.