

## NEWS&VIEWS MARCH 2023

### How to give feedback to staff: tips and traps for managers

**Effective communication is the key to good management, especially when dealing with sensitive issues, such as giving feedback to workers**

Positive and constructive communication with staff is a critical skill that takes time to develop. It's also a constant source of learning for everyone in the workplace, especially for managers. Therefore, as a manager, it's important that you understand **how to give feedback** to staff so you can build a productive workplace culture based on effective communication.



### Why is feedback such a difficult issue?

The truth is that every employee will tell you they want feedback. They instinctively know that **feedback helps them learn and develop their skills**. However, the reality is that they don't like receiving it in many situations.

Feedback often results in **tension between a manager and the employee**, and resentment builds. For example, consider an employee who struggles with self-awareness or is sensitive to feedback. They may lose confidence quickly if they perceive the feedback is **harsh, unfair or too critical**.

It's fair to say that feedback challenges many of us, especially when we're perfectionists, have strong work ethics, or we don't like being wrong. But it's not only employees that find this a difficult topic to navigate. **Managers may also struggle to find a comfortable way to communicate feedback** to an employee. For example, if the employee often struggles with feedback, the manager may have concerns about giving any further feedback. It may cause them to deliver it without due consideration, ineffectively, abruptly, or worse.

This double-edged anxiety can lead to **miscommunication, tension and relationship breakdown**.

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## How do I improve my feedback skills?

We're all busy, and with busyness often comes **direct (unfiltered) communication**. In other words, **no sugarcoating**. Typically, time-poor managers may use direct communication to quickly get to the point so they can move on to the next task or challenge.

While some workers thrive in an environment based on this communication style, others will struggle, perceiving it as **judgment or criticism**. For managers, it highlights that the key to success is to take the time to:

1. **Develop an acute sense of awareness about your communication style.**
2. **Understand how others may perceive your communication style.**
3. **Learn what communication style best suits your staff.**
4. **Adapt your communication style accordingly.**

There's no easy way to learn the skill of giving feedback. But as managers, we must **constantly strive for improvement** and encourage our staff to do the same. It means that we need to find ways to develop our relationships with other workers and have difficult conversations without letting emotions take over.

It's critical to understand that the success of the feedback lies in how the recipient interprets it. So if they perceive the feedback to be negative, they'll have a negative reaction to it. **Adopting the other person's perspective** is an effective tool in this situation. For example, the recipient is likely to have a positive reaction if they can understand that the giver is:

- **Taking the time to explain a task.**
- **Identifying where the recipient can improve.**
- **Giving them a chance to make the changes.**

In reality, in this situation, the giver is trying to **teach the recipient the skills they need to do the job**. It's an important part of good worker management and even more effective when the manager takes care to point this out.

On the flip side, managers need to understand that the employee:

- **Has spent time and effort considering their work tasks.**
- **Doesn't have the same experience as the manager.**
- **May not have previously developed the skills to receive feedback positively.**

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## Why is it important to understand different communication styles?

Understanding each other's communication styles can help smooth the way for feedback. For example, a good manager can **adjust their communication** style to match that of the employee. And a good employee will, over time, **learn to change how they react** to feedback. It will allow a **productive and constructive relationship** to develop.

Managers and employees should **regularly check** in with each other about how feedback is given and received. These conversations are most effective when they occur when there is no need for feedback. This approach will help both parties better understand what the process will look like when it eventually happens.

## How do I give feedback to staff?

There are some key points to consider when you're giving feedback to staff:

1. **Ask** the employee how they prefer to receive feedback. Where possible, deliver the feedback in that way.
2. Don't talk about someone's **personality**. The feedback must only ever be about the behaviour.
3. Make the person aware of the **impact** of their behaviour. It's not about blame or making the person feel shame.
4. Try not to give feedback within earshot of others. Instead, lower your voice, offer privacy, and allow the employee to **maintain their dignity**.
5. Avoid speaking generally. For example, don't say, "the work you do for me is sloppy." This isn't constructive and is likely to be received as criticism. Instead, **talk about specifics**. For example, "that report you wrote for me was missing information on topic X. Otherwise, it was good work."
6. Always give **timely** feedback. Don't delay it for days or weeks. Instead, give feedback as soon as possible after reviewing the task. And **don't bombard** the worker with feedback. For example, a 2-hour feedback session is excessive.
7. Be **mindful** that using "you" frequently may make the worker feel **attacked**. Avoid phrases like "you didn't do a good job on that" or "you got that wrong".
8. Get your **timing** right. It's not ideal to catch the employee off-guard or to surprise them with feedback at the end of the work day. Instead, schedule regular catch-ups, and tell them in advance that you want to meet with them to review their work. Do your best to make the experience as pleasant as possible.
9. **Acknowledge** the person's positive impact on your team and that they have what it takes to do the task. If relevant, acknowledge your shortcomings or errors.

## The wrap-up

Personality styles differ, and managers sometimes need help in getting feedback right. It's not only about what you say. It's also about how you say it and the surrounding circumstances. So if you need assistance or have a tricky situation that you don't know how to manage, get in touch.

[We'll help you work out how to give feedback to your staff.](#)

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