



IMPROVE YOUR FEEDBACK AT WORK: HOW TO ASK FOR AND GIVE FEEDBACK EFFECTIVELY

Two Minute Reads: A series of tips that improve your performance at work in no time!

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Are your employees getting the feedback they need to be successful? Some research reports say that up to 65% of employees want more [feedback](#). Anyone who has started a new job, changed roles or begun a new project already knows that ongoing performance feedback is critical to success.

But many of us are afraid of asking for or giving feedback. After all, asking for feedback may invite unwanted criticism. We fear the ensuing insult to our sense of self-worth. Many of us would rather avoid feedback because of this risk factor.

The missing link is how to ask for specific feedback without harming our self-worth or inhibiting motivation.

Additionally, few of us receive instruction or practice in how to get or give feedback that is purposeful and non-confrontational. We assume that we have to layer what I call "emotional load" into a feedback conversation. Giving constructive feedback that builds confidence and performance instead of shame and self-doubt is challenging yet very possible.

Think about the last time you gave feedback to someone. Were you so emotionally attached to the issue that the frustration and anger came through loud and clear? Did it "drown out" some very useful feedback that? If so, step back for a moment. What if you had begun by thinking about what happened, identified your emotions and needs, and created a separate list of useful suggestions for change?

I call that a pre-feedback review. Then you could have processed the event on paper to look like this:

Pre-Feedback Review

- *What happened: What happened and what should have happened in your mind?*
- *Identify your emotions: Bullet point these.*
- *Identify your needs: Connect your strong emotions to what you needed to happen in the situation.*
- *Useful suggestions: Make a checklist of feedback suggestions to offer in a feedback conversation.*

Perhaps the closest many of us can come to understanding how to give effective feedback is the sports coaching we may have received. Many of us have experienced encouraging coaches who have given us critical feedback in a positive way.

As a contrast, some of us have received coaching that hurt our self-esteem and diminished our personal motivation. What to do? I have developed a brief framework for ensuring an effective feedback approach for receiving and giving feedback.

A Framework for Giving and Receiving Feedback

1. First, reduce the “emotional load” of asking for or giving feedback. You don’t have to plead, look apologetic, or alternatively appear armed for battle. Just be yourself. Complete a pre-feedback review before you begin.

2. Think of asking or giving feedback as helpful—a way to prevent problems going forward. A check-in as progress occurs. Before you ask for or give feedback, breath, relax and remember that you are interested in improvement.

3. Use a calm voice to ask for feedback. Soften your posture and eyes—and lean into the conversation. We all need feedback to improve.

4. Getting feedback: Here are several “key phrases” to consider using to get the feedback you need:

- “I would like to plan a time to review and improve my performance on this project. When is good?”
- “Can you give me some specific feedback on how I am doing on this project?”
- “Can you tell me what I am doing well and what I can improve on with this project?”

4. **Giving feedback:** many of us procrastinate or worse, offer insincere appreciation. We sugar-coat the feedback and avoid the richness that critical feedback can provide. Instead of doing this, think about the art of giving feedback as a *giving assistance* instead of a rebuke or criticism. Develop your own natural approach to giving feedback. Here are some great "key phrases" to start with:

- "Let's plan a time to connect on the project. Can you prepare a list of questions, concerns or issues to share?"
- "I have some helpful feedback for you.
- "I have feedback for you on what is going well, and how to improve a few problem areas..."

5. **Keep the feedback conversation informal:** yet on-track.

Once you meet:

- Name the feedback subject again .
- Talk about why the subject is important enough to review. You can name your emotion without *expressing* the emotion.
- Be sure to bring this from you pre-feedback review and review the list:
Useful suggestions: Make a checklist of feedback suggestions to offer in a feedback conversation.
- Ask for feedback and actively listen.
- Work through concerns and problems.
- Resolve to move ahead with the best solutions you can agree on.
- Thank the other for listening.
- Create a check-back date to review progress.

There you go. The main idea is to remember that the purpose and intent of effective feedback is to improve performance *and* reduce anxiety and stress. Approach it that way and you will improve your natural feedback skills.

CLI's seasoned and experienced partners Dr. Susan Cain and Dr. Tim Buividas provide coaching and customized training to develop the performance of your people. Visit us at corplearning.com.