

Giving and Receiving Feedback

short guide



Feedback is an essential tool to help us learn new skills and improve existing ones. Like most things, giving inexperienced feedback can hinder rather than help. Many of us also struggle to take feedback. We can find it hard to accept praise and it's easy to get defensive when we're given negative criticism.

The tips in this guide will help you to not only give feedback constructively but also make the most of any feedback given to you.

Giving Feedback

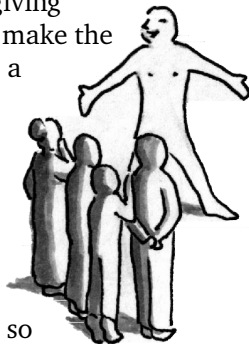
Remember that your feedback is about helping someone else to learn – check with yourself that it's given in that spirit.

Always start with the positive – everyone needs encouragement and affirmation. Giving this first helps make us more receptive to being told what could be improved. Also, many of us aren't very good at recognising our own abilities, so it's important to tell people what they are doing well and what their strengths are.

Be honest. There's simply no point in saying “that was great!” whilst thinking “that was awful!”. The person you're giving feedback to won't learn anything and will only make the same mistakes in future, thinking they're doing a good job.

Be specific. Rather than making general comments such as “that was brilliant” try to pinpoint what the person did that was brilliant (or awful) and what effect it had on you.

e.g. “I really liked how well you prepared your talk, however I found it hard to take in so much data in such a short time.”



Own your feedback and accept that you can only ever speak from your own perspective. You're in no position to make universal judgements. Begin with “I” or “In my opinion”.

If you're giving feedback to a group, **direct comments to named individuals** where appropriate. We learn better when feedback is made relevant to us.

Limit your comments to criticising what people did and not who they are. In other words **criticise people's actions or behaviour but not their personalities!** There's a world of difference between saying “you didn't do that very well” and “you're useless”.

Taking Feedback

Be open to constructive feedback – we can learn a lot from it.

Listen to the feedback. Hear the positive as well as the negative. Make sure you understand what is being said. Ask if you're unclear about what is being said or want more feedback about a specific aspect.

Try not to get defensive or counter every negative point with an excuse or explanation (what we call *feedback tennis*). Remember that the feedback is there to help you learn.

If you're finding the feedback difficult, ask for it to stop.

Thank the person for giving the feedback.

Decide what you will do as a result of the feedback (both positive and negative) – what changes will you make?

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