

How to give and receive feedback

People are sometimes reluctant to provide feedback for fear of offending others or creating conflict. Likewise, hearing feedback can sometimes cause one to feel defensive. However, when properly given, feedback can be an invaluable tool to help others improve and succeed.

Like all skills, giving and receiving feedback is something that can be improved with preparation and practice. Below is some information to help you start down the right path.

Before giving feedback:

- Check your intentions and consider the goal of providing feedback. Ensure your goal is positive; for example, you plan to support someone or solve a problem. Give feedback because you care enough to help the person succeed.
- Ensure you are in an appropriate emotional state for the conversation. Consider how you are feeling about the situation you need to provide feedback on. Are the feelings you are experiencing based on what is happening now or reminding you of something in the past? If you are feeling upset, angry, or frustrated take a breather and wait to address it until you feel calmer.

The best feedback is intended to help someone.

Effective feedback clearly and objectively describes actions or behaviours that people can change.

- Effective feedback is timely. It is as closely timed to an event where the behaviour you want to address took place so that it is easier to remember for both parties.
- Ask permission to engage the other person in the conversation. Example: “There is something that I need to talk with you about. Is now a good time?”
- Find an appropriate space to provide feedback. Have the conversation in a private setting; avoid doing it publicly.

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Providing feedback:

- Let the person know your intention behind providing the feedback.
 - If you can make it safe in the first 30 seconds of a conversation you have a 97% chance of a good conversation. A great resource to read is a book written by Joseph Grenny called Crucial Conversations. Here is a [YouTube video](#) that outlines how to make a conversation feel safe.
- “People never get defensive with you because of what you are saying. People get defensive because of why they think you are saying it. It is their belief of your intent, not the content, that provokes defensiveness. Your job is to reassure them about your intent and to purify the content.”***
- Joseph Grenny (Crucial Conversations)**
- Provide a clear and specific example of the behaviour on which you are providing feedback. Start with tangible, objective facts. What did you see, hear, touch, or experience? Use ‘I’ statements. Describe what you saw, heard, and felt. If you start a sentence with “I”, it creates a less defensive conversation rather than using “you” which can sound like blaming, judgements and accusations. Example: “When I was on the phone with a client yesterday, you opened my door and started asking me questions.”
 - Focus on specific behaviour, i.e. what or how something was done, not why. Focusing on the person and their intentions can create defensiveness. Example: “I noticed you have been late to our team meetings. I thought that as a team we all agreed to be on time for meetings. Can we talk about it? What support do you need?”
 - Do not generalize. Avoid terms like “always”, “never” and “all”. Again, be specific.
 - Feedback does not always mean providing advice. It is discussing something you saw, heard or felt. You can create an atmosphere where the person can ask you for advice and or you may ask, “Would you like some advice?”
 - Make a request at the end of the feedback for what you need them to do differently. Example: “In the future, if I am on a call or in a meeting, can you please knock on the door and wait for me to answer?”
 - Consider having an exit strategy. Should you feel that the conversation is increasing tension, you no longer feel safe or the conversation is no longer productive, have a plan on how to end the conversation and leave.
 - Suggestions on how to end the conversation include:
 - “I would like to leave it here.” Or “I am going to end the meeting and leave the room now”
 - Why you are going to do it:
 - “I feel this conversation is no longer productive”. Or “I am sensing that this conversation is creating further tension. Let’s end it here and we can reconvene at another time. (your intent).
 - “I have enough information right now. I would like to take some time to reflect and then get back to you.”
 - What you will do next:
 - “I will be in contact with you in the next few days to follow up.”

Receiving feedback:

- Assume the best intentions of the person providing you feedback. It can be uncomfortable to provide feedback, but it can be a gift to help you succeed.
- Fear of having to deal with defensiveness is typically a reason people don't want to provide feedback. Creating a space of learning from feedback will support you in going into it with less of a defensive nature. Be approachable. People avoid giving feedback to people who are not approachable. Your openness is showcased through body language, facial expressions and welcoming manner.
- Listen to hear and understand. Practice all of the skills of an effective listener including using body language and facial expressions.
- Summarize and reflect on what you hear so that the feedback provider knows they are being heard.
- Focus on understanding the feedback by questioning and restating – this also can help diffuse any feelings of defensiveness you may have. Ask clarifying questions. Ask for an example that illustrates the feedback if you are unclear.
- Thank the person providing you with feedback. Be a model for how to receive feedback.
- If you find yourself becoming defensive or hostile from the feedback, try stress management techniques such as imagining you are distanced from the situation, are viewing it from a balcony.
- Just because someone gives you feedback, does not mean their feedback is right. They see your actions but interpret them through their own perceptual screen in life experiences.
- If you truly disagree with the feedback, let the other person know you would like to take some time to think about what they said so that you can discuss further at a later time.

Even if you had the best intentions behind how or why you did something, be open to hearing that the impact of your actions on others may have been negative.