

## Guidelines for giving constructive feedback<sup>1</sup>

---

The purpose for giving feedback is **to improve the situation or performance. Constructive feedback is information-specific, issue-focused, and based on your observations!**

That is not to say you must always be positive. There is a role for negativity and even anger if someone is not paying sufficient attention to what you are saying. However, this should be used sparingly. You will most often get much more from people when your approach is positive and focused on improvement.

**In positive feedback situations, express appreciation.** Positive feedback is news or input to a coach about an effort well-done; appreciation alone is praise. Yet, when you add it to the specifics of constructive feedback, your message will carry extra sincerity.

**In negative feedback situations, express concern.** Negative feedback is news to a coach about an effort that needs improvement. Negative feedback does not mean a terrible performance, but rather a performance in which the outcomes delivered should be better. Thus, negative is not a negative word in this case.

### Feedback Rules

- ✓ **Be sure to keep notes** (see observation tool) on the performance feedback that you give. It helps you track what is happening in people's performance rather than relying on your memory.
- ✓ **In your first sentence, identify the topic or issue that the feedback will be about.**
- ✓ **Start off with something positive.** This helps put the person at ease. It also lets them "see" what success looks like and this helps them to take the right steps next time.
- ✓ **Give at least as much positive feedback as you do negative.** Positive feedback stimulates the reward centers in the brain, leaving the recipient open to taking new direction. Meanwhile, negative feedback indicates that an adjustment needs to be made and the threat response turns on and defensiveness sets in. You do not need to avoid negative, or corrective, feedback altogether. Just make sure you follow it up with a suggested solution or outcome.
- ✓ **Provide the specifics of what occurred.** Without the specifics, you only have praise or criticism. Start each key point with an "I" message, such as, "I have noticed," "I have observed," "I have seen". "I" messages help you be issue-focused and get into the specifics. People generally respond better to specific, positive direction. Tell the person exactly what they need to improve on; this ensures that you stick to facts and there is less room for ambiguity.
- ✓ **State observations, not interpretations.** Observations are what you see occur; interpretations are your analysis or opinion of what you see occur. Tell what you have noticed, not what you think of it, and report the behavior you notice at a concrete level, instead of as a characterization of the behavior. Observations have a far more factual and nonjudgmental aspect than do interpretations.
- ✓ **Be sincere and avoid giving mixed messages.** Sincerity says that you mean what you say with care and respect. Mixed messages are referred to as "yes, but" messages. In essence, putting "but" in the middle tells the other person, "Don't believe a thing I said before." Try not to exaggerate to make a point. Avoid words like "never", "all" and "always" because the person will get defensive. Always discuss the direct impact of the behavior and don't get personal or seek to blame.

---

<sup>1</sup> The text is taken and adjusted from the following sources:

Brounstein, M. (2017). Giving Constructive Feedback. Accessed on 20.02.2017 from

<http://www.dummies.com/business/human-resources/employee-relations/giving-constructive-feedback/>

Halford, S. (2011). Five steps for giving productive feedback. Accessed on 20.02.2017 from

<https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/219437>

Mind Tools (2017). Giving Feedback. Accessed on 20.02.2017 from

[https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMM\\_98.htm](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMM_98.htm)



- ✓ **Be direct when delivering your message.** Get to the point and avoid beating around the bush. Both negative and positive feedback should be given in a straightforward manner.
- ✓ A **tone of concern** communicates a sense of importance and care and provides the appropriate level of sincerity to the message. Tones such as anger, frustration, disappointment, and the ever-popular sarcasm tend to color the language of the message and turn attempts at negative feedback into criticism. The purpose of negative feedback is to create awareness that can lead to correction or improvement in performance. If you can't give negative feedback in a helpful manner, in the language and tone of concern, you defeat its purpose.
- ✓ **Make sure you both know what needs to be done to improve the training.** The main message should be that you care and want to help the person grow and develop. Set goals and make plans to monitor and evaluate progress. Stick to behaviors the person can actually change or influence. → See follow-up coaching tool "agreements"!