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HR GUIDE

How to Give Constructive Feedback: A Guide for Managers & HR



Feedback Fuels Productivity and Engagement

Time and again, [research shows](#) that company culture is a [defining factor](#) in employee retention and engagement and, ultimately, business success. However, although the Great Resignation is over, employee engagement has fallen over the past few years to its lowest rate in more than a decade — just [30% of U.S. employees](#) are engaged, and 17% are actively disengaged. Employees point to less clarity about what's expected of them at work, less connection to their companies' mission, and a lack of someone who cares about them at work as catalysts for declining engagement.

So, what can you do to turn this trend around? **Give lots and lots of feedback — and ask for it in return.**

Giving employees regular feedback, as well as getting it from them, is integral to building a culture that supports and motivates them to do their best. It builds trust and connections, clarifies expectations, and improves productivity. All of that leads to increased engagement and a workforce with everything they need to achieve their goals.

That's why continuous, constructive feedback is a must, and it's why we've created this guide to show you how it's done. You'll learn more about the benefits of feedback, some rules to follow when giving it, and concrete tips on how to structure feedback conversations.



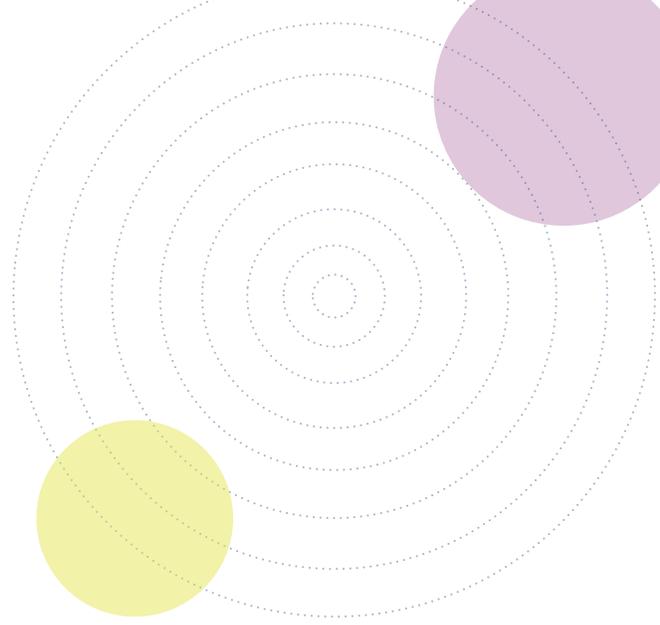


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The Benefits of Continuous Feedback

Employees don't just need feedback more than once a year during performance reviews — 92% say they want it.

Rest assured that your people will appreciate and benefit from efforts to increase performance discussions, and so will the business. What could your company accomplish when you reap the benefits of continuous feedback?

1 Opens up communication

Despite the research showing how much people desire helpful feedback, whether it's good or bad, that doesn't mean it's easy to do. But it's worth it to push through the discomfort and integrate continuous feedback into your performance management strategy. The more your managers give and ask for feedback, the more it becomes the norm and, thus, a part of company culture.

2 Builds confidence and trust

One of the factors contributing to the declining employee engagement rate is that fewer employees feel someone at work cares about them. Regular feedback can help dispel this notion for your direct reports. Checking in often and ensuring they have what they need to do their best are excellent ways to show employees that your organization cares about their success.

“

People overestimate the negative consequences of giving feedback for themselves, as well as underestimate the benefits for the other person. This misunderstanding persists even when the feedback giver and receiver know each other well.”

Francesca Gino
Harvard Business School

3 Key to an agile, adaptable workforce

Frequent check-ins and performance conversations ensure your people are always aware of how their work impacts business goals or why those goals even exist in the first place. With this line of sight, your people are better equipped to be flexible when goals change, or new priorities arise. Instead of annoyance or confusion, they understand why these changes are happening and can quickly adapt.

4 Ensures goal alignment

Every individual works on goals that contribute to departmental goals, which roll up to business goals. Regular feedback ensures that these goals stay aligned and no one person gets off track, spending valuable time on work that doesn't further business objectives. During these conversations, take the opportunity to connect the dots and show your employees how achieving their goals enables business success.

2 in 10

Only two in ten employees say their company's performance management practices motivate them to do great work.

8 Guiding Principles for Giving Feedback



Did you know that 70% of managers say they're uncomfortable giving employees face-to-face feedback?

It's not just negative feedback that's making them nervous — owning their own mistakes, giving directions, and even giving praise can be nerve-wracking, too. Luckily, there are some proven strategies you can turn to when talking about performance gets stressful.

Take a closer look at eight guiding principles for giving employee feedback.

1 Prepare, prepare, prepare.

The best way to ensure you give constructive feedback is by preparing for performance conversations. Formal annual and semiannual reviews require more preparation and should include reviewing past evaluations, understanding goal achievement, and getting feedback from other sources. Managers should arrive prepared with their feedback and have action items in mind.

Informal performance discussions, like during one-on-ones, also benefit from a little bit of prep time. Review notes from the previous check-in, take a look at their goal progress, or work with the employee to create a quick agenda so you're both on the same page.

2 Give more of it.

As with learning any new skill, practice makes perfect — so the more you give feedback, the easier it will become. You don't even need to limit yourself to weekly one-on-ones. Send a quick Slack message to check in or ask for a project update via email so you can formulate feedback.

3 Don't put it off.

Timeliness is one of the most important elements of constructive feedback. After all, how useful can your input be if it comes months after the deadline passed or the project was completed? Give feedback as soon as possible in an appropriate setting. In some cases, that could be a quick comment in a Google Doc or a 15-minute phone call outside of your regular weekly meeting.

4 Be specific.

If you want to give helpful feedback, specificity is a must. A vague "Great job on the project!" doesn't help employees understand their strengths compared to if you said, "Great job managing deadlines and keeping the team on track so we could complete the project before it was due!"



70% of managers say they're uncomfortable giving employees face-to-face feedback.

5 Be corrective, not critical.

Performance conversations often mean calling employees' attention to mistakes or areas for improvement. Taking the conversation in a negative direction can be challenging, and you never know how employees will respond. Be sure to remain corrective, offering guidance for improving or rectifying the mistake rather than criticizing your employees.



80% of employees who say they received meaningful feedback in the previous week are **fully engaged** at work.

6 Make an action plan.

Before ending any performance conversation, plan for what to do next to continue the employee's progress. Give them some action items, reconfigure the goal they were struggling with, or decide to discuss the project again at the next weekly check-in. Be sure to write down your plan and follow up on its execution.

7 Take notes.

Taking notes during or right after feedback conversations helps ensure these are constructive conversations and makes it easier to follow up on what was said. Whether an employee is facing termination or you're making a case for a promotion, your notes are essential documentation, a record of the feedback you've given and what happened as a result. Notes also help ensure action items are completed and hold everyone accountable for doing their part.

8 Follow up.

Use your notes to follow up on the action items or plan you discussed with the employee. You don't need to have another formal performance review to do so — it can be as simple as a check-in during your weekly one-on-one with the employee or an email update. Whatever the case, don't leave employees hanging if you want to give constructive feedback.



How to Structure Your Feedback

Only 16% of employees said their last conversation with their managers was meaningful.

The structure of employee feedback can help or hurt its effectiveness. You want employees to listen to what you have to say and understand the next steps they need to take. You also want them to leave the conversation feeling encouraged and supported, not uncertain or discouraged.

Try these tips for structuring feedback so you can have more productive conversations.

1 Review progress and offer support.

First, check in about your employee's progress toward their goals or the specific project or deliverable they're working on. Are they on track to meet the goal or make the deadline? Ask how you can help get answers, remove roadblocks, or provide resources. Encourage them on their progress so far, and let them know you're always available to support them.

2 Give constructive feedback and address challenges.

You might have noticed you need to provide some guidance to your direct report, or they may be asking for it. Either way, it's important to give feedback that helps them move forward.

For example, imagine your employee is having trouble finalizing a sale and needs pointers on how to seal the deal. You might step in during a client meeting, chime in on an email thread, or coordinate a meeting between the would-be client and one of your happy clients to move the conversation to the next step.

3 Provide positive feedback and acknowledge accomplishments.

After discussing how they're progressing and giving constructive feedback, wrap up the conversation on a positive note. Provide encouragement about their progress toward a tough goal, thank them for leading a recent meeting, or let them know you've noticed their growth in a particular skill.

The SBI Model for Feedback

The SBI Model is one popular way to structure feedback so it's clear, concise, and constructive. You can use the SBI Model for both positive and constructive feedback. Here's how it works:

- ✔ **Situation:** First, describe the situation to give your feedback context.
- ✔ **Behavior:** Describe the behavior you saw without making judgments and focusing instead on the employee's specific actions.
- ✔ **Impact:** Explain how the behavior affects others, whether that's a colleague, team, or the business as a whole.

Allow the employee to respond to your feedback, then create a plan for rectifying problem behaviors or continuing positive ones.

Receiving Feedback as a Manager

According to Harvard Business Review, one's ability to listen to productive feedback, whether positive or negative, is “a hallmark of a successful leader.”

Opening yourself up to feedback from direct reports helps foster transparent communication, which builds trust and shows employees that their input is valued. It also increases the likelihood that they'll be receptive to your comments about their performance.

To encourage your people to give you feedback, ask them often and let them know it's helpful for both of you to hear where you could improve. They offer a different perspective that you might not have considered — or they may reinforce areas for improvement you've been working on already.

Respond to their feedback by taking it seriously and letting them know what you'll do to address it. Then, follow up with them to find out if the changes you've made are having the desired effect and to let employees know that their feedback matters to you.

When you give and receive useful, frequent feedback, you motivate your employees, improve productivity, and help your business achieve its goals.



Feedback Fits In With ClearCompany Performance Management

With ClearCompany, your team can access all the tools you need to deliver continuous constructive feedback at every stage of the employee lifecycle, including 1:1 Workspaces, Shout Outs and Celebrations, and Goal Planning.

Sign up for a demo of ClearCompany Performance Management to see our feedback tools in action.

[Schedule a demo](#)

