

TIPS FOR GIVING FEEDBACK TO YOUR PEERS

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FEEDBACK WANTED

There are a couple myths about feedback I'd like to dispel up front. First is that feedback is the delivery of bad news. Second is that feedback is what a teacher gives to the student or a manager gives to their subordinate. Both are partly true, but each misses the bigger picture.

- **Feedback is negative:** Simply put, feedback is when the effect of some action is returned to change future actions. Certainly the feedback can communicate bad news, that the action was not effective and different actions are needed in the future. But feedback can be positive as well—the action was effective and more of it is needed in the future.
- **Feedback comes from the teacher or manager:** Absolutely true! But it misses the point that feedback between yourself and your peers or coworkers is as, or more, important. Peer feedback includes the two-way discussions in which we decide on or clarify our goals and methods, create and refine new ideas, report and assess the progress we're making. In fact, according to Roger Schwarz, a widely recognized expert in teamwork, the manager or team leader's job is primarily to ensure team members provide "regular constructive feedback" to one another. "There needs to be an expectation within the team this is a shared leadership responsibility" (#2)

It is hard for most of us to give useful constructive feedback. Fears of causing your peers to feel uncomfortable, or damaging your relationships often leads us to clam up. So we need to remind ourselves that feedback is something that most of us actually want. Researchers found that 3 of every 4 employees view feedback as a means of improving their performance. And over 90% of people believe negative or "corrective" feedback is effective to improve performance, if delivered correctly. (#1 Zenger/Folkman surveys of 1,000 and 4,000 employees).

HOW TO GIVE FEEDBACK

There is no lack of advice out there about how to give feedback that is heard, digested, and used. I will keep this to just a few key ideas to keep in mind. The first, from Zenger and Folkman (#1), is what I believe is the most important.

"If your feedback is shared constructively and with genuine care for the other person, you're doing it right."

The second point is stated in various ways by different experts. But Hannah Fleishman put it very succinctly.

"Make it [feedback] about the What, not the Who" (#3)

The "What" here refers to one's behaviors or actions and the consequences (#4). Behaviors and actions can be observed by both the giver and receiver of feedback. We can agree on what happened if our feedback is based on observable behaviors. In contrast, if your feedback focuses on attitudes, beliefs or

characteristics it will be challenged, regardless of its usefulness. If you don't believe me, consider how you react to receiving these two feedbacks.

1. When you miss deadlines you agreed to, I am uncomfortable assigning you key tasks.
2. When you are lazy, I am uncomfortable assigning you key tasks.

THE PEER FEEDBACK MODEL

Michael Auzenne and Mark Horstman (#4) from Manager Tools (www.manager-tools.com) present a special model for giving peer feedback, as opposed to more top down subordinate feedback. I recommend listening to the [full podcast](#), but here are the key points and some examples.

The Peer Feedback Model is based on peers "sharing" their thoughts with one another to help others act more effectively in the future. While a manager is usually asking the person to change behaviors (explicitly or implicitly), as peers we are providing observations for the person to consider. The feedback must be specific, observable and non-judgmental.

The model includes two steps, plus a third optional part. Here are some positive and corrective examples drawn from actual student comments entered in PeerAssessment.Com. (with some modifications)

1. State the behavior you observed (When you ...)	2. Describe the impact on yourself and others (Here's what happened ...)	3. (optional) Recommend an alternative to consider (I find that doing ...)
When you help us organize the tasks to complete ...	It gets everyone on the same page and helps us clarify who is responsible for what.	
When you start off each discussion with your opinion ...	I am not comfortable voicing my thoughts if they are different.	I appreciate it when whoever starts the discussion just states the question and asks others for their thoughts, before giving their own.
When you start a conversation with just one person during our meetings ...	It distracts me and gives me the impression you are not interested in helping the team.	
You summarize our task assignments at the end of each meeting ...	Which energizes me to do a good job because I am confident others will contribute.	I would like to see us put that in an email right away as well.
When you don't complete your tasks for the meeting ...	It makes me feel stressed out and the group loses time trying to do it for you.	

IN CONCLUSION

Keep in mind the following when you give feedback to your peers:

- We need and want feedback from others, both positive as well as negative or “constructive” feedback.
- Giving feedback is everyone’s responsibility.
- Share your feedback with caring and respect for the other person.
- Your feedback is about the person’s observable behaviors, not them as a person.
- Form your feedback in three parts:
 - (a) State the behavior
 - (b) Describe the impacts
 - (c) Recommend an alternative

REFERENCES

- #1 Jack Zenger, Joseph Folkman (January 15, 2014) Your Employees Want the Negative Feedback You Hate to Give, *Harvard Business Review*. Retrieved on 1/11/2020 from <https://hbr.org/2014/01/your-employees-want-the-negative-feedback-you-hate-to-give>
- #2 Rebecca Knight. (June 16, 2014). How to Give Your Team Feedback, *Harvard Business Review*. Retrieved on 1/11/2020 from <https://hbr.org/2014/06/how-to-give-your-team-feedback>
- #3 Hannah Fleishman. (July 28 2017). How to Give Negative Feedback Without Sounding Like a Jerk. Hubspot.com. Retrieved on 1/11/2020 from <https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/giving-negative-feedback-tips>
- #4 www.manager-tools.com (October 22, 2006). The Peer Feedback Model. Manager Tools, Burke Virginia. Retrieved on 1/11/2020 from <https://www.manager-tools.com/2006/10/the-peer-feedback-model> (*Manager Tools is a consulting company that provides free weekly podcasts intended to provide “managers and individual contributors actionable recommendations to further their careers.”*)