
Tool Kit item 5 - Providing Effective Feedback

The purpose of feedback is to continually reflect on and improve performance. It is recognised that feedback influences behaviour and motivates performance.

Feedback is important, as past behaviour is the best indicator of future behaviour; unless something intervenes to alter our perspective, we will not change. This does not always mean that feedback is 'good', but it should be delivered in a way that builds self-esteem and promotes awareness, reflection and learning. Thus, effective feedback acknowledges the successful aspects of performance as well as considering what can be improved.

To be effective, feedback is...

Regular – Like performance review and development, giving and receiving feedback will have limited effect or benefit if it is provided only once a year – it needs to be provided on an ongoing basis and not limited to formal meetings/reviews.

Immediate – If feedback is given as soon as possible after an event, it will have greater impact and opportunity for reflection and change if relevant. It will also allow feedback to be more specific, as details will be more relevant and readily available.

Specific – When telling someone specifically what they did, or did not do, be sure to describe and focus on the behaviour, action and subsequent impact. Do not generalise your feedback, and do not judge the person.

Empathic – Feedback should be given with consideration to the perspective of the receiver. Understand your own perspective or biases and consider any context/circumstance for the receiver.

Planned – Make sure you have gathered necessary information to provide effective feedback, and ensure you deliver it at the right time, in the right place. Check facts before you provide feedback to ensure accuracy of information.

There are essentially two types of feedback

Positive

This applies where a person has performed well. It consists of praise but is more powerful if it is used to highlight why or how the job was done well, and how it linked to expected outcomes or behaviours. The more specific the feedback, the more the individual will learn about their behaviour. Use this to reinforce good performance.

Constructive

This applies where a person has not performed or behaved in line with expectations and is used to highlight where and why performance was not up to expectations, to explore learnings on how it might be done better next time. When describing the person's action, it is important to focus on specific observable facts. Use it as a constructive way of improving future performance.

To make the most of a feedback session, be sure that you:

- Are focused and well prepared.
- Have all the facts on hand.
- Are clear on your approach.
- Consider the individual, their context, their feelings and opinions. Go into the session with an open mind.
- Control your own emotions – don't lose your cool. Talk when you are calm and objective.
- Choose a time when you are at your best and you think the other party will be most receptive. Check you both have time to give your full attention to the feedback session.
- Take leadership and ownership of the feedback you are about to give or receive. Use 'I think' openers, rather than 'You are' statements.

Giving constructive feedback

Knowing how to communicate feedback appropriately is a critical part of the performance and development process. Collecting the right information and knowing what effective feedback consists of is only half the battle – you still need to negotiate your way around delivering your constructive comments.

Supervisors/managers - when providing feedback, remember to:

- Prepare yourself and your staff for the feedback session.
- Describe the actual behaviour in question.
- Describe the impact of the behaviour.
- Describe what you would like to see happening instead.
- Set a goal and start to coach your staff into achieving that goal.
- Provide feedback privately.
- Be specific about the behaviour or action that was appropriate/inappropriate and explain the impact.
- Be aware of how the feedback is being received and recognise whether it would be useful to reconvene later (i.e. allow time for the feedback to be absorbed).
- Check the accuracy of the information you are using – do not simply rely on word of mouth.
- Focus on the future – determine strategies for improved performance and gain agreement on how to handle the situation if it were to occur again.
- Try to deal with one issue at a time – select the aspect of performance that is most critical to achieving the objectives.
- Develop a team culture that is open to, and willing to accept, constructive feedback.

Receiving feedback effectively

When most people think of feedback, they imagine that they are the person offering it to others. The reality, however, is that we will also receive feedback from our own supervisors/managers, co-workers and other staff. It is for this reason that being able to receive feedback effectively is important for us all.

When receiving positive feedback:

- Allow the person giving the feedback to talk; listen attentively while they do so.
- Ask for specific details; make sure you understand the behaviour about which you are receiving information.
- If the feedback relates to personal attributes, ask the person to describe the behaviour that was appropriate.

When receiving constructive feedback:

- Allow the person giving the feedback to talk; listen attentively while they do so.
- Ask for specific details; make sure you understand the behaviour about which you are receiving information.
- If the feedback relates to a personal attribute, ask the person to describe the behaviour that they would like you to change.

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- If the feedback does not appear constructive, say so, and ask the person to provide some constructive comments that would help you to make some changes.
 - Be open to the feedback, ask for specific examples and, if you need, respond after you have had time to reflect on the issues raised. Responding defensively will not establish an environment where the other person will feel comfortable giving you feedback and will hinder learning and behavioural change.
 - Where appropriate, follow through on the advice and suggestions given to you.