Giving and Receiving Feedback

"Giving and receiving feedback in an effective, productive and empathetic way is a skill that needs to be refined."

Feedback is critical for performance. If you don't have the feedback from your own team, then you don't really understand what needs to be done to increase productivity and maintain a healthy organizational culture.

Having a healthy feedback loop starts with one thing: Vulnerability. If you're leading a team, it can feel unnatural to admit that, perhaps, you're not all-knowing. The kind of leader who is reflective, insightful and willing to listen is rare, but organizational assessments depend on reliable feedback, which can only come from people who feel comfortable sharing it.

Another key to healthy feedback is understanding your team's personality styles. Does one person dominate every conversation and charge forward with tough conversations? Does another person keep their thoughts to themselves in team meetings, require prompting to share opinions and prefer those tough conversations happen one-on-one? Think carefully about each member of your team and how they'd best react to giving and receiving feedback.

The final key to feedback: Having a culture that embraces transparent, direct and timely feedback. Having a space where feedback is given and received constructively requires constant practice and recognition. But the important thing is, with some guidance, it can be improved upon.
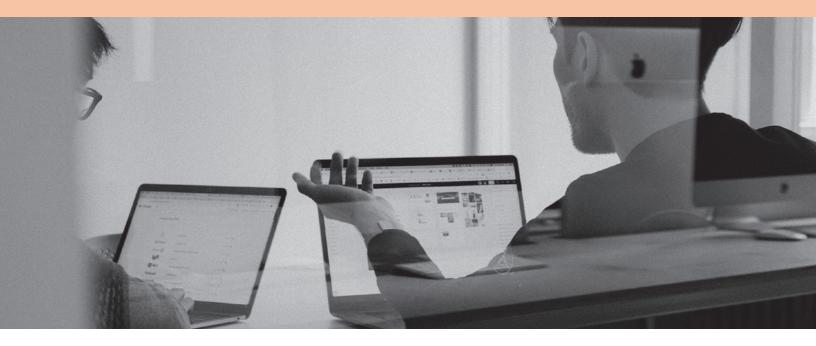
The 3 keys to giving feedback

Giving constructive feedback is tough and takes a lot of emotional fortitude and training. Here are the steps to getting there:

1. **Have a high degree of transparency.** Be able to approach someone in a candid way in the right context, which means knowing whether the feedback you have is best given one-on-one or is appropriate to do in front of a group. You'll have to consider the person's personality style: Will they feel embarrassed if they're praised or given criticism in front of others? Will they be likely to shut down the conversation if you speak to them one-on-one? Give yourself and the recipient the best chance at being able to listen and understand your message.

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2. **Make it face-to-face whenever possible.** In today's world of remote work, sometimes being in the same room as another staffer isn't possible. But jumping on a video call is a reasonable alternative. We all communicate with more than words, so the important part is to increase the emotional, physical and other non-verbal cues you and the other person have to communicate with each other. Don't fall victim to the ease of sending an email. Instead, take advantage of the opportunity to create an emotional memory.

3. **Practice empathy.** You may or may not have a positive message to send, so understand how the other person might feel about what it is you're saying. Phrase any feedback in a way that's not about the person, but instead about performance or an action taken. A failed sales call, for example, does not happen because a staffer is a bad person; it happens because they may need coaching on what to say.

The 3 keys to receiving feedback

If someone gives you feedback that's well-thought-out, focused on the action or task and done candidly, it's less likely you'll get more of it if you react negatively or don't respond at all. Feedback is a two-way conversation, so here are the steps to being a good recipient:

1. **Make sure you're open to hearing feedback.** Consider your body language — are your arms crossed? Are you leaning away from the conversation? — and your tone of voice. Stay measured and amiable so you can truly hear what the person has to say.

2. **Before processing, seek to understand.** Listen to the feedback. Don't seek a way out of the conversation as quickly as possible. Be curious and ask questions so you can get to the root of a concern, if needed, and do your best to see a situation from the speaker's point of view.

3. **Restate the person's statement.** It's a good idea to start this by saying, "I'm hearing you say X, and I could have improved upon that by doing Y." You do not have to agree with the statement, but you can acknowledge the speaker's point of view in a positive way by saying you understand and heard the feedback.