

The Fundamentals of Feedback

Commenting on your employees' performance can be intimidating, yet it's one of the most effective ways you can interact with and motivate your team. Discover how to give feedback that's constructive, inspiring, and leads to results.

Characteristics of Effective vs. Ineffective Feedback

Whether your comments are positive or negative, how and when you deliver feedback to your employees is crucial. Here's what can make or break the effectiveness of your feedback:

Timely vs. Delayed: It's best to give feedback while the details are still fresh, and context is intact. Putting off a discussion or postponing praise diminishes relevance and may be dismissed by the receiver.

Clear vs. Ambiguous: Communicate directly and sincerely, as it leaves no room for confusion or opportunities for misinterpretation. If appropriate, email a synopsis of your discussion to solidify your points.

Subjective vs. Personal: Stay focused on what the person did, not who they are. Pointing to their character or a personality trait can feel critical or offensive and could damage your relationship.

Detailed vs. Vague: Use specifics, including pertinent examples or evidence. Broad, detached comments that could apply to anything won't lead to a particular outcome or motivate further.

Observable vs. Inferable: Feedback should involve behavior or outcomes you can see or measure, not assumptions or speculation.

Actionable vs. Aimless: Feedback sessions should include a way forward with clear-cut expectations and an action plan. Having a conversation with no formal direction can lead to more issues for low performers and may cause a high performer to become complacent.

Affecting your effectiveness

Given the differences described above, let's look at a few examples of what it looks like to shift the tone of your message from ineffective to effective.

Ineffective

You've missed a lot of deadlines recently.

It's difficult to get a hold of you and people are starting to complain.

Nice job on the updated training manual!

I noticed you send emails during off-hours, and I'm concerned that you don't have a handle on things.

You dominate the conversation during meetings.

Effective

I noticed that you missed the last three deadlines for our current project. The due dates were agreed to ahead of time, so I'm wondering what got in the way.

In the last week, two clients complained that you haven't returned their calls. This is unlike you. Has something changed that I can help with?

The new training manual looks great! Thank you for the time I know you put in to updating the policy section and streamlining instruction sets. The team will certainly benefit from your attention to detail.

I know it's challenging to juggle everything, but I'm concerned about your work-life balance. Can we take a closer look at your deliverables and reassess your workload?

During team meetings, I like to hear from everyone and want to ensure you all have a chance to speak.

While providing feedback is a highly valuable management tool to further employees' success and satisfaction, it's not often something managers look forward to. This is common and very understandable, which is why your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is here to help. Call any time day or night for tips and expert guidance on giving feedback to your employees, confidently and constructively.

The EAP is a voluntary and confidential employee benefit available to eligible federal employees at no cost.

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