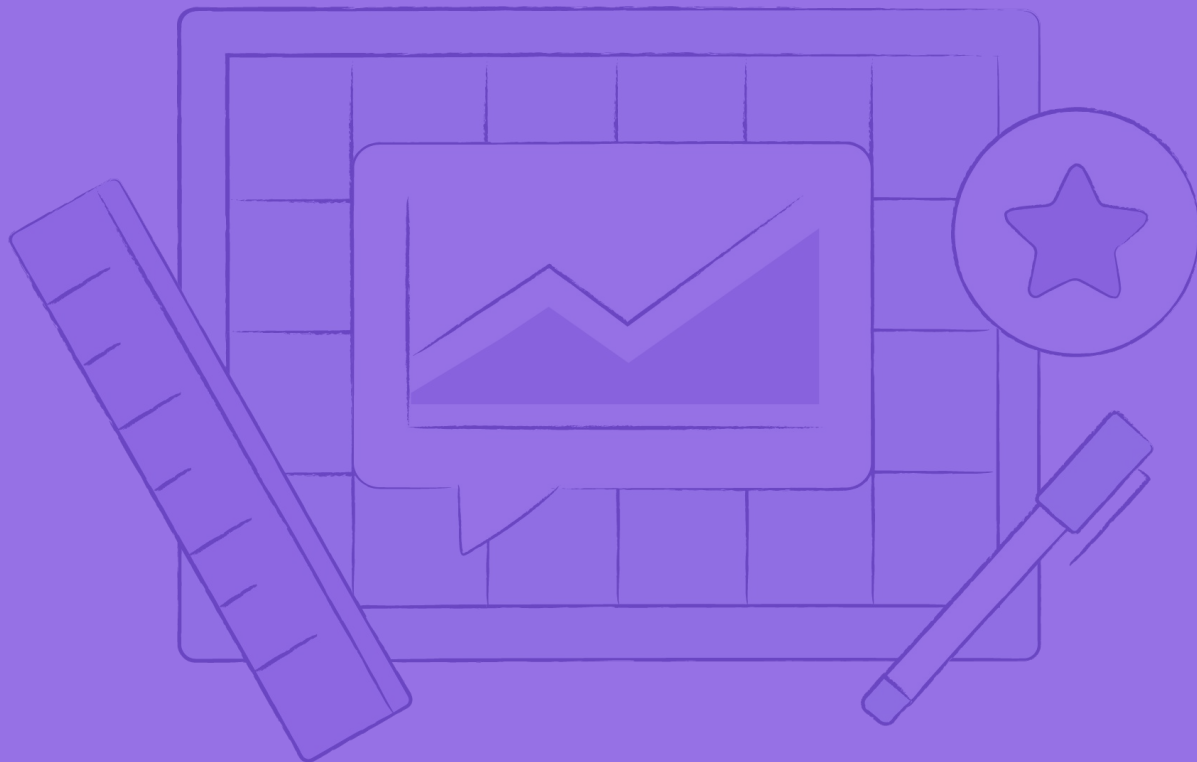




How to Deliver High-Quality Feedback that Drives Performance

A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE



Intro



Feedback is an essential component of growth and development at work, but it's something that many companies don't get right. Employees are unhappy with the status quo—**65% say they want more feedback** than they're currently getting and only **1 out of 5** feel that their performance is measured in a meaningful way.

There are a number of reasons for this, mostly based on a disconnect between the traditional way of approaching performance management and the new way of working. If you'd like to dig deeper into why feedback is currently so unsatisfactory and how we got to where we are, be sure to check out the first eBook in this series, “Why Feedback Drives a High-Performance Culture.”

In this eBook, we'll be looking at the nuts and bolts of good feedback: When should you give it? How should you give it? And what should you do afterwards to make sure it leads to action and not just good intentions?

Our goal is to give you a step-by-step manual of best practices to make the feedback process simple and stress-free. Ready? Let's get into it!

In general, what makes a feedback effective?

Based on extensive data on employee and manager sentiments about performance measurement, Gallup suggests focusing on the following 4 attributes to improve your company's practices.

1 Specific

What exactly are you giving feedback on? In order for feedback to be useful and actionable, it needs to be specific, both in the way that it describes the past behavior or work and in the way that it outlines what should be changed in the future. In a [Harvard Business Review](#) article, Liane Davey writes that “orienting to the situation, describing the behavior, and sharing the impact... are the basic ingredients of effective feedback.”

2 Tied in to a tangible outcome

What will the recipient do as a result of hearing your feedback? If you can't think of a clear outcome or tangible step, it will be even more difficult for the person who's receiving it to do so! Remember, the point of feedback is to help a coworker learn and improve.

3 Respectful

How will this feedback come across to the person who's receiving it? Liane Davey writes about the importance of coming across as an “ally.”

Davey suggests you can show respect by sharing how you're invested in the outcome and leaving room for the person to share their take on the matter.

4 Timely & frequent

Is the recipient getting feedback regularly and in a timeframe that they can easily act upon? Feedback should be given frequently and at a regular cadence. Also, consider how you can time your feedback so that it will have maximum impact. What you say to someone right after they've given their presentation and their adrenaline is still rushing is not as likely to sink in as what you bring up with them in a meeting a day or two later. We discuss timing in more detail in Part 1.

Now that we've got a foundation of some of the elements of good feedback (the "what"), let's consider the mechanics of when and how to give feedback effectively.



PART I

Before the exchange

How to pick the right situation

In the modern workplace, it no longer makes sense to wait until the annual performance review cycle to give feedback. The fast-paced nature of work means that feedback needs to become a regular process that weaves itself into day-to-day work: we refer to this as “continuous feedback.” Yet, we don’t want to overdo it. Feedback should be meaningful and tied to key behaviors.

How do you assess this? The key is to step back and consider the impact your feedback will have on the recipient: Will it provide a long-term benefit? Is it something they’re capable of changing?

Here are some guidelines to help you decide whether this particular situation warrants feedback:

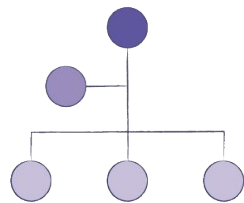
- After observing quality work, when projects wrap up, or other positive behavior deserves to be recognized
- When the skill in question is something the person uses frequently and therefore is likely to practice and improve
- If the person is already expecting feedback, such as during an in-person check-in
- When there’s a persistent problem that negatively impacts a colleague, the team, or the organization as a whole
- When there is a skill you believe would be helpful for this person to develop based on their goals or role, and you can give them actionable steps to improve

Now that we’ve covered which situations merit feedback, let’s take a look at who should be participating in the feedback exchange.

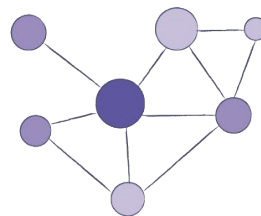
Who should give & receive feedback?

As we've mentioned briefly, the traditional feedback conversation would look something like this: At the annual performance review, a manager would sit down and discuss what had happened in the past year with their direct report and what went well vs. what could have gone better.

There are a number of reasons why this approach doesn't make sense anymore, and one of the big ones is that your manager doesn't necessarily have the most insight into your work performance. Throughout the course of the year, you may work with others on your team, people from different teams, and with managers from other departments. Josh Bersin describes this approach to adaptable, project-based collaboration as the "network of teams." So the answer to the question of who should be giving feedback is: Whoever is working most closely with the person in question! And this will often change throughout the course of a year, and even over a quarter.



HOW THINGS WERE:
Hierarchy



HOW THINGS ARE:
Network of Teams

This doesn't mean that managers should never give feedback to their direct reports—they absolutely should—but employees should also be encouraged to gather feedback from the people they work most closely with. And employees should be empowered to give feedback in these situations, too.

Since employees rely on high-quality feedback from the coworkers they work with most closely in order to develop, it's paramount that this feedback be kept between colleagues rather than made available to managers. Continuous feedback throughout the year should encourage employees to own their development rather than fear that managers will later use this information to inform their performance reviews.

Tick tock: When is the right time to give feedback?

We've discussed that receiving feedback once or twice a year simply doesn't cut it, and it makes much more sense to switch to a continuous feedback model. But "continuous feedback" doesn't mean giving feedback at any and all times. It means being thoughtful about delivering quality feedback on a regular basis. In order to focus on giving quality feedback, you'll want to consider the timing of when you deliver feedback for maximum impact.

On the one hand, you want to avoid giving feedback too soon. It's important to take time to collect your thoughts and gather relevant facts, metrics, and information—your feedback shouldn't come across as a snap judgment or empty praise. [Harvard Business Review](#) suggests using feedback to propose a solution to help the recipient move forward, and it will generally take some time to come up with something thoughtful if you're following this model.

But on the other hand, you don't want to wait too long to give feedback, either. According to Gallup research, only **1 out of 3 employees** received recognition or praise in the past week.

And research has shown a correlation between how often people receive feedback and how engaged they are at work. In a Harvard Business Review article on performance management, **Marcus Buckingham and Ashley Goodall write:** “If you want people to talk about how to do their best work in the near future, they need to talk often. And so far we have found in our testing a direct and measurable correlation between the frequency of these conversations and the engagement of team members.”

So when is the right time to give feedback? Not too soon and not too late! It sounds easy in theory, but it’s obviously more complicated in practice.

“

If you want people to talk about how to do their best work in the near future, they need to talk often. And so far we have found in our testing a direct and measurable correlation between the frequency of these conversations and the engagement of team members.



PART II

The exchange

Let's talk about the tricky stuff

At some point, you will likely need to give someone feedback on an area where they're not meeting expectations or need to improve. Or maybe even just on something they're working toward but haven't quite mastered yet.

This can be challenging—**43% of managers** say that giving corrective feedback is a “stressful and difficult” experience, but it doesn't have to be.

The key to approaching corrective feedback is to make sure that it feels like it's coming from an ally, not an adversary. Look for ways that you make your feedback feel supportive and not antagonistic.



WHICH BEHAVIORS ARE EASIEST TO CHANGE

When giving feedback, keep in mind that some things are easier for the recipient to change. Here's a list of behaviors (ranked from easiest to hardest to change).

- Job skills
- Time & work management
- Knowledge
- Attitudes
- Habits
- Personality traits

Now you know the ideal timing and cadence for giving feedback. But what do you actually say when it's time to give feedback? In this section, we'll investigate some of the theories and principles that should guide your approach to the actual feedback exchange.

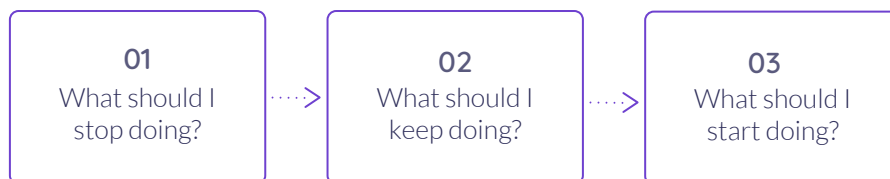
By having an understanding of how easy/difficult it is for someone to make the changes you're suggesting (see the sidebar), you can imagine what type of reaction they might have. Keep in mind that habit or personality feedback is the most difficult to change, and therefore people are more likely to have a strong negative reaction to that type of feedback. That's why in these cases it's especially important to deliver it in a way that shows understanding and proves that the change will be beneficial to the recipient.

This is also why creating a regular cadence of positive and constructive feedback is so important. The recipient will be more likely to appreciate and take your feedback when it's delivered this way. If a colleague tends to only give feedback when there's something that needs to be course corrected, the recipient may grow wary of this person and just see them as petty. The key is to establish trust and openness between giver and receiver so that the feedback is taken seriously.

There are a number of frameworks and approaches to giving constructive feedback, and we'll look at a few of them in more detail.

1 The SKS framework

The **SKS framework** uses three simple questions to guide your feedback conversations based on the concepts of stop, keep, and start (in other words, SKS):



2 The Situation Behavior Impact model

The Situation Behavior Impact (SBI) model is a framework for giving feedback that focuses on specific situations and behaviors and outlines the impact those behaviors have on others.

According to the SBI framework, feedback can follow this pattern:



You begin by providing context so the person knows exactly what your feedback is referring to. By describing the behavior, you communicate what you have observed directly.

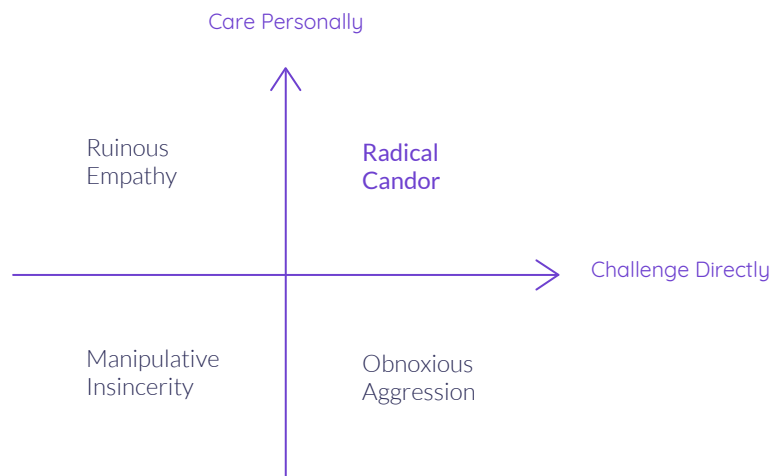
This step is important because you want to establish yourself as a credible source. It's also important to try to remain as objective as possible by using measurable information. Finally, by describing the impact, you're helping the recipient to understand how their behavior or performance has affected others.

After you've gone through each of these steps, it's also important to give the recipient time to process the information and consider what their next steps should be. And don't forget that this model can be used for all types of feedback, even when you'd like to praise someone!

3 Radical candor

Another model for giving feedback that’s been gaining traction in recent years is “**radical candor**.” This approach balances the ability to challenge directly and care personally at the same time. It means you’re not afraid to offer direct critique as long as it’s balanced with compassion and care for the other person’s feelings.

This approach considers two axes: caring personally and challenging directly. If you care without challenging, you won’t be providing useful feedback. If you challenge without caring, you’ll make people feel uncomfortable or hurt their feelings. And if you don’t care and don’t offer feedback, well, let’s just say you’re probably not reading this eBook in the first place!



While not as formulaic as the SBI or SKS models, radical candor also provides a framework to help you make sure that you’re offering feedback that will help someone improve and you’re doing it in a way that takes their feelings into consideration.



EXAMPLES OF QUALITY FEEDBACK

“One thing you’ve done well recently is putting together our presentation deck with enough time for the team to provide feedback. Thank you for anticipating our hectic schedules this week while you were spearheading this. This helped our team stay on top of things!”

“One thing I’d like to see you work on is handling questions when presenting to our clients. Last week, it seemed like you didn’t capture all of their questions in your answers, and they were a bit confused. Sometimes a follow-up ‘Did that answer your question?’ can help. Happy to brainstorm with you on this.”

EXAMPLES OF SITUATION BEHAVIOR IMPACT MODEL FEEDBACK

“In our meeting yesterday I noticed you repeatedly interrupted Sally before she was able to completely vocalize her thoughts. I mention this because interrupting someone can be interpreted as a sign of disrespect or imply that you do not value her input.”

“You came to the client meeting with a well thought out and engaging presentation. Your thorough understanding and genuine excitement about the client’s project gave them confidence in your project leadership ability, and they immediately gave the go-ahead to start.”



PART III

After the exchange

You now have some concrete ideas on how and when to give effective feedback. This is a great start, but don't forget to think about what comes next! In order for feedback to be truly effective, it needs to lead to some sort of change in behavior. In this section, we'll look at a few ways to turn your feedback conversations into actionable next steps.

1 Create a sense of progress

Researchers Teresa Amabile and Steven Kramer have shown that **a sense of progress is the most powerful motivator in the workplace**. In fact, a sense of progress is even stronger than recognition or pay.



WHY FEEDBACK MATTERS

67%

67% of employees who receive positive feedback are engaged¹

40%

Employees who don't receive feedback and feel ignored by their managers are 40% more likely to be disengaged²

25%

25% of employees who receive recognition plan to leave their current role vs. 51% of employees who don't receive recognition³

73%

73% of employees say receiving recognition makes them more satisfied with their work & position⁴

You can encourage feelings of progress by focusing feedback on how the recipient is helping your team or organization. When closing out or following up on a feedback conversation, mention how this change will impact the rest of the team and your company.

2 Keep it positive and focus on small wins

Research from **Barbara Frederickson** shows that our brain circuitry may also play a role in how we approach goals. When we maintain a positive view, we're energized, focused, flexible, and more likely to connect with those around us. So when you give or follow up on feedback, think about how you can relate the conversation to the recipient's personal goals and hopes. Look for ways to define and celebrate small wins to keep that positive momentum going.

3 Use the SKS framework

You may remember that we discussed the SKS framework in Part II. Quick reminder: It involves asking questions about what someone should stop, keep, and start doing. If you make a habit of ending your feedback conversations with these three questions, the recipient should always have a few clear takeaways.

Remember that the point of this feedback is to encourage continuous growth and development. This is why we strongly recommend separating continuous feedback from compensation discussions. You want to empower employees to lead their own development and set ambitious goals for themselves. This is much harder to do when they feel that their chances of getting a promotion or raise are at risk.

Zugata is Performance Management Software for high-performance cultures

It is the only solution that enables both performance evaluation and performance development, driving performance forward and impacting your company's bottom line. Our robust platform accelerates employee performance by using sophisticated algorithms to gather continuous feedback, enabling meaningful check-in conversations, and delivering personalized resources to help employees advance their skills.

Over 1,000 companies like Lyft, Gusto, and Greenhouse use Zugata to accelerate employee performance.

Join them and create a high-performance culture at your organization.

[Learn More](#)



Empowering employees and organizations to reach their potential

Copyright © 2018 Zugata Inc.