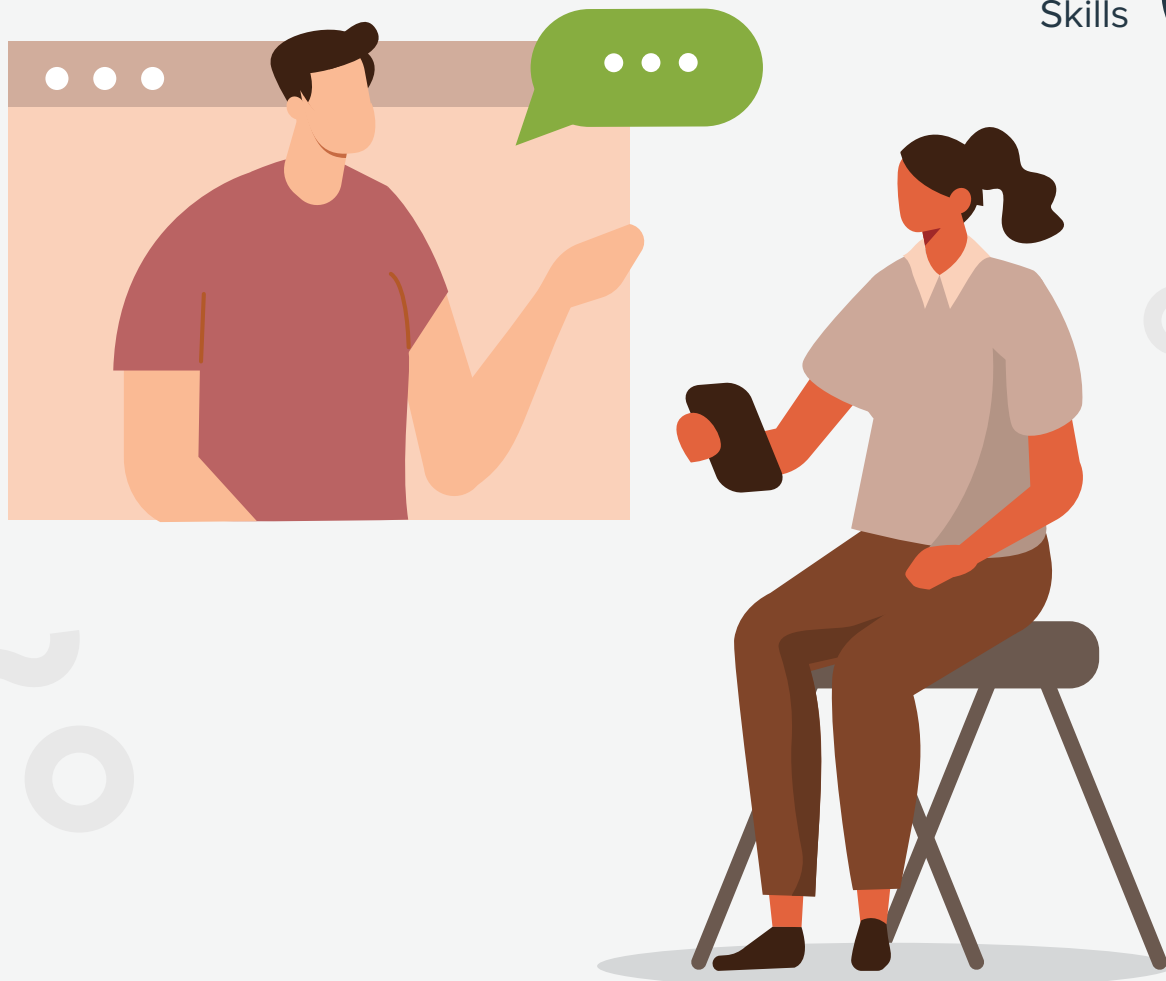


Skillbook

Giving Feedback

Communication
Skills



Giving Feedback

Skillbook

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1. Introduction

As a manager, giving feedback is one of the most important things you can do to help your team members. When you make a conscious choice to give regular feedback, you demonstrate that you are committed to their personal development, and you are taking steps to create a productive and harmonious workplace.

So, why do we struggle so much with giving feedback?

In particular, giving negative feedback can seem daunting. How can you tell someone that they are doing something wrong, and still preserve a good relationship with them?

The key is to be objective, and to get them to think about their own goals and solutions, without having to tell them what to do.

You need to be well prepared to do this, and you need to have a solid understanding of the issue that you want to discuss. When you know the direction that the discussion needs to go, you can ask the right questions and give the right support.

Good planning is critical to giving effective feedback, and you also have to give the other person a sense of ownership of the process. You want them to buy into it, and to help them to decide for themselves what they need to do to improve.

This **Skillbook** is designed to give you the tools that you need to give great feedback. In just one hour, you'll learn how to:

- Evaluate people's performance objectively.
- Come up with potential solutions to poor performance.
- Conduct a feedback discussion that gets maximum buy-in from the other person.

By the end of this Skillbook, you'll know how to provide effective feedback. When you develop your skills in this area, you'll enjoy much better work relationships, and you'll have a happier and more productive team.

2. Evaluating the Situation

The feedback process should have four distinct stages:

- **Evaluating:** assessing the situation.
- **Planning the feedback:** identifying solutions, and planning what to say and why.
- **Discussing:** sitting down to discuss the issue.
- **Closing:** creating your action plan for improvement.

We'll begin by looking at the first stage – evaluating the problem.

When you provide feedback, you need to be clear about what you want to evaluate. Feedback that leads to positive change should be honest and direct. You can't generalize or be vague, and you need to back up any comments you make with hard facts.

So, you need to spend sufficient time thinking about what you're going to say, and preparing for your interaction with your team member. Use the Performance Analysis Form on [pages 5 and 6](#) to help you to do this.

Before you start filling out this form, you need to know how to articulate your assessment of someone, so that your feedback is effective, and so that it can influence change effectively. You can do this with feedback statements.

Effective Feedback Statements

Effective feedback statements should have two key qualities: they should be specific, and they should be observed.

1. They Should Be Specific

Describe the behavior or performance of your team member, and support your statements with specific examples of his attitude or results.

Example A:

A vague statement: "Quality is poor."

A specific statement: "He consistently produces work with a high failure rate, he fails to fill in quality reports, and he does not monitor himself for improvement."

Example B:

A vague statement: “Resists change.”

A specific statement: “He is not using new work-flow processes consistently, he is not entering data accurately, and he shows little initiative in coming up with solutions to common problems.”

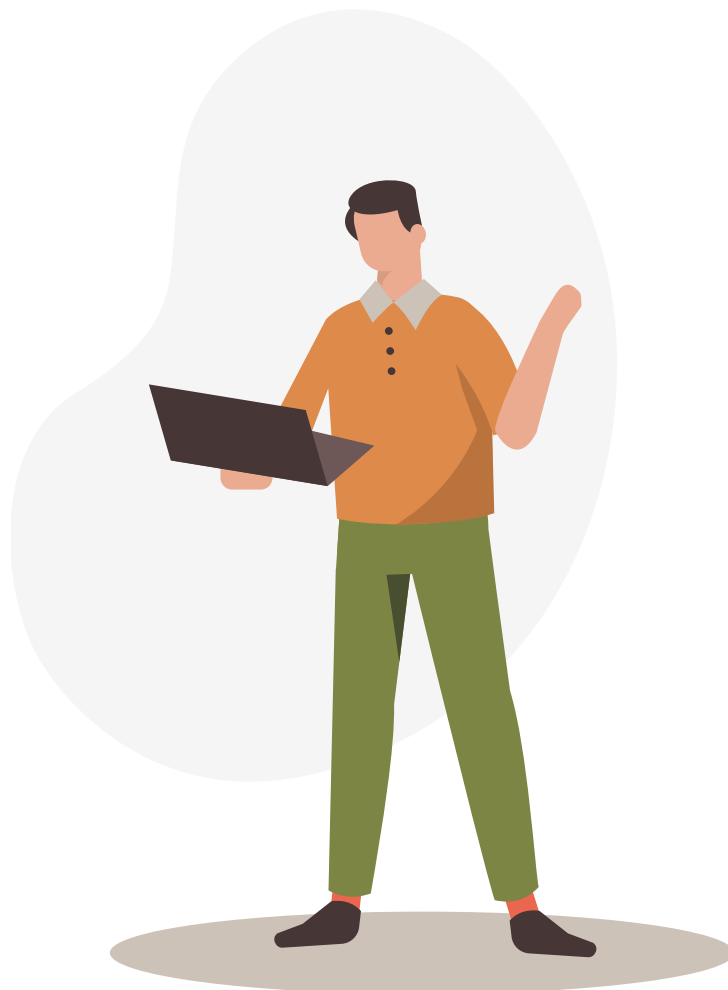
2. They Should Be Observed

Only provide feedback on behaviors or results that you’ve observed first hand, and don’t mention hearsay or third-party comments. This makes it much easier for you to provide clear and specific feedback, and it means that you have all the information you need to defend what you say.

When you gather your observations, you need to be aware of the difference between observation and inference. Keep your comments factual, and avoid attributing motives to people’s behavior.

So, what’s the difference between observation and inference?

- An **observation** is something that you have witnessed.
- An **inference** is an interpretation of something you have witnessed.





Action:

Try the activity below, and determine if the statement is an observation or an inference. The answers are given on [page 17](#).

Statement	Observation or Inference
1. Martha didn't look well. She told me she hadn't slept much the night before because her child was sick.	
2. Sarah asked for two hours to complete her summary report, but she did the work in one when I said how important it was to get it done quickly.	
3. Samantha was in bad shape today. There was a party last night at the local bar; she's probably hungover!	
4. Fred seems to be very nervous today. It might be because he has his performance review this afternoon.	
5. Ted was angry about the cost overruns. I guess he thought they made him look like an incompetent manager.	
6. Andrea is often quite slow to deliver, but she can perform when she puts her mind to it. She wanted to go home early today, so she finished one of her regular tasks in 45 minutes, when it usually takes her two hours.	
7. Todd agreed that his performance had been slipping, and we reached an agreement that he would improve over the coming weeks.	
8. Juan feels that Greg's behavior suggests he doesn't care about his stress levels or his feelings.	

Performance Analysis

Now that you know how to write effective feedback statements, it's time to apply this skill to your evaluation of a person's performance or behavior.



Action:

Think about a team member, colleague or other person that you need to give feedback to, and fill out the questionnaire below. Remember to use specific and observable statements when answering.

Performance Analysis Form
Evaluation of:
Date:
Task/function to be analyzed:
What is the performance standard or expectation?
Is the person aware of this standard or expectation? How do you know?

What outcomes or conditions cause you to believe that a problem exists?

What specific behavior(s) are indicative of the problem?

How often does the problematic behavior occur? Or how long has it been going on?

Does the person realize that the problem exists? How do you know?

How will your feedback/involvement help to rectify the situation?

3. Identifying Solutions and Planning Your Feedback

By this stage, you should have made specific observations, and you should have a clear picture of what the problem is. The next step is to think about potential solutions. It's not useful to give feedback that only points out the negatives, or that just discusses your evaluation and observations. You should have an improvement plan in mind when you talk to your team member.

For now, you need to concentrate on identifying probable causes and coming up with possible solutions. A good framework to use here is the ACHIEVE model:

- **A**bility.
- **C**larity and confidence.
- **H**elp and support.
- **I**ncentive and motivation.
- **E**valuation.
- **V**alidity.
- **E**nvironment.

Each of these seven areas is a potential root cause of the problem. To use the model, you evaluate how each factor affects the person's performance, and then come up with a solution.



Action:

Look over the problem that you've identified, and then review the potential causes and potential solutions in the table below. For the causes that best fit the problem, write down actions that you might take in the right-hand column.

Potential Causes	Potential Solutions	Actions
Ability: does the person have the required knowledge, skills, experience, aptitude, training, and education to be successful?	Provide education, training, coaching, job reassignment, and job support.	

Potential Causes	Potential Solutions	Actions
<p>Clarity and confidence: does she understand the job or task? Does she know what is expected, and what performance indicators will be used? Are the targets and priorities known?</p>	<p>Review goals, objectives and standards. Discuss and review policies. Revise job descriptions, and create written agreements and objectives for meeting expectations.</p>	
<p>Help and support: are there sufficient resources, materials, space, training, time, money, and people available to meet the standards and expectations?</p>	<p>Make a plan to provide the resources required. These may be physical resources, or they could be support, training and coaching.</p>	
<p>Incentive and motivation: do you know what motivates him? Are the rewards provided appropriate? Are the correct behaviors and outcomes being reinforced?</p>	<p>Make a plan to understand what motivates him. Create a feedback and reward system that positively reinforces desired behavior and eliminates undesirable consequences.</p>	
<p>Evaluation: is she given input on her performance regularly? Does she understand how, when and why she is evaluated?</p>	<p>Plan regular formal and informal feedback. Co-create criteria for success, and decide how to measure them.</p>	
<p>Validity: is what you are asking him to do, or expecting of him, valid and reasonable? Is he being treated fairly and equally? Is the evaluation process objective and results-oriented, rather than subjective?</p>	<p>Create solid policies and performance criteria. Provide explanations and discuss evaluation processes. Audit your practices for fairness and equality.</p>	
<p>Environment: are there parts of the internal environment (job design, management style, reward system) that are incongruent with success? What external conditions (market conditions, competition, government standards) are influencing performance?</p>	<p>Where possible, discuss and make plans to adjust environmental factors that are within your control. When they are outside of your control, plan and discuss how to cope with them. Consider these factors when developing performance standards.</p>	



Action:

Based on your analysis, think about the solutions that you may be prepared to offer, depending on what your discussions reveal. Use this as an opportunity to think through what you are, and are not, prepared to do. Record these in the table below.



Tip:

Be prepared to abandon these solutions if the facts don't support your initial assumptions once you start discussing them. It's possible that the problem could be caused by something completely different.

Possible Solutions

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4. Conducting the Session

At this point, you've identified the problem, and come up with some possible strategies for improvement. Now you need to turn your attention to how you will present this information to your team member, and how you will attempt to reach a solution with them.

The GROW model is a useful tool that you can use to motivate people to deliver the change that you want. This classic coaching method achieves maximum buy-in, because it helps the person to decide for themselves what they need to do to improve. GROW Stands for: **G**oal, **R**eality, **O**ptions, and **W**ill.



Tip 1:

We will follow the GROW model loosely here because, in feedback situations, there's a possible element of confrontation that isn't present in normal coaching situations. Also, you can't be 100 percent sure of your analysis of the situation until later in the process.

Tip 2:

See [this article](#) if you'd like to read more about the GROW model.

Establishing the Goal

You've identified the problem, and you've recorded the evidence that supports your analysis of it. You've also identified the standard that you want the person to achieve.

Before you start the discussion, you need to organize this information so that you can clearly state the problem in the feedback meeting, and quote evidence in such a way that it leaves no "wriggle room." Remember to include observations, not inferences.



Action:

Write out your problem statement, and note any observations that support your assessment of the situation, using the Feedback Planning Form on [pages 13 and 14](#).

Now it's time to open the discussion, and establish the goal.

Here, you state the problem, you list the evidence that supports this, and you then say what you want the person to achieve (the goal of the session).



Tip:

Avoid opening by discussing what the other person perceives the problem to be. When starting the feedback session, you should be very clear about the issues. The discussion comes after this.

Examining Reality

The next step in the GROW process is to discuss how the person perceives the current situation. It's impossible to get to a stated end point, or a goal, without solidly marking the starting point.

For instance, perhaps they don't appreciate the importance of the behavior you're looking for, or they're distracted by other activities. Perhaps your analysis of potential causes is accurate. It could be that something else really significant is going on (for example, in their personal life) that you're just not aware of.

To find out about this, use questions that address the what, who, how, and when aspects of the situation and the outcome. For example, you could ask:

- What is happening?
- What is the outcome?
- Who else is involved?

Try to come to an agreed analysis of what's going wrong in the situation, so that you both fully understand the current position. Make a note of this so that you can refer back to it.



Action:

Before the session, make a list of questions on the Feedback Planning Form on [pages 13 and 14](#). You want to help your team member to uncover the essence of the problem for themselves.



Tip:

As part of this discussion, the other person may lay some of the blame for poor performance with you. Our article on [Unfair Criticism](#) will help you to deal with this appropriately.

Exploring Options

After exploring the current reality, you then move on to looking at possible solutions.

Here again, from your analysis of possible solutions that you identified earlier, you should have a good idea of what needs to be done. However, from the answers and insights revealed by your team member, some of these solutions might need to be adjusted, or scrapped altogether.



Tip:

It's very important that you do your own analysis and problem solving first. If you go into the session without a clear idea of what is really happening and what you can do about it, the discussion can get off track very easily. As a result, you might end up with a solution that is too employee-centered, and that fails to consider the organizational and resource constraints that are important to any workable solution.

This portion of the feedback session is designed to get you both thinking along the same lines. From here, you can develop solutions that meet both of your needs. You have already identified what you think needs to be done; now the other person identifies their ideas, and you can come up with a well-rounded course of action that meets everyone's needs.

Try to get them to identify as many options as possible – this will help them to buy-in to the process – and let them do most of the talking. When they offer ideas and suggestions that you don't accept, explain why. When they make suggestions that are similar to yours, try to build on them and create a great combined solution. Ask questions that get them thinking about different possibilities and options. Some questions to consider include:

- What have you tried?
- What else could you do?
- Why haven't you tried it?
- If this constraint were removed, what would be possible?
- What are the potential risks involved?



Action:

Take some time to brainstorm good questions that will encourage your team member to explore possible solutions. Record these questions on the Feedback Planning Form on [pages 13 and 14](#).

Establishing Will

The final step in the GROW model is to gain commitment from the other person. You'll only achieve positive, lasting change with a firm commitment to action. After all, when you give feedback, your job is to make sure that the person will act on the information you've given, so that the situation is fully resolved.

Again, good questions will help you to establish the person's motivation to improve. Examples include: what will you do now? When do you see yourself starting this? How will this help you?



Action:

Continuing the examples in the previous sections, brainstorm a few motivation-building questions that you can ask the person, and record them on the Feedback Planning Form below.

Feedback Planning Form
Feedback for:
Problem Statement:
Observations:
Goal Statement Questions:
1.
2.
3.
4.

Uncovering Reality Questions:	
1.	5.
2.	6.
3.	7.
4.	8.
Coaching Questions for Discovering Solutions:	
1.	5.
2.	6.
3.	7.
4.	8.
Motivation Building Questions:	
1.	4.
2.	5.
3.	6.
Positives for Ending the Discussion:	

5. Closing the Session

The final part of giving feedback that you need to prepare for is the close. This is where you establish an action plan for change.

You know what you want to happen. The other person knows what they need to do, and has expressed a will to do it. Now you need to develop a solid action plan to address the problem. You'll identify the steps that you'll both take, and you'll schedule the checkpoints where you'll monitor progress.

After you have come to an agreement, try to end the feedback session on a positive note, and with an expression of support. However, make sure that you don't leave the person thinking that everything's OK, and that they don't need to try too hard to make the changes you've agreed to.



6. Key Points

The ability to give effective feedback is a necessary skill in almost all management roles.

The key to a successful conversation is to prepare for it in advance.

When you give feedback on the fly, you will likely find that your comments won't be objective enough, and you might find that you veer off course and allow the discussion to focus on unrelated and unproductive issues. You can also find that the situation spirals out of control, damaging your relationship with the other person.

You'll more likely reach an agreement if you follow an organized approach that uses objective information to come up with potential solutions. You can then use coaching techniques to help the other person to come up with a great solution on their own.

This can be a long process, but the end result will be goal statements that address the real problem, and, more importantly, solid action plans that you and the other person can follow through with.

7. Answers for the Observation/ Inference Exercise

Statement	Observation or Inference
1. Martha didn't look well. She told me she hadn't slept much the night before because her child was sick.	Observation
2. Sarah asked for two hours to complete her summary report, but she did the work in one when I said how important it was to get it done quickly.	Observation
3. Samantha was in bad shape today. There was a party last night at the local bar; she's probably hungover!	Inference
4. Fred seems to be very nervous today. It might be because he has his performance review this afternoon.	Inference
5. Ted was angry about the cost overruns. I guess he thought they made him look like an incompetent manager.	Inference
6. Andrea is often quite slow to deliver, but she can perform when she puts her mind to it. She wanted to go home early today, so she finished one of her regular tasks in 45 minutes, when it usually takes her two hours.	Observation
7. Todd agreed that his performance had been slipping, and we reached an agreement that he would improve over the coming weeks.	Observation
8. Juan feels that Greg's behavior suggests he doesn't care about his stress levels or his feelings.	Inference