



# THE FEEDBACK HANDBOOK

GIVE WELL. RECEIVE WELL.



# NO ONE REALLY LIKES FEEDBACK. GIVING OR GETTING IT. THIS GUIDE IS HERE TO HELP.



**The Feedback Handbook** is chock full of tools to add to your toolbelt when it comes to both giving and receiving feedback. Some skills will be the nuggets you practice and adjust in your everyday leadership style right away and every day. Some you can put in your own leadership toolkit and use them when the person and situation best call for them.

To get the most out of this guide, you have to commit to:

- Starting with a **beginner's mindset**, being open to learning and trying something new
- **Trying** new skills even when it's outside your comfort zone
- **Practicing** new skills repeatedly

Feedback does not need to be painful. Let's make it easier, shall we?

Much love,



# HOW TO RECEIVE FEEDBACK

**Receiving feedback** can feel really challenging, and for some more than others. No one really LOVES feedback in the traditional sense. Most people would prefer to not have to hear about how they are doing it wrong. That is normal human nature.

The good news is that you can build your openness to receiving feedback like a muscle with practice. Also, when you request feedback with a quality ask, you are in much greater control of the feedback that you receive. The result will be more actionable and useful feedback that you actually want to incorporate. Receiving that doesn't seem nearly as painful.

Here are some ways you can **build your skillset and capacity** for receiving feedback.

## Be open and ready

If you are going to ask, you will want to be ready for the feedback you are asking for. And the feedback you didn't ask for. And maybe more feedback than you anticipated. When you open the door, prepare yourself to willingly receive whatever comes through it.

Being **open and ready** does not mean you have to agree with or incorporate every piece of feedback you receive. You simply need to be willing to look at them without judgement.

A great way to examine feedback is to attach **no value or judgement** to it but to simply observe it like a scientist. You can ask yourself these questions after you receive new feedback:

- How true is this for me?
- Do I choose to incorporate this feedback into my work?

When you are open and ready for feedback, you are able to thoughtfully respond with a simple, "thank you," sans defensiveness. If you must ask clarifying questions, do so from a place of curiosity and seeking clarity rather than defending your stance or getting stuck in the "but what about...?" loop. Here is what that might sound like:

- "I'd like to ask a question for clarification, would that be okay?"
- "I would really like to understand what you are telling me. Could you tell me more about \_\_\_\_\_?"
- "I am curious about what is important about that for you. Could you share more?"



## Be targeted in your feedback focus

You probably aren't working on every single aspect of your leadership at the same time. That would be like trying to boil the ocean, so naturally we **pick a few key areas** on which we are focusing. Your quest for feedback should be focused as well.

It is generally not of service to you to seek out feedback broadly on any topic. Chances are what comes back is not what you expected in your mind, and when our expectations are different than reality we tend to feel disappointed, frustrated or defensive.

For example, let's imagine you give a presentation and then say to the audience, "Okay, give me some feedback, I can take it!" You would receive back some comments about the delivery, some comments about the content, some comments about whether you were loud or articulate enough, or some other comments that are colored in their past experiences and what they think a presenter should be. You might expect them to talk about what content parts were valuable or not, and feel totally off guard or defensive when you hear the unexpected news that your delivery was low energy.

The better you can **articulate for yourself your own goals and intentions**, the better you can articulate those to others for more targeted feedback.

### Focus areas:

*Write down the 1-3 areas of **your** leadership or communication that you are focusing on here:*



1

2

3



## Make it safe for others

Many of us are hungry for more feedback than we generally receive. Maybe your boss doesn't spend a lot of time with you, or give you much fodder to work with. Perhaps you work in an organization where the culture avoids direct feedback. Whatever the reason, you can absolutely take charge to request the feedback you are seeking.

When asking for feedback, you want to make it **safe, comfortable and easy for the other person** to give you specific feedback.

### **Make it safe:**

Build a relationship with that person to create a baseline feeling of trust. Let them know that you will respond well. Share what you are working on so they don't have to "break the news" to you that you need to improve a certain skill.

### **Make it comfortable:**

Ask for feedback in a way that shows you will willingly hear what they have to share, without being defensive. Thank them for sharing the feedback, whatever it is.

### **Make it easy:**

When we make vague, sweeping requests for feedback, that is way too hard for people to wrap their heads around. Make it easy by being very specific. **Refrain from asking**, "Do you have any feedback for me?" [This is a closed question that will likely result in a "yes" or "no" response. They have to search their brain for all the feedback about everything you've ever done and it's overwhelming, which ends in a "no" because they can't think of anything specific.]

**Instead say**, "I am working on my communication to be more clear and concise in meetings. What do you think I could improve on from this morning's meeting?" Another way to get specific is to ask them to rate that particular focus on a scale of 1-10. [Know that most people will not give you 1's or 10's] When they give you a number (let's say they give you a 7) you can say, "Great! Thank you. What would have made it an eight or a nine?"



## Read between the lines

When people don't feel totally safe or are not very skilled in providing clear feedback, the feedback they do give might be easy to miss if you aren't paying attention. People dip their toe in or drop hints all the time to see if leaders are going to pick up on what they are putting down. If they don't catch the hint or there is a sense that the waters are rocky, they won't continue. Poorly delivered feedback to you is helpful information all the same. If you want to continue to receive feedback in the future, how you respond to them in this moment is critical.

## No sudden moves

Allow yourself time and space to take in feedback and decide what you will do with it. Don't make any sudden changes as a reaction to the feedback. Instead, decide what is true and important for you and what the best way forward will be. If we react too quickly, we might make some tactical errors that are not in service to the bigger picture.

At the same time, you might have an "aha!" moment from some feedback that helps you see an easy change that you can make right away. Go for it. If it feels positive and expansive rather than tight and defensive in your body, it is probably an easy and positive fix to make immediately.

## Ask frequently & take action

The more you ask and the more skilled your request is, the **more quality feedback** you are likely to receive. Asking frequently in a safe and supportive manner will allow people to feel secure in giving more and more honest feedback. You may ask for feedback in nearly every one-on-one meeting as a way to build your frequency of opening the feedback door.

When you receive feedback from others, one of the most critical steps is to **do something with that information**. You have to take visible action. If people don't see any changes based on the feedback they are sharing, they will begin to assume their input doesn't matter and stop sharing. If you receive feedback and choose not to act on it for some reason, you can still close the loop and communicate back with the feedback provider that you heard them, you genuinely appreciate their input, and the reason why it is not the right direction for you to go at this time.



## Take the driver seat in conversations with your leaders

Many leaders lament that their team members don't regularly maximize how they present themselves in their one-on-one meeting time with them as their boss. In a perfect world, YOU bring the agenda to the table, present what you are working in, and ask for their input. You are the driver of the meeting and owner of that time, not the leader with whom you are meeting.

When you take responsibility for what you bring to the table and what you ask for, you will come prepared to have the key conversations you need to have and in the allotted time. Use this time to build trust with your leader, and make specific requests for the feedback you are seeking (as outlined in this guide). The more you own the agenda, own asking for what you need, and offer solutions, you ease the responsibility for your leader and increase the effectiveness of your time spent.

## Try it out!

Fill in the blanks in advance for a ready-made script to ask for specific, focused feedback in your next meeting.

Who is the most trustworthy person I can ask for this feedback? \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for taking the time, I really appreciate it. I am focusing on improving my \_\_\_\_\_. I trust your judgement and I am really looking to improve in this area. Would you be willing to help by sharing your ideas?

Specifically, I am working on \_\_\_\_\_. What is one thing that I could have done in our last meeting to be more effective at \_\_\_\_\_?

[Active listening, take notes]

Thank you for sharing that with me. I am going think more about how I can incorporate that into my work. I appreciate you being so open and willing to share your view with me.

### After the meeting, ask yourself:

What did you hear? And, how did it feel?

What are possible ways I might act on this feedback?

If you didn't like/agree with the feedback, reflect on it from a different angle as a self-check.

Ask yourself, "Let's say for now that is true. What would that mean for me? What would I change?"

# HOW TO GIVE FEEDBACK

## If you struggle giving feedback...

Some of us shy away from giving feedback, which is completely understandable! It can feel uncomfortable to tell someone that you would like to see them do something differently. This is especially true with traditional feedback, which focuses on discussing something that happened in the past and cannot be changed.

We may lack confidence in our knowledge or authority to provide feedback, or not want someone to feel badly as a result of our message. The most common response is to procrastinate on giving the feedback, leading us to give it too late or never give the feedback at all (e.g., "Too much time has passed, I can't tell them NOW!"). The outcome is leaders who give feedback in rare "events" like once a year in a formal annual review meeting, rather than it being an ongoing and trusting conversation with your team member.

As a leader, it is one of our **key responsibilities to communicate** what needs to be said, and in a timely manner. Instead of feeling as though you don't want to upset them or hurt feelings, take the opposite viewpoint. Imagine that if the roles were reversed and someone had some information that could help you get better at your work. You would likely want, even expect them to be courageous enough to tell you. Not providing feedback makes *you* feel more comfortable in the moment, but it is a disservice to the person you lead. When you see it as an important responsibility that only you can do, you take a deep breath and do the hard thing anyways.

1

### **Eat the frog:**

#### **Give feedback as soon as possible/appropriate**

The longer you wait, the harder it gets and the less relevant the information to the other person. Give the feedback as soon as it is appropriately possible giving consideration to having the time and safe space to have the feedback conversation.

Prepare in advance for the conversation – don't go in and "wing it" – much of our anxiety about the conversation is actually our lack of preparedness. Use the model shared in this guide as a starting point!



## 2 Starter sentences

Sometimes you might be nervous to tell someone feedback that's potentially viewed as negative. That is totally understandable! No one LOVES it, but we can practice to feel more secure in our process.

In my earlier leadership years, I found it hard to find the words to START the conversation. As a result, it helped me to use some "starter sentences" to put myself out there (no going back now!) and break the ice so the feedback didn't seem so abrupt. Try some of these sentences to help you transition from "hey, thanks for coming, how are you?" to "I have something important to tell you":

- "Can I be really honest with you?"
- "Would you open to me sharing some feedback?"
- "I think it is really important that I share this with you, would that be okay?"

## If you struggle editing your feedback

Some of us give too much feedback! If you have a tendency to just shoot out every possible suggestion that may be "helpful" rather than tailoring your feedback, then read on.

### 1 Read/listen closely for what feedback is requested

Some people are adept at asking for feedback and will be specific and targeted in their request (they must have read this guide!). Notice what feedback they are requesting and match your feedback, rather than tackling everything else under the sun. Be aware of the most effective way to share the feedback back to them. When in doubt, private is usually better than public.

### 2 Edit for key themes or highest impact

Don't give every piece of feedback you can think of. Instead focus on a few key things that would have the biggest impact. Think "two things that will make a huge difference" rather than "100 things you could change about your presentation." If it doesn't fit into your key themes, perhaps it can be given another time or doesn't need to be given at all.

### 3 Ask yourself, “Is this helpful for them?”

We may have feedback that actually isn't helpful, or doesn't fit into the priority goals. Ask yourself in advance if it will be helpful to the other person. If you are only sharing it because it feels good for you, rethink if you might best just let it go.

## For everyone giving feedback

### Pick a safe venue

Provide feedback in the manner that's most safe and appropriate. When in doubt, private is better than public. Rather than write feedback in a comment on social media, direct message or email someone so it is not visible to the community. Have verbal conversations privately rather than in a group setting.

### Make it an ongoing conversation, not an event

Feedback should never feel like an “event.” When we do it infrequently or only when something bad happens or for formal annual reviews, our teams understandably assume those conversations will be bad. Instead, build in regular one-on-one time in a safe environment so that your interactions feel more like a continuation of one long conversation and relationship, rather than events. This means having regular planned time on the calendar that you do not cancel so that both you and your team member can count on that time to engage in important dialogue. If you need help figuring out how to structure your one-on-one time to get the most out of it, check out [The Definitive 1:1 Conversation Guide for Leaders](#).

### Situational leadership

The days of “one size fits all” leadership are over. If you know anything about your team (and you should!) then you know they all have different thoughts and different feelings that lead to vastly different motivations. To be a situational leader, I invite you to take three things into account before your interactions:

- What are the internal motivators for this person?
- What external factors should I consider in this case?
- What leadership methods match my authentic style, and works for them as an individual?

## Prepare for the conversation

There are many different types of conversations – goal setting, changing action, reinforcing success, expectation setting. All of them can be maximized by putting a little time in up front to prepare.

- Get clear on your intentions and message
- Anticipate different reactions, and how you will handle them
- Have details readily available if you need them
- Prepare how you close the conversation and end with clear next steps

## Use a model

I love using a model to help ensure you don't leave out anything important, and to practice skills consistently. You can use a template like this one [included later in the guide to make copies!] to help you prepare a comprehensive conversation as well as reflect on how it went.

### BEFORE

- What is the purpose/goal of this conversation?
- What approach works best with this person?
- What information might I be missing?

### DURING

- *[Greet the person, set a positive tone]*
- DESCRIBE THE SITUATION
- EXPRESS THE IMPACT
- *[Pause/seek their input]*
- SUGGEST ALTERNATIVES OR NEXT STEPS
- CONSENSUS ON OUTCOMES

### AFTER

- How effective was this conversation?
- What did I learn?
- What are my next steps?





## Ask open-ended questions, rather than telling

Using open-ended, empowering questions is the backbone of taking a coaching approach to your conversations. Instead of telling, ask questions for them to come to their own conclusion. Resist your normal urge to tell, and keep asking and listening. You will be amazed at what you learn and the conclusions your team can come to on their own!

### Basic tips of asking empowering questions

- All questions are open-ended (cannot be answered in a yes/no)
- Ask one question at a time
- Ask from a place of curiosity, not judgement
- Who, what where, when, how (rarely why)
- Asked for the purpose of the other person's awareness, not your understanding

### Examples of empowering questions

- What's on your mind?
- And what else?
- What's the real challenge here for you?
- What was most useful for you?
- What is holding you back?
- What's another way to look at that?
- What is really bothering you about this?
- How does that fit into your plan?
- What support do you need?

### Pro tip!

The key is in the space between. Silence is okay here! Ask a question and then, be quiet. Let the other person process what you've asked, rather than talk over their thought process.

Get comfortable in the silence.



## Feedforward

**Feedback** is giving information about something that happened in the **past**, and cannot be changed.

**Feedforward** is looking toward the **future** and identifying or suggesting things that could be done differently next time.

Feedforward feels easier to give and receive for exactly these reasons. It stays future-oriented in possibility where we can actually take action for improvement.



### Feedforward might sound like:

- Have you tried...
- Have you considered...
- Something I've seen work is...
- One idea I have is...
- One suggestion is...

Use these "sentence starters" to provide feedforward with others. As with all feedback tools, be sure that you have built trust with the other person as a prerequisite to offering Feedforward.

## Try it out! Prepare and give feedback

**Now it is time** to put some new leadership skills into action. Use the template on the next page to prepare your thoughts and as a guide for the conversation. But first, commit:

- **Who do I owe a feedback conversation?** \_\_\_\_\_
- **I will have this conversation by phone/Zoom/in-person (circle 1) by** \_\_\_\_\_

# CONVERSATION STARTER: TEMPLATE

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Leader Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## BEFORE

- What is the purpose/goal of this conversation?
- What feedback tools might work best with this person?
- What information might I be missing?

Notes:

## DURING

*[Greet the person, set a positive tone]*

DESCRIBE THE SITUATION

EXPRESS THE IMPACT

*[Pause/seek their input/listen]*

SUGGEST ALTERNATIVES OR NEXT STEPS

CONSENSUS ON OUTCOMES

## AFTER

- How effective was this conversation?
- What did I learn?
- What are my next steps?

Notes:

## Take Action: Your Feedback Action Plan

You have lots of new feedback tools in your leadership tool kit. Put new systems in place and practice new skills regularly to master the arts of giving and receiving feedback. Use this action plan to make specific commitments.

### Receiving Feedback

- What specific feedback would you like to receive and ask for?
- Who will you ask? In what format will you ask?
- When will you ask by?
- After: What feedback did you receive? How did you feel about asking? (1-10) What would make it 1-2 points higher next time?

### Giving Feedback

- What feedback tools will you incorporated into your leadership style right now?
- What is something you can try differently within the next 5 days?
- What changes will you make to how you lead in the next month?
- What haven't you mastered yet? What is getting in your way?

### After You've Practiced

- What worked well?
- What will you tweak and try again?
- How will you continue to grow your feedback muscle?

## LOOKING FOR MORE READING?

[The Art of the Awkward 1:1](#) | Mark Rabkin | Medium

[Awkward 1:1s: How To Get Honest Feedback](#) | Mark Rabkin | Medium

[Clumsy Feedback Is a Poorly Wrapped Gift](#) | Roger Schwarz | HBR

[Stop Giving Feedback, Instead Give Feedforward](#) | Kevin Kruse | Forbes

[Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High](#) | Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, and Switzler

[The Coaching Habit: Say Less, Ask More & Change the Way You Lead Forever](#) | Michael Bungay Stanier



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