

EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK NEEDS CLARITY AND CARE

Why is it so hard to give and receive feedback in a way that leads to positive results?

Feedback is an integral part of our lives, whether at work, in education or in personal relationships. We do it all the time, but it can be difficult to get it right.

Different personalities react to feedback in different ways – and everyone has an emotional reaction before their rational brain kicks in. For some, the first reaction may be surprise, anger or denial. Others may overlook all the positive messages and take a small suggestion as confirming their feelings of inadequacy. It is tempting to decide it's easier not to give feedback – but then the other person would be justified in saying that nobody ever told them what they needed to know.

Research shows that feedback is most effective when a person receives it as an opportunity to grow, or to leave old habits behind, rather than as a fixed verdict on their ability or worth as a person. It helps if they trust the feedback-giver's perspective on their strengths, as well as their views on their development.

Questions leaders ask themselves before offering feedback on performance include:

- Am I showing care for this person, in offering feedback to build their self-confidence, or to develop the way they do their job, or even to help them move to a different future?
- Based on the evidence, can I offer advice and support on next steps?
- What is the language that works best with this person, so they can receive constructively what I am trying to say? How can I tap into what motivates them?

If feedback is about behaviours and relationships, is it worth asking yourself:

- What is my motivation in raising this? Is there a genuine point to be made or am I offloading my own emotions? Should I wait until I feel calmer?
- If I get an emotional response to the feedback, can I keep my own reactions under control and focus on what will help the other person to hear me?
- How do I explain the impact that their behaviours are having, and calmly try to unpack what is driving them?
- Will my body language suggest active listening and a desire to understand?
- How do I allow them enough space to reflect – possibly with some time-outs?
- Can we agree on a shared purpose, such as team success, that is important enough for us both to start a dialogue about what needs to change?
- Am I ready to take feedback on what I could do differently?

You can't change another person. You can only create a context where they want to change something about their self-belief, their reactions or their approach to work.