

Feedback



Leaders' Guide

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Giving & receiving feedback

Feedback always takes place in a context, e.g. a task, a culture and a relationship. This means that how feedback is given, and how it is likely to be received, will be influenced by a wide range of factors which could include:

- ✦ Whether feedback is 'positive' or 'negative'.
- ✦ Whether feedback is solicited or unsolicited.
- ✦ Quality of trust between giver and receiver.
- ✦ Cultural-relational values and norms.


Feedback that keeps leaders awake at night tends to be that which they believe another person may regard as 'negative', and that is unsolicited. The leader may be nervous about how the other person may react and what the potential consequences could be.^[1]

I'll share some sample feedback conversations below, along with associated formulae or structures for those conversations, and then some related principles, insights and approaches that you may also find useful. There is no magic formula or one-size-fits-all so do feel free to modify as you see fit.

Scenarios & framing

I've often found it useful to prepare for a feedback conversation by thinking in advance about how to frame it, including what words to use. Here are some different scenarios and examples that you could adapt and apply to your own language, culture, relationships and situations:

Scenario 1: End of year appraisal: Giving feedback


 [Formula: 1. What went well? 2. Even better if?]^[2]

'The purpose of this conversation is to look back over the year as a whole, to review and celebrate what went well, to see what we can learn from it and to agree what enhancements we could make next year.

I have some reflections and ideas I'd like to share with you. First, however, what stand out to you as the highlights from the year; what challenges did you face; how did you handle them; and what would you like to do the same or differently next year?'

[Followed by]: 'This is what I noticed went well....and as we look to the year ahead, this is what I think could make it even better... What do you think?'

Scenario 2: End of year appraisal: Inviting feedback


 [Formula: 1. What went well? 2. Even better if?]^[3]

"As we look back over the year together, I'm keen to hear your views on what I did well and what I could do better next year. The most useful feedback for me would be very honest and specific. That will help me to build on what I'm doing well and improve my leadership for the future.

In light of that, given what you have seen and experienced of me, what 2-3 main strengths have you seen me display in practice this year, and what 2-3 things would make the greatest positive difference to my performance as a leader in the year ahead?'

[Followed by]: 'So, in summary, what I'm hearing is: this is what I do well...and this is what would most improve my leadership... Is that right?' [Followed by]: 'Thank you for such useful feedback. I really appreciate it.'

Scenario 3: An issue that has arisen: Giving unsolicited feedback

 [Formula: 1. Observation. 2. Feelings. 3. Needs. 4. Requests.][⁴]


'I'd like to have a conversation with you about what happened in the team area today. Do you have 15 minutes now to meet in my office...or when this afternoon would work best for you?'

[Followed by]: 'Thank you for taking time to meet. This feels like a difficult conversation, but I'd like to talk this through with you so that we can reach a solution together.'

When you raised your voice at X this morning, I felt concerned. I need the whole team to work together well to achieve our goals by the end of this week. I'd like to discuss what happened.'

[And/or]: 'What's your perspective on what happened in the team area today? How were you feeling? What do you need to do now to resolve this? What help would you like from me?'

Scenario 4: Stuck conversation between leader and another person

 [Formula: 1. Observation. 2. Awareness. 3. Inquiry. 4. Action.][⁵]

'Can we pause for a moment to look together at what's happening between us?'

My sense is that we're both stating our positions but seem a bit stuck. We seem to be talking at cross-purposes. Is that how it looks to you too?'

I'm aware that I'm starting to feel frustrated and a bit defensive. To be honest, I'm struggling to understand where you're coming from, and I'm feeling unheard.'

And I'm curious. How are you feeling? What are you wanting from me that you are not receiving? What's important to you in this? What do you want me to hear?

This is where I would like to get to... It would help me if you would be willing to.... What do you need from me? How about if we were to try X...?'

Scenario 5: Low motivation, engagement or performance

🗨 [Formula: 1. At best. 2. Aspiration. 3. Need to happen. 4. Commitment.][⁶]

'I'd like to have a conversation with you about where things are at now and what would make a great experience for you as you move things forward in your area. I have an idea about how we might approach this. Are you willing to give it a try?

OK, first. Whilst working on X, when have you been at your best? For example, when have you gone home thinking, 'Woah – that was a good day!' Tell me what happened, how you felt at the time, what made the difference. I'm keen to hear it.

Next, given that experience and as you look forward now, what would you like it to be more like, more of the time? What would make the greatest positive difference for you? Have a go at describing what you and others would be doing and how that would feel for you.

OK, that sounds like a great vision! Thinking practically now, what would need to happen for that to happen? What would you and others need to be doing to make it real? Paint a picture for me so I can imagine it too.

Now, thinking about next steps. Given what you've been reflecting on, and that kind of positive future, what would you be willing to do to bring it about? What would you want from me, or others, to help make it a reality for you? What shall we agree to do?'

Guiding principles

As a follower of Jesus, I find a number of biblical principles helpful, for instance:

- ↻ Jesus is full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)
- ↻ We are to speak the truth in love. (Ephesians 4:15)
- ↻ Our feedback is to be honest and authentic. (Proverbs 27:6)

I also find related principles from a wider variety of domains useful, for instance:

- ↻ Trust grows when we take a risk and find ourselves supported. (Stephen Covey, Speed of Trust, 2008)
- ↻ Feedback should raise a person's awareness and expand their reality. (Carole Pemberton, Coaching to Solutions, 2006)
- ↻ Support and challenge are both needed to create sustained change. (John Blakey & Ian Day, Challenging Coaching, 2012)
- ↻ If we proactively invite and respond positively to feedback, we will inspire confidence in others to do so too.^[7]

Motivating change

The goal of giving and receiving feedback is often about inspiring, motivating or requiring a change. In light of this, insights from motivational psychology can be useful, for instance:

Feedback

- 🔗 Be clear and explicit about your intention (motivation) and purpose (desired outcome) in giving feedback to, or requesting feedback from, another person.
- 🔗 Where possible, tap into the motivation of the other person when giving feedback – that is, who or what matters most to them, and notice that different people are motivated by different things (Margaret Moore, Erika Jackson & Bob Tschannen-Moran, *Coaching Psychology Manual*, 2016), for instance:
 - 🔗 Extrinsic: e.g. to gain praise from others, or a promotion, or a pay rise.
 - 🔗 Intrinsic: e.g. to increase job satisfaction, or improved wellbeing, or sense of achievement.

Some people are motivated more by moving *towards* (i.e. something they want); others by moving *away from* (i.e. something they want to avoid), (e.g. Dianne Lowther, *Towards and Away From*, 2019).^[8] This is sometimes known as the pleasure vs pain principle: the benefits of achieving something vs the costs of not doing it.

Motivational interviewing (MI) is a useful technique that seeks to tap into a person's motivation so that they are more likely to choose to change. Here are some sample MI questions (adapted from William Miller & Stephen Rollnick, *Motivational Interviewing*, 2012):

- 💬 'What values do you seek to live by in your life?'
- 💬 'How might a change in behaviour lead to benefits in the future?'
- 💬 'How might your current behaviour lead to problems in the future?'
- 💬 'What changes would you like to make?'
- 💬 'What support will you need from me (or others) to make the change?'

Non-violent communication

Leaders sometimes associate feedback conversations with a risk of provoking harmful or damaging conflict.

In view of this, insights from Non-Violent Communication (NVQ)^[9] can be useful, for instance:

For feedback to be effective in achieving change, leaders need to be clear and specific, and to own the issue. If we simply project the issue onto another person (e.g. blame), it is likely to evoke defensiveness and/or resistance to change.

A useful 4-step formula can be applied, or adapted as needed, especially in situations where trust is low or the issue is potentially emotionally-charged:

🗨 Observations: 'When I (see, hear)...'

🗨 Feelings: '...I feel...'

🗨 Needs: '...because I value...'

🗨 Requests: 'Would you be willing to...'

Raising awareness

A popular model for disclosure and feedback is known as the Johari Window (Joseph Luft & Harry Ingham, The Johari Window, 1955).^[10]

This model is often presented as a grid with four quadrants, with known/unknown to self on one axis and known/unknown to others on the other, to create the different dimensions.



The model can be used as a conversation-starter and can be useful for leaders because it invites as well as offers disclosure and feedback and, therefore, can build trust.

Appreciative/solutions-focused approaches^[11]



Appreciative inquiry (AI) and solution-focused approaches draw on positive psychology. As such, they focus on positive dimensions of a person or situation and desired future states rather than deficiencies or problems in the past.

As such, they invite and can evoke high levels of positive engagement for change and reduce risks of e.g. accusing, blaming or getting stuck in negative patterns.



The conversation will focus on:

-  Strengths (or, what went well), rather than weaknesses (or, what went wrong).
-  Solutions (or, what you want), rather than problems (or, what you don't want).

A simple yet effective framing can be:

-  Positive – past. WWW: 'What went well..?'
-  Positive – future. EBI: 'Even better if..?'

A sequence in coaching could look like:

-  1. 'When have you been at your best (or, when has it gone well)?'
-  2. 'What do you want (it) to be more like, more of the time?'

3. 'What need to happen for that to happen?'

4. 'What are you willing to do?'

Further resources

[1] See: Relational Feedback (<http://www.nick-wright.com/blog/relational-feedback>)

[2] See: Positive (<http://www.nick-wright.com/blog/positive>)

[3] See: Positive (<http://www.nick-wright.com/blog/positive>)

[4] See: The 4-Part NVQ Process (<https://www.nonviolentcommunication.com/4-part-nvc/>)

[5] See: Dynamics of Team Coaching (<http://www.nick-wright.com/dynamics-of-team-coaching.html>)

[6] See: Appreciative Coaching (<http://www.nick-wright.com/appreciative-coaching.html>)

[7] See: Cracks (<http://www.nick-wright.com/blog/cracks>)

[8] See: Towards & Away From Motivation (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Dh2oBS7cGE>)

[9] See: The 4-Part NVC Process (<https://www.nonviolentcommunication.com/4-part-nvc/>)

[10] See: Disclosure-Feedback Model (https://wabankers.com/images/wba/pdfs/edhrJohari_Only.pdf)

[11] See: Introduction to Appreciative Inquiry (http://www.new-paradigm.co.uk/introduction_to_ai.htm)

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