



5 Ways (Effective) Feedback is a Gift

workhuman®

A cultural building block

Most of us are familiar with how good it feels to get truly meaningful feedback – the kind of feedback that really helps us grow or acknowledges the growth we've already achieved. Great feedback is an invaluable gift that has an impact on our individual productivity, performance, and morale – and ultimately helps us build a stronger, more trusting work culture.

Whether it is encouraging or constructive, great feedback has been proven to have a strong impact on individual performance and satisfaction. But did you know that encouraging feedback can also have profound implications on the health of our organizational cultures?

Traditional performance management tends to be hierarchical, less frequent, and less trustworthy – relying on annual reviews and top-down observations oriented around job function. This limits its effectiveness and negatively impacts organizational trust and communication.

Today's feedback looks much different. It is multilateral, traveling in a continuous, inspired way from employee to manager and organization and back. It is also both manager- and employee-led, which gives it the power to foster trust and strengthen relationships across your culture. It can also be peer-to-peer, which reduces the potential unconscious bias impact of a traditional manager-employee relationship while expanding the scope of insights from one voice to many. It truly is a cultural building block.

Here are five ways effective feedback can improve performance and build humanity in the workplace.

ONE

Feedback helps us to improve where we need to.

The classic case for feedback is still where it is most effective today: to encourage employees to improve their performance and grow. Thoughtful, detailed, and specific feedback gives employees and peers the tools they need to reach their goals and excel. Studies show that we benefit from, and even crave, critical feedback, but that it should always be given in a committed, thoughtful, and fair way for maximum effect. While it may be tempting to avoid giving critical feedback, it's important not to dodge it, especially when it is requested by someone who wants to improve.

TWO

Feedback encourages us to double down on our best work.

We often think of feedback as a mechanism for change and improvement, but it can also be a powerful "green light" to encourage employees to keep up good work they are already doing. We should always remember to include what people are doing right in our feedback – by offering recognition, but also in what Gallup calls strengths-based feedback, which tends to focus more on supporting employee goals and learning than simply on task completion. It's important to give positive feedback even more proactively and freely, because concentrating solely on critical feedback can cause employees or peers to tune out over time. Positive feedback can be a needed boost to confidence and success for many employees.



THREE

Feedback builds trust and belonging.

Giving and receiving feedback fosters trust and vulnerability within organizations, building relationships and employee loyalty. When we exchange our thoughts and advice with the company, managers, and peers – and when that advice is accepted and acted upon – it increases our feelings of belonging. Studies have shown how important manager relationships are to our sense of community and happiness at work. Likewise, feedback is often given within the context of managing, coaching, and mentoring – which makes it equally critical to feelings of connectedness and organizational support. This is why it is important to both be honest in giving feedback, and open in how we receive and act upon it as managers and leaders.

FOUR

Feedback can save us from impending disaster.

In addition to the continuous gifts of feedback that we detailed above, feedback can be a lifesaving triage tool. Most of us can think back to professional advice that saved us from going off the rails. If you have mechanisms in place for timely, inspired feedback, your employees can offer and get course direction exactly when it is needed most. This is where feedback systems like Conversations® really shine. If we wait too long to give feedback, often by the time we hear it the damage has long since been done and left to fester. When offering just-in-time feedback, it's important to have empathy and give people time to absorb and act on your advice – because this sort of intervention is most likely to come as a surprise.

FIVE

Feedback can help us achieve our dreams.

Another direct application of feedback is helping employees achieve a very specific aspiration or goal. Perhaps your employee is working toward a promotion, certification, or other personal or professional milestone. Mentoring and coaching through feedback can be a powerful gift here, helping employees with goal-setting and tracking their progress. Often this sort of feedback will be employee-led. Working toward goals for learning or advancement is one of the top reasons that employees will ask for more feedback from peers or leadership and it is important to give it.

One thing should be noted here. Simply giving feedback is not always enough. Some feedback is careless, vague, or even destructive. To make a difference, your feedback must be effective and constructive.

What makes feedback effective?

Here are seven tips:

1. It is accessible everywhere: Effective feedback is accessible via the cloud in your organization and on all platforms, including mobile.

2. It is inclusive: Effective feedback is also accessible to everyone in the organization. It crosses functional boundaries and doesn't silo groups or exclude subgroups.

3. It is anyone to anyone: Effective feedback isn't limited to manager-to-employee communications. It can also go up, down, or sideways, incorporating feedback to managers, leaders, and peers.

4. It can be employee-led: Some of the most effective feedback is that which is requested. When employees ask for feedback, they are most open to hearing it.

5. It is continuous: Effective feedback isn't on a schedule. It is inspired and given frequently – whenever and wherever it is needed.

6. It is balanced: Effective feedback is never harsh or angry. It is always honest, but also inclusive of both positive and critical observations and advice.

7. It is individual: Effective feedback is never vague. It does not rely on templates or boilerplate and it is always respectful of each employee's expressed preferences.

Give your employees the tools they need to effectively give and receive the gift of feedback. Take a tour of Conversations® today.

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