

## What it is

A method for successfully preparing and delivering feedback to an individual

## What it can do

This tool can assist you to:

- Help train others to give high-quality, effective feedback.
- Help you to improve your skills in giving feedback to individuals

## When to use it

- When training or coaching people to improve their ability to give feedback: whether to people they supervise, teammates, or colleagues.
- With groups, in preparing them to give feedback to each other.
- When preparing yourself for challenging feedback sessions.

## How it works

This tool is available online at: [stproject.org/resources/tools-for-transformation](http://stproject.org/resources/tools-for-transformation)

The criteria on the following pages are thorough and helpful guidelines for giving skillful feedback.

## 1. Context matters

Always be aware of the relational context in which feedback is being given.

- Power: Does one person have more positional power in the organization?
- Social identity: Are dynamics of gender, race, age, ability, or class at play?
- Trust: Is the level of trust in the relationship low or high?

These factors impact peoples' ability to hear feedback.

## 2. Availability of receiver

- If someone is not willing to receive your feedback, it's not likely to be useful.
- It is easiest for feedback to be received when it's requested.

If not requested, make sure it's a good time to be giving feedback. Wait if the other person appears distracted, emotionally triggered, or otherwise not present and available.

## 3. Create context for feedback

- Be clear to yourself and the other(s) on the purpose of giving the feedback.
- What are the outcomes you hope to achieve?
- When possible, create a context of something to which you're both committed: the organization, shared values, agreed-upon goals, improving your relationship, etc.

## 4. Intent and tone

- The purpose of feedback should be to create something positive. Make sure your intent is positive (vs. simply venting or getting back at someone).
- It is usually unskilled to try to give feedback when you are emotionally triggered.
- Avoid disrespect or personal attacks. This makes it difficult if not impossible for others to hear.
- It is possible to express feels of frustration or hurt while still being respectful and kind.

*"Be kind whenever possible. It's always possible."* – The Dalai Lama

## 5. Being present

- So much of communication is non-verbal.
- Feedback is easiest to receive when the giver is present, connected to their purpose, in contact with the receiver, and at ease in offering their perspectives.

## 6. Helpful

- The receiver should actually have the capacity to do something about the feedback.
- Feedback should be improvement-oriented – more focused on opportunities, what is possible and what can be learned or improved, rather than where someone is stuck or dwelling on past failures.

## 7. Clear

- Feedback needs to be understandable to the person receiving feedback. Specific examples are usually helpful.
- Don't assume that just because certain words came out of your mouth that the other has actually received the message you intended.
- It is often useful to request that the receiver of feedback reflect back or summarize what they have heard.

## 8. Try to balance what's working and suggestions for improvement

- This is a better frame than "positive" and "negative." All feedback should be designed to have positive results.
- Usually, one should offer a balance of the two. If the truth is we have only affirming feedback and no suggestions, this is fine. But hearing only requests for change with no affirmation will often cause people to feel defensive.
- We usually begin first with affirming feedback. While the feedback "sandwich" (enclosing the suggestive feedback between two pieces of affirming feedback) is not necessary and may come across like a rote management technique, it is usually good to end the feedback session with some kind of positive energy that affirms your caring or commitment to this person, your belief in their capacity to learn and grow, etc.

## 9. Three kinds of feedback: *"I see. I feel. I imagine."*

- Behavioral feedback (*"I see"*)
  - Feedback about someone's behavior and its impact that is observable through objective data.
    - A Martian anthropologist studying the same scene would be able to see or hear something happening. For example: *"You delivered the report yesterday rather than two weeks ago as promised."*
    - *"Your evals for this last training were all 9's and 10's."*
- How they impact you (*"I feel"*)
  - How you personally feel about some behavior.
  - This derives its validity from being the truth of your experience and doesn't claim to be any more. For example:
    - *"I felt frustrated that the report came in late."*
    - *"I feel really pleased about your scores on the post-training evals."*
- Intuitive feedback (*"I imagine"*)
  - Your sense of things.
  - This should be offered as an opinion, leaving the person free to test against their own experience and insight. For example:
    - *"I wonder if the report was late because you've been so over-committed since the departure of one of your organizers."*
    - *"I imagine the extra time you put into prep for the training really paid off."*

- Intuitive feedback is easier to receive when there is trust present in the relationship.
  - When offering intuitive feedback, it's best to begin with statements that make it clear that you don't know for sure, and give people lot of space to agree or disagree:
    - *"I wonder if..." or "I imagine it might be possible that..."*
    - *"I have no idea if this is true or not, but..."*
  - Very often, these three forms of feedback may be combined. For example, you may have some objective feedback about their behavior, then describe its impact on you, and/or offer an interpretation.
  - It's useful to make clear which kind of feedback you are giving.
  - When you are giving behavioral feedback, refer to your sensory data.
  - Behavioral feedback is usually the easiest to receive, as it is more or less objective.
  - **IMPORTANT:** Avoid attributing motivation to peoples' behavior. We don't really know what lies in the heart of another person, and people may experience our projections as invasive or insulting.
10. **Avoid judgments (except when measuring against defined criteria)**
- Statements like *"You're rude!"* or *"You're inattentive!"* tend to be inflammatory. Point to the behaviors. (see #8)
  - In performance situations, it is appropriate to offer evaluations of behavior such as, *"Your reports aren't meeting our standards,"* or *"You have not been doing an adequate job of supervising \_\_\_\_."*
  - But be prepared to give evidence to support your evaluation.
11. **Try to avoid "third-party" feedback.**
- Examples: *"Well so-and-so said..."* or *"Others on the team feel..."*
  - It's often impossible for the other person to validate, can induce paranoia, and may stir up trouble with others.
12. **Be prepared to deal with impact of feedback**
- When giving feedback, you may have some impact on another human being. Be committed to deal with what is evoked.
  - Be willing to be present for any emotional reactions in the receiver.
  - People often need time to digest feedback. If you push for immediate response, you may get a less thoughtful or triggered reply.
13. **Criteria for evaluating feedback:**
- Did the person(s) receiving the feedback experience it as useful?
  - Did it help achieve the purpose for giving feedback? Did it lead to useful results?
  - Did it build a partnership that supports the ongoing relationship?