



**Feedback To Achieve  
Real Results**

# The Points of Effective Feedback

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Experience indicates that feedback is most effective when it has the following characteristics:

## 1. Feedback Should Be Descriptive Not Evaluative or Judgmental

Effective feedback includes a description of what feelings someone else's behavior has aroused in us. When we give descriptive feedback, our intention is to communicate to others what we are experiencing.

When we give evaluative or judgmental feedback our intention frequently is to judge the other person, or to present some evaluation of the quality or worth of his or her behavior.

### Evaluative / Judgmental Feedback

*"You couldn't possibly say that if you'd been listening to what's going on."*

### Descriptive Feedback

*"The way I heard you, I got the impression you were ignoring what I've been saying and that makes me somewhat annoyed."*

## 2. Feedback Should Be Specific Rather Than General

It is usually not very helpful to be told that you are being emotional or apathetic, irrational or cold, touchy or insensitive. Such characterizations are so general that it doesn't take a very keen observer to take one with only a grain of truth. While these characteristics are so broad they may be true, they describe at such a general and abstract level that the information you get is of no direct or practical use.

General Feedback:

*“What you did was bad for everyone. No one will want to put up with that sort of abuse.”*

Specific Feedback:

*“What you said sounded to me as though you are upset. It appears to have provoked you, but I don’t know how, specifically.”*

### 3. Feedback Should Take Into Account The Needs Of The Giver And The Receiver

Feedback designed only to relieve our own feelings may occasionally be justified in a situation, such as, that of defending the self from continued hostile or scornful or embarrassing or tormenting or frightening verbal attack.

In general, feedback calculated to relieve one’s own feelings fails to be constructive or effective. This is true since such feedback does not take other people’s feelings into account and thus it tends to (1) be destructive, (2) to cut off or drastically reduce communication, (3) not communicate anything useful to others.

Non-Empathetic Negative Feedback

*“That’s a helluva way for you to act. Do you want sympathy or just to have you own way?”*

Empathetic Feedback

*“I sense that you are pretty discouraged, aren’t you? It hasn’t been too long since I felt that way. I wonder if you have any ideas about how to beat it?”*

#### 4. Feedback Should Be Directed Toward Behavior The Receiver Can Reasonably Be Expected To Do Something About

To be told that you are dominating or retiring, amusing or frustrating, inhibiting behavior or helpful may not provide any clue for a change. If you feel someone is dominating or trying to dominate the group, then feedback directed to specific modifiable behavior will provide suggestions to the others as to a desired direction of change.

*“If you want me to follow your line of thought or understand how you really feel, I believe I could stay with you better if you would make your statements shorter and give me a chance to question, when I don’t understand.”*

#### 5. Feedback Should Be Solicited And Welcomed Rather Than Imposed

If you have reason to believe that your feedback may not be desired, it may be well to test by asking something like:

*“I’d like to tell you how I feel about what you’ve been doing; would you like to hear what I have to say?”*

At other times, when a person has received considerable feedback on his or her behavior, it may be appropriate to check with him or her to see if they want more. As a general rule, it is desirable to establish a norm that people can say at any time when they do or do not want feedback.

#### 6. Feedback Should Be Well Timed

When feedback is given as soon as possible after the behavior to which it refers, the person getting the feedback has a chance to recapture what he or she was trying to do.

## 7. Feedback Should Include Checks To Ensure Clarity And Understanding

Asking the receiver to re-phrase what came through to him or her, is one way for checking accuracy. The act of checking provides an opportunity for the receiver to raise questions or to make comments.

# The Feedback Sandwich

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## The Fundamentals of Feedback:

Within 5 Minutes: Feedback is most useful in changing behavior if it is given within 5 minutes of the completion of the event. I have a really hard time remembering what I was doing on Wednesday two weeks ago. So, if you can give me feedback about something I did 2 weeks ago, I can apologize, but there is not much I can do about it. To be useful it needs to be recent enough that I can use it in modifying behavior.

Feedback Sandwich: Negative feedback is not always acceptable. It therefore is often rejected unless it is made pleasing. Negative feedback which is sandwiched in between 2 positive statements is generally more acceptable and generally more utilized in behavior.

- What was done that was right
- What needs to be improved
- Overall positive statement

Drawbacks to Feedback Sandwich: Sometimes the Feedback Sandwich is so acceptable that the individual who really needs to know that (s)he needs to improve misses the point. This individual will say, "But everyone told me I was doing well." This type of individual will need improvement criteria in writing. Problems of sandwich feedback should not prevent its use – as a supervisor just be clear on what to do, if some individuals miss the full story – one of the next models.

# Alternate Models

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The following are two alternatives to the Feedback Sandwich and can be used by supervisors to give feedback to employees.

**Feedback Model #2 - Short Feedback with Response:** Feedback from the supervisor often needs more directedness and response from the employee. Here's a short model for feedback, when the Feedback Sandwich is not effective.

1. Tell the individual what was done, that was right.
2. Tell them what needs to be improved.
3. "Now, tell me what you are going to improve?"
4. "Tell me, how will you do this the next time?"

**Feedback Model #3 - Long Feedback with Response:** Feedback from the supervisor sometimes needs to be longer than usual, and the supervisor may suspect that the individual does not want to hear the feedback. This model for feedback solves those problems.

1. "How do you think you did in this exercise / project / assignment, etc.?"
2. "Is it important to you that you improve?"
3. "Good, you know how important it is for us to assist you in being the best that you can be."
4. "Now, let me tell you what you did that was right...."
5. "and what needs to be improved is....."
6. "Now, tell me what you are going to improve?"
7. "Tell me, how will you do this the next time?"

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*Kindest regards,*

*Cathy and Jeff*