

How to Give Feedback

A roadmap for feedback that clears the air — and keeps the relationship.

Before you start: choose one or two issues at most — not a laundry list. Pick a conducive space and time, free of distractions. Be calm; if you're triggered, wait if you can.

1 FRAME IT

Let them know this is feedback for improvement — not punishment — so they know what to expect from you.

2 APPRECIATE SOMETHING SPECIFIC

Find something you genuinely appreciate about them. Then say “and” — never “but.” (“But” negates the appreciation and raises hackles.)

3 NAME THE BEHAVIOR, SPECIFICALLY

The behavior, not a verdict on the person. “The reports had several errors in the past two weeks” — not “You're incompetent.”

4 DESCRIBE THE IMPACT

On you, the team, or the business. If emotion is involved, own it with “I” statements: “I feel frustrated because it's the third time we've talked.”

5 MAKE A REQUEST — AND ASK FOR IDEAS

“What ideas do you have to solve this?” Bring one or two of your own to share.

6 COACH AND LISTEN

If you sense resistance, ask: “Please repeat what you heard me say.” Then listen intently — their view may reshape yours.

Put It Together

One short paragraph. Practiced out loud. Delivered calmly.

Now write steps 1–5 as one short paragraph, so you can see the whole conversation at once. Practice delivering it a few times — in front of a mirror, or with someone you trust — until it comes out calm and clear.

FROM THE BOOK — A REAL EXAMPLE

Frame: “Joe, I want to discuss something with you to help you grow and become a better engineer. This is a feedback-for-improvement session.”

Appreciate: “I appreciate the time and detail you spent on the design of the part, and...”

Be specific: “I noticed the part is susceptible to vibration, based on its specs.”

Impact: “If a customer gets a faulty part, their products are in jeopardy — and we lose time and money on rework.”

Request: “So I’d like you to rework the specs and adjust the vibration differential. What comments, questions, or ideas do you have?”

BEFORE YOU DELIVER

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| ☐ In person, if at all possible | ☐ One or two issues — no laundry list |
| ☐ Calm state — not triggered | ☐ A space free of distractions |
| ☐ Ready to truly listen to their side | ☐ Appreciation, given generously |

A culture where people tell each other the truth will feel different at first — even unsettling. One step forward, two steps back is normal. Keep going.