



New Dynamics

Performance and goals

The guide to useful employee feedback

Give specific, timely feedback, listen to context and turn a difficult conversation into a practical next step.

Practical guidance · Worked examples · Printable worksheet

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Published 15 September 2026

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Read in order for the full approach, or use the linked contents to find a section. The final worksheet gives you space to record decisions and next steps.

Give specific, timely feedback, listen to context and turn a difficult conversation into a practical next step. This practical guide to employee feedback brings together a step-by-step approach, illustrative examples, a reusable worksheet and answers to common questions. Start with the section closest to your current challenge, then use the working session to turn the guidance into a clear next action.

Make the observation specific

Useful feedback starts with something the person can recognise. Describe the situation, the observed action and its impact. Avoid labels that imply you can see a person's intent.

Instead of “you are not collaborative”, explain that the handover omitted an agreed decision and the next team had to repeat the discussion. Ask for the person's view before deciding what the example means.

Choose the right moment and setting

Give feedback close enough to the work that the details remain clear. Choose a private conversation for sensitive matters and check that the person has room to engage.

- Describe the example without exaggeration.
- Explain the effect on the work or on others.
- Ask what context you might be missing.
- Agree a next step that can be practised.
- Offer support and a follow-up conversation.

Make receiving feedback easier

Managers can model the behaviour they want by asking for feedback on their own decisions. Ask a focused question, listen without immediately defending the choice and explain what you will change.

If you cannot act on a suggestion, explain why. A request for feedback followed by silence teaches people that the process is performative.

Carry learning into the next conversation

Capture the agreed action and relevant context, with clear expectations about who can see the note. Follow up on whether the change helped.

Use [continuous feedback](#) as part of the performance cycle and the [manager 1:1 template](#) to keep support and learning connected to everyday work.

Put the guide into practice

Set aside a working session with the people who own this process and one or two people who experience it. Use a fictional or appropriately authorised case, so the discussion can be specific without sharing unnecessary personal information. The purpose is to leave with a usable decision or document, not just agreement that the topic matters.

Prepare the case

Choose a fictional work event and write down only what was observed. Separate the action, the impact and any interpretation. For example, an omitted handover detail may have delayed another team, but that does not establish that the employee was careless or uninterested. Identify what context you need to ask about.

Write the starting assumptions down before discussing solutions. If the group disagrees on what happened, identify the information needed to resolve that difference rather than building a plan on an untested story.

Work through the decision

Practise opening the conversation with a specific example and an invitation to respond. Explain why the issue matters to the work. Listen before suggesting a solution, then agree a practical next step. If the recipient identifies a missing dependency or an unclear instruction, include that in the action rather than repeating the original criticism.

Ask each participant to explain the proposed decision in their own words. Differences in interpretation often reveal an unclear criterion, a missing responsibility or an instruction that will be difficult to follow.

Test an exception

Introduce feedback from someone who did not observe the event directly, or a recipient who disputes the facts. Decide what can be discussed as a question and what needs verification first. Also test a sensitive concern that belongs in a formal or confidential process rather than an ordinary feedback conversation.

Record what changes in this situation and what remains the same. An exception should lead to a clear next step, with an owner, rather than an informal workaround that nobody can explain later.

Agree the handoff

Summarise the agreed action and the support each person will provide. Confirm whether a note is needed, who will see it and how progress will be reviewed. A feedback conversation should help the recipient act; it should not leave them guessing what acceptable work would look like next time.

Finish by confirming the owner, the next action and the date when the result will be reviewed. Give the person receiving the work enough context to continue without repeating the whole discussion.

Frequently asked questions

What makes feedback constructive?

Constructive feedback describes relevant behaviour, explains its effect and helps the recipient identify a usable next step. It also allows for context and correction. Kind wording alone is not enough if the message is vague, and directness does not justify personal labels. Focus on what the person can influence and clarify any support or changed expectation needed.

How soon should feedback be given?

Give it while the details are still useful, with enough preparation to be accurate and in an appropriate setting. Avoid delaying an important issue until an annual review, but do not rush into a public or emotionally charged conversation without checking facts. Consider the recipient's ability to engage and the seriousness of the matter. Sensitive or formal concerns may require a different route.

What if the employee reacts defensively?

Pause and ask what they heard or what context is missing. A strong reaction may reflect surprise, an inaccurate account or the way the feedback was delivered. Keep the discussion specific and avoid arguing about personality. You can restate the work expectation while remaining open to correction. If the conversation cannot be productive, agree a suitable time and process to continue.

Review the first cycle

At the follow-up, discuss the actual work and whether the agreed change helped. Recognise progress specifically and examine remaining obstacles. Check your own contribution to the outcome, including whether instructions or support were clear. Useful feedback develops through a relationship of reliable listening and follow-through, not a single perfect script.

Keep a brief record of what was tried, what participants found useful and what needs to change. Compare the result with the original problem rather than judging success only by completion. If the process created extra work without improving clarity, quality or support, simplify it and test again. Share the agreed change with the people who will use it, and name the person responsible for keeping the guidance current.

Worked conversation: an incomplete handover

Illustrative opening: “In yesterday’s handover, the open customer issue did not have a named owner. The receiving team spent the first hour finding out who could respond. Can we look at what happened?” This states an observation and impact, then invites context. It does not assume that the person ignored the task deliberately.

The employee explains that two teams were still discussing ownership when the handover was due. The manager checks the timeline and agrees that the escalation route was unclear. Together they decide that unresolved ownership will be marked explicitly, with a named person responsible for obtaining the decision. The manager commits to confirming the escalation contact before the next handover.

A useful follow-up asks whether the receiving team could identify the next action and whether the manager’s promised clarification arrived. If the handover improved, the manager recognises the specific change. If it did not, both people examine the remaining obstacle rather than repeating a general instruction to communicate better.

This structure can be adapted for positive feedback too. Describe what helped, explain the effect and ask what made it possible. The purpose is to make useful work understandable and repeatable, while leaving room for the employee’s account of the situation.

Write any agreed note in factual language. Separate a verified event from a question still being explored, and avoid turning one conversation into a permanent label about the person.

About New Dynamics

[New Dynamics](#) connects goals, feedback, recognition and reviews around the way organisations work. This guide is published by the New Dynamics Editorial Team as part of our practical library for HR leaders, managers and People teams.

Use the examples and worksheets to structure your own discussions and adapt them to your organisation. Illustrative scenarios are not customer case studies. Policy and employment guidance needs appropriate local review before adoption.

For questions about this guide, corrections or a conversation about your performance management process, email contact@new-dynamics.com. Explore the complete [guide library](#) for related resources.

Your working worksheet

Use the prompts from this guide to prepare one real conversation or decision. Keep personal or sensitive information in your organisation's approved records. This page is for your own working notes.

Purpose: What needs to improve and for whom?

Evidence: What facts and context do you need?

Decision: What will you do and why?

Support: Who needs to be involved?

Next action: Who will do what and by when?

Review: What will show that the action helped?

Discuss your next step with New Dynamics: contact@new-dynamics.com