



Feedback That Fuels Growth

A People-First
Guide to Giving and
Receiving Feedback

FEEDBACK THAT FUELS GROWTH: A PEOPLE-FIRST GUIDE TO GIVING AND RECEIVING FEEDBACK

Your people are your greatest asset. Systems matter. Strategy matters. But your business will only scale as far as your team can grow.

And growth requires feedback.

When leaders avoid difficult conversations, performance stalls. When leaders refuse to receive honest feedback, culture erodes. But when feedback flows in both directions, trust deepens, blind spots shrink, and your team becomes a true strategic advantage.

This guide gives you two practical tools for your leadership journey:

- ✦ **Part 1:** A step-by-step framework for giving feedback with clarity and confidence.
- ✦ **Part 2:** A culture-building roadmap for receiving feedback and discovering what your company culture actually feels like to your team.

Use them together. Or use them independently. Either way, you'll be better equipped to lead your most important resource well.



THE DIFFICULT CONVERSATION PLAYBOOK

A Step-by-Step Guide to Giving Feedback Without Damaging Trust

Avoiding hard conversations doesn't protect your team. It confuses them. It quietly communicates that mediocre performance is acceptable. And over time, it erodes trust.

Great leaders understand this: Feedback isn't a punishment. It's an investment. When it comes to the long-term success of your team — as individuals and as a group — clarity can be the most important gift you can give as a leader.

Here's how to give difficult feedback in a way that builds trust, reinforces standards, and creates growth.

Step 1: Choose the Right Moment

The best method for giving feedback is in person or on a video call. Opt for a phone call if necessary, but never via email. Written feedback allows too much room for misinterpretation.

Best timing for difficult feedback:

- ✦ Earlier in the week (Monday–Wednesday)
- ✦ Earlier in the day (not late afternoon)
- ✦ As soon as reasonably possible after the issue

Avoid:

- ✦ Fridays at 4:30 p.m.
- ✦ Right before PTO
- ✦ Delivering multiple weeks of stored-up frustration at once

Feedback should never feel like an ambush.





Step 2: Open the Conversation Clearly

Start with connection. Then move to clarity quickly.

First words you can use:

- ✦ “I want to talk through something I’ve noticed because I care about your success here.”
- ✦ “I’m sharing this because I believe in your potential and want to help you grow.”
- ✦ “There’s one area where we need to raise the standard, and I want to walk through it together.”

Avoid:

- ✦ “This isn’t a big deal, but...”
- ✦ “I might be wrong, but...”
- ✦ Long rambling explanations that blur the message.

Be kind. Be direct.



Step 3: State the Specific Behavior



Feedback must be **specific** and **observable**.

Vague feedback is hard to act on and can quickly feel personal. Ensure you have specific examples of what they need to work on with actionable, time-bound next steps.

Instead of:

“You need to communicate better.”

Say:

“In the last two team meetings, you shared updates that were missing key deadlines and next steps. That left the team unclear on ownership.”

Use this formula:

When you did X, the impact was Y.

Example:

“When the client email went out with incorrect pricing, it created confusion and required three follow-up messages to correct.”

This keeps feedback objective rather than personal.



Step 4: Pause and Listen



After sharing, say:

- ✦ “Help me understand what was happening from your perspective.”
- ✦ “What do you think contributed to this?”

Then stop talking.

Listen without interrupting. Sometimes feedback reveals unclear expectations, workload overwhelm, or broken systems.

If They Get Defensive

Defensiveness is often fear in disguise.

You can say:

- ✦ “I’m not questioning your intent. I’m focused on the outcome.”
- ✦ “I’m on your side here. Let’s solve this together.”
- ✦ “We can both agree the result wasn’t what we wanted. Let’s focus on how to improve it.”

Stay calm. Don’t match emotion with emotion.

If They Get Emotional

Tears or visible frustration do not mean you’ve done something wrong.

Say:

- ✦ “I can see this is hard to hear. That makes sense.”
- ✦ “Take your time. This conversation is about helping you succeed.”
- ✦ “My goal isn’t to discourage you. It’s to help you grow.”

Pause. Give space. Maintain dignity.



Step 5: Define Clear Expectations

Feedback should always come with actionable, time-bound steps for improvement. Have ideas prepared, but try to build this plan together.

Encourage your employee to take an active role in their personal development. Clear expectations sound like:

- ✦ “Moving forward, here’s what needs to happen..”
- ✦ “By next Friday, I need you to..”
- ✦ “For the next 30 days, we’re going to measure progress by...”

Then confirm:

“Can you summarize what you’re taking away as next steps?”

Clarity prevents future resentment.

Step 6: Follow Up in Writing

Receiving feedback can be emotional. What you said and what they heard can often differ.

It’s always best to send a written follow-up outlining:

- ✦ The issue discussed (include positive and constructive comments)
- ✦ The agreed-upon action steps
- ✦ The follow-up date

This reduces misinterpretation and reinforces accountability.



REMEMBER: *INSPECT* WHAT YOU EXPECT

Follow up consistently. When improvement happens, celebrate it.

Say:

“I’ve noticed a big improvement in how you’re structuring updates. Keep going.”

Feedback plus encouragement builds confidence.



One of the best gifts a leader can give their team is clarity. Learning to deliver feedback early and often minimizes rework, builds trust, and prevents frustrations from snowballing into bigger issues.

[Schedule a Call to Get Started](#)

CULTURE CLARITY

A Guide to Uncovering Your **Real** Culture Through Feedback

You may think your company culture is collaborative, empowering, and growth-oriented.

But what does it actually feel like to work there?

People are your greatest asset. And understanding how they experience your leadership is non-negotiable. If you want to understand your company culture, you can't just look at your values statement. You have to get to the bottom of what your team experiences every day.

That means asking for feedback, and really **listening**.

Step 1: Audit Your Leadership Climate

Start with reflection:

- ✦ Do people bring you problems early, or only when forced?
- ✦ Do meetings feel safe for disagreement?
- ✦ When was the last time someone challenged you openly?

Silence does not equal alignment.

It may equal fear.



Step 2: Use an Anonymous Culture Survey

Send a short, anonymous survey. Here are some examples, but don't be afraid to get specific with your team. Feedback is a gift to your leadership!

Psychological Safety

- ✦ I feel safe admitting mistakes.
- ✦ Mistakes are treated as learning opportunities here.
- ✦ I can respectfully disagree with leadership without consequences.

Workload and Boundaries

- ✦ I feel comfortable taking PTO without checking email.
- ✦ I believe workload expectations are realistic.
- ✦ I can say no to additional work without penalty.

Clarity and Feedback

- ✦ I receive regular, actionable feedback.
- ✦ I understand what success looks like in my role.
- ✦ Leadership asks for and acts on feedback.

Trust and Ownership

- ✦ I feel trusted to make decisions within my role.
- ✦ Delegation here feels empowering, not micromanaged.
- ✦ Leadership follows through on commitments.

Add one open-ended question:

“What is one thing leadership could improve that would make your work experience better?”



Step 3: Prepare Yourself to Hear the Truth

Before reading results, decide:

- ✦ You will not retaliate.
- ✦ You will not dismiss.
- ✦ You will not explain everything away.

Feedback is data.

Even if perception differs from intent, perception is your culture.

If Feedback Feels Unfair

Say to yourself:

- ✦ “This may not reflect my intent, but it reflects their experience.”
- ✦ “If multiple people feel this, it’s a pattern worth addressing.”

Then meet with different team members to get more insight:

“I saw this theme in the survey. Can you help me understand what this looks like in practice?”



Step 4: Close the Loop Publicly

After gathering feedback:

- ✦ Share key themes.
- ✦ Acknowledge responsibility where needed.
- ✦ Announce 1–3 concrete changes.

Example:

“We heard clearly that it feels difficult to fully unplug during PTO. Starting next quarter, we’re implementing coverage plans to ensure no one returns to overwhelm.”

Nothing kills trust faster than asking for feedback and ignoring it.

Step 5: Model Receiving Feedback in Real Time

The best way to create a positive feedback culture is to model it.

When someone gives you direct feedback, respond with:

- ✦ “Thank you for telling me.”
- ✦ “That’s helpful to know.”
- ✦ “I need to think about that, but I appreciate you bringing it up.”

Never:

- ✦ Argue immediately
- ✦ Defend reflexively
- ✦ Punish subtly later

Your response trains the culture.

Culture isn’t created by a page on your website or words on the wall. It’s the everyday decisions your leaders model and your team members perpetuate. Being intentional about your culture starts with listening, adapting, and setting your team up to thrive.

[Schedule a Call to Get Started](#)



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