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Feedback that works

A cheat sheet with the SBI model, examples and a practice sheet – for managers and teams who want to talk about work in a specific and respectful way.



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before you start

Why do we need feedback?

Feedback is one of the simplest development tools – as long as it is specific and given with good intentions. Its purpose is not to judge the person but to help things go even better next time.

Reinforcing feedback

Shows what is worth repeating. It recognises a specific behaviour and its effect – so good practices become habits.

Developmental feedback

Points out what to change. It describes the behaviour and its impact, then opens a conversation about doing it differently.

A feedback culture

Emerges when feedback is not only given but also asked for and received well – at every level of the organisation.

what good feedback looks like

1 **Specific**

Describes what actually happened – facts, not opinions or sweeping words like “always” and “never”.

2 **Timely**

Comes as close as possible to the situation it refers to. Feedback three months later is more of an archive than a pointer.

3 **About behaviour, not the person**

“The report came in two days late” instead of “You’re irresponsible”. Behaviour can change; a label is hard to shake off.

4 **Meant to support**

Before you start, ask yourself: “Am I saying this to help?” If so, the other person will usually sense it.

a simple model

The SBI model step by step

SBI (Situation – Behaviour – Impact) is a model developed at the Center for Creative Leadership. It helps you structure feedback so that it is clear and doesn't sound like a judgement. It's worth ending with a question or a request.

S
Situation

When and where?

Name the specific situation so the other person knows what you're talking about. *"At yesterday's meeting with the client…"*

B
Behaviour

What exactly did you see or hear?

Describe the behaviour the way a camera would record it – without interpretation. *"…you interrupted the client twice before he finished his question…"*

I
Impact

What was the effect?

Say how the behaviour affected you, the team, the client or the result. *"…the client was clearly annoyed and the conversation went off track."*

+
Question / request

What next?

Invite a conversation or say what you need. *"How did it look from your perspective? What can we do next time?"*

Example: reinforcing feedback

S: During Friday's presentation to the board

B: you showed the results in one simple chart and answered questions with specific figures.

I: The board approved the budget straight away, and I was asked who had prepared the materials. **+** Would you show the team how you built that chart?

Example: developmental feedback

S: This week, when we were closing the project,

B: the report came in on Thursday, although we had agreed on Tuesday, and I wasn't told about the delay beforehand.

I: I had to move the client meeting and explain the delay. **+** What happened? How can we agree that next time I hear about a problem earlier?

the other side of the conversation

How to ask for and receive feedback

A feedback culture starts with leaders who ask for it themselves. The general question “Any feedback for me?” usually ends with “No, all good”. Specific questions work better.

questions that really work

- “What is one thing I could do differently in our meetings?”
- “What about the way I hand over tasks makes your work easier, and what makes it harder?”
- “How can I support you better on this project?”
- “If you were in my shoes, what would you change in this process?”

when you hear difficult feedback

1
Listen to the end

Don’t interrupt or explain yourself straight away. Your job at this stage is to understand, not to defend yourself.

2
Ask for an example

“Can you give me a specific situation?” helps separate facts from impressions – and shows you take it seriously.

3
Say thank you and decide

Thank them for their courage. You don’t have to accept every comment – but let them know what you’ll do with it.

3 traps to avoid

The “sandwich”

Praise – criticism – praise. People quickly learn that a compliment is followed by a “but”, and stop hearing the praise.

Judgement instead of observation

“You’re chaotic” is a label. “We changed the topic three times in the meeting” is an observation you can discuss.

Feedback once a year

Comments saved up for the annual review lose their value. Short, ongoing feedback works much better.

printable

Practice sheet

Prepare two pieces of feedback this week: one reinforcing and one developmental. Write them down using the SBI model before you talk to the person.

Situation	Behaviour	Impact	Question / request

checklist before the conversation

- [ ] I know the goal of this conversation – what should change or what I want to reinforce.
- [ ] I describe behaviour, not personality traits.
- [ ] I have a specific example, not a general impression.
- [ ] The conversation will take place as soon as possible after the situation.
- [ ] I have chosen a quiet place and time – without an audience.
- [ ] I have prepared a question that will open the conversation.
- [ ] I am ready to listen to the other side.
- [ ] I know how we will sum up what we agreed and when we will come back to it.

what's next?

Ready to take the next step?

This resource is a good start. If you want to bring about change across your whole team, we can help.

Building a feedback culture →

Workshops for managers and teams: a pre-training survey, interviews with managers and an interactive session where we practise giving, receiving and seeking feedback.

Individual coaching →

One-to-one work for leaders and managers – including preparing for difficult conversations with the team.

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Development conversations, delegation, team engagement, Gallup strengths and more – always tailored to your needs.

Not sure where to start?

Book a free 30-minute online consultation. We'll talk about your needs and suggest the best first step.

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