

Feedback that Works:

Understanding Generational Differences, Building Trust, and
Delivering Feedback That Creates Growth



DEVELOP. EMPOWER. RETAIN.

The Foundation of Effective Feedback

Many of us assume people see the world the way we do. They don't. One of the biggest mistakes leaders make is believing that their communication style is the "normal" way to communicate. What feels direct to one person may feel harsh to another. What feels supportive to one person may feel micromanaging to another.

Common sense is not common. Every person has a different background, life experience, personality, communication style, and set of expectations.

Before giving feedback, remember:

- Everybody has a reason and a story for how they became who they are.
- Different generations were raised with different communication norms.
- Different personalities process information differently.
- The only person you have complete control over is yourself.

Your goal is not to force someone to respond the way you want. Your goal is to communicate in a way that gives your message the greatest chance of being heard.

Thoroughbreds and Donkeys

Some people are natural "thoroughbreds."

They are driven, competitive, ambitious, and constantly looking for ways to improve.

Others are more like "donkeys." They are steady, loyal, dependable, and may not be motivated by competition or advancement.

Neither is better.

The mistake leaders make is assuming everyone is motivated by the same things they are.

Before giving feedback, ask:

- What motivates this person?
- What are they trying to achieve?
- What kind of communication helps them perform at their best?

Feedback becomes more effective when it is personalized.

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The Stories We Tell Ourselves

When something goes wrong, many of us immediately begin creating stories. Sometimes we tell ourselves:

Victim Stories - "It's not my fault."

Villain Stories - "They're doing this on purpose."

Helpless Stories - "Nothing I do will make a difference."

These stories often create emotional reactions that make feedback conversations worse.

Instead:

Pause.

Gather facts.

Ask questions.

Stay curious.

Focus on what is actually happening rather than the story you're creating about it.

The T.H.I.N.K. Filter

Before delivering feedback, ask yourself:

T – Is it TRUE?

H – Is it HELPFUL?

I – Is it INSPIRING?

N – Is it NECESSARY?

K – Is it KIND?

If the answer to one of these questions is "no," pause and rethink your approach.

The goal of feedback is growth—not simply expressing frustration.

Feedback Is More Than Words

Research consistently shows that people interpret messages through both verbal and nonverbal communication.

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Consider:

Your Body Language

- Are you standing over someone?
- Are you sitting at eye level?
- Are your arms crossed?
- What message is your posture sending?

Your Voice

- How loud are you?
- How fast are you speaking?
- Is your tone calm or tense?

Your Environment

- Is privacy needed?
- Who else is present?
- What happened immediately before this conversation?

Your Emotional State

Never underestimate the impact of your own mood.

If you are angry, embarrassed, frustrated, exhausted, or emotional, delay the conversation whenever possible. Responding thoughtfully almost always produces better outcomes than reacting emotionally.

Mirroring and Building Rapport

One communication strategy discussed during the webinar was mirroring.

Mirroring means subtly matching another person's communication style:

- Volume
- Pace
- Energy level
- Communication approach

People tend to feel more comfortable with people who communicate similarly to them.

This does not mean becoming someone you are not.

It means adjusting your delivery so your message can be received more effectively.

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Timing Matters More Than You Think

Sometimes feedback fails because the timing is wrong. Before providing feedback, consider:

Their Body Clock

Sparrows - Most productive in the morning.

Sprowls - Most productive in the middle of the day.

Owls - Most productive in the evening.

Their Audience Preferences

Ask yourself:

- Would this person prefer privacy?
- Do they enjoy public recognition?
- Are they likely to feel embarrassed if others are present?

The right feedback delivered at the wrong time often feels like the wrong feedback.

Generational Feedback Preferences

Remember: These are trends, not rules. Treat people as individuals while using generational insights as a starting point.

Baby Boomers

Many Boomers appreciate:

- Documentation
- Examples
- Respectful directness
- Feedback connected to professional growth

Helpful phrases:

"Can I show you a few examples?"

"I think this adjustment could help you be even more successful."

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Generation X

Many Gen Xers appreciate:

- Independence
- Efficiency
- Consistency

Helpful phrases:

"Here's a way to make this process easier."

"Let's simplify this."

"No news is often interpreted as good news."

Millennials/ GenZ

Many Millennials appreciate:

- Frequent feedback
- Specific feedback
- Collaborative conversations
- Clear explanations

Helpful phrases:

"I'd like to see more of this."

"Here's what could potentially improve."

"Here's why it matters."

For many Millennials and Gen Z employees, silence can feel like uncertainty.

A Simple Framework for Difficult Conversations

When addressing an issue, try:

When _____ happens...

I feel _____...

The impact is _____...

I would like you to _____...

This keeps the conversation focused on behavior and outcomes rather than blame.

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Appreciation Makes Feedback Easier to Hear

People are more receptive to feedback when they feel valued.

Consider the Five Love Languages:

- Words of Affirmation
- Quality Time
- Acts of Service
- Gifts
- Appropriate Physical Connection

Not everyone experiences appreciation the same way.

The more personalized your recognition, the more meaningful it becomes.

WHAT SHOULD I TRY THIS WEEK?

Don't try to implement everything. Pick ONE strategy and practice it consistently.

- ☐ Review the THINK framework before giving feedback.
- ☐ Use the "When...I feel...The impact...I would like..." formula during a difficult conversation.
- ☐ Schedule one weekly check-in with a direct report or teammate.
- ☐ Pay attention to someone's body clock and intentionally adjust when you give feedback.
- ☐ Match your communication style to the recipient's preferences.
- ☐ Ask someone whether they prefer public recognition or private appreciation.
- ☐ Read about the Five Love Languages and identify how your team members prefer appreciation.
- ☐ Give one piece of specific positive feedback every day this week.
- ☐ If you lead others, distribute the feedback assessment tool and ask for honest input.
- ☐ Document examples before giving corrective feedback.
- ☐ When working with Boomers, focus on respect, growth, and examples.
- ☐ When working with Gen Xers, explain how changes make life easier.
- ☐ When working with Millennials or Gen Z, increase the frequency and specificity of feedback.
- ☐ Replace assumptions with curiosity. Ask one additional question before drawing conclusions.
- ☐ Pause before reacting emotionally and



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