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Leaders who actively seek feedback are seen as more effective, trustworthy, authentic and respectful. (Shutterstock)

## Giving feedback can be daunting for new leaders — here's how to provide it thoughtfully

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Giving performance feedback at work can be a stressful experience, especially for new leaders and their employees. It often evokes feelings of anxiety, uncertainty and defensiveness.

Leaders might worry about how their feedback will be received and how it could affect workplace relationships. On the other hand, employees might feel vulnerable and apprehensive about being judged or criticized, which can lead to defensive reactions.

Yet, feedback has never been more important. In today's world, where complexity and unpredictability are the norm, leaders need access to diverse perspectives and accurate information to make informed decisions and strategically adjust their approaches.

Employees can be apprehensive to speak up at work, so it's crucial to create a workplace culture that values continuous learning and open communication. This requires everyone in an organization to engage actively in both giving and receiving constructive feedback.

When feedback is delivered thoughtfully and perceived as constructive by employees, it can bridge the gap between potential and performance and provide clarity in times of uncertainty.

For new leaders, mastering the art of giving feedback involves more than just addressing performance issues; it includes recognizing achievements, fostering professional development and building trust with employees.

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#### **Staying competitive**

Performance feedback offers several benefits that can help leaders and their workplaces. First, feedback helps leaders identify gaps between current and desired performance, allowing them to detect limitations and develop strategies for improvement. By understanding and addressing these discrepancies, leaders can enhance their workplace's performance.

In addition, managerial roles are often ambiguous and uncertain, especially as leaders move up the organizational hierarchy due to broader responsibilities, complex decision-making, and less direct oversight.

Traditional control mechanisms, like job descriptions and formal performance reviews, are often inadequate for guiding leaders through these complexities. In such cases, actively seeking out feedback becomes crucial for effectiveness.



Performance feedback offers several benefits that can help leaders and their workplaces. (Shutterstock)

Leaders need diverse feedback sources, such as peers, customers, mentors and industry experts, to understand and respond effectively to the rapidly changing business environment. Feedback from employees helps leaders tap into the collective intelligence of their teams, make informed decisions, identify strategic misalignments and develop innovative solutions.

Lastly, regularly seeking feedback from employees fosters a culture of continuous learning and engagement in the workplace. It strengthens relationships, shows appreciation for employees' knowledge, and motivates them to contribute to organizational goals.

## **Seeking out feedback is key**

It's equally important for leaders to seek and receive feedback from their employees. Embracing feedback enhances adaptability by providing leaders with real-time insights into what's working and what's not, allowing them to make necessary adjustments.

Leaders who actively seek feedback can refine their strategies, adapt their leadership styles, and improve inclusiveness within their teams, leading to better decision-making and stronger team dynamics.

When leaders seek feedback, they demonstrate humility and a commitment to self-improvement, which instills these values in their employees.

Leaders who actively seek feedback are seen as more effective, trustworthy, authentic and respectful. This behaviour positively impacts performance across all sectors. Employees working under such leaders feel more engaged, committed, resilient, energized, creative and satisfied at work.

Despite the benefits, many leaders — especially new ones — find giving and receiving feedback daunting and avoid it. Performance feedback can improve performance and leader effectiveness, but it can also lead to lower performance and interpersonal conflict if not done right.

This happens because our performance at work is closely tied to our perception of who we are.

Negative feedback can hurt our positive self perceptions, leading to defensive reactions.

## How to provide thoughtful feedback

To ensure feedback is received positively and constructively, here are five strategies to consider:

**1. Develop your skill:** Improve your ability to give feedback by educating yourself through articles, videos and formal training. Observe other leaders to learn from their techniques. Practice delivering feedback in low-stakes situations to build confidence and proficiency, and take time to reflect on your experiences.

**2. Check your motives:** Before giving feedback, ensure your intentions are genuinely aimed at helping the recipient improve, rather than to criticize or vent any frustrations. If you are seeking feedback, approach it with an open mind and be ready to listen and act on the insights provided.



Feedback is a strategic tool that can build trust while driving better decision-making. (Shutterstock)

**3. Choose the right time and setting:** Timing is everything. Provide feedback when both you and the recipient are calm and avoid times of high stress. Deliver feedback while the context is fresh and the details are clear. Choose an appropriate, comfortable setting where the recipient feels safe and open to discussion. These conversations should not feel intimidating for either party.

**4. Separate performance from self-concept:** When giving feedback, focus on task-related processes — steps, techniques and strategies — rather than on the person's abilities or value. This approach reduces defensiveness and promotes improvement by directing attention to the task at hand. Be specific and clear when acknowledging good performance in employees.

**5. Treat feedback as a gift:** When asking for feedback from employees, acknowledge the risk they take in sharing their insights, such as potential discomfort or fear of negative repercussions. Appreciate their courage and use the feedback to grow and improve. Practice humility, and recognize that constructive feedback gives you the opportunity to benefit personally and advance your career.

Giving and receiving feedback constructively is more than just another leadership skill — it's a strategic tool that can build trust while driving better decision-making. Practice it regularly, and watch both your leadership capacity and team dynamics flourish.