

Feedback



Feedback is crucial to ensure that you have fully understood an issue, to help someone to understand how they come over to others, and to enable someone to move forward.

Feedback, particularly challenging feedback, needs to be **explicitly owned**, **timely**, and **kind**. If I say 'You seem aggressive' I may be saying something about me rather than you: I may find you aggressive whilst others find you direct. It is better to say 'I find your approach aggressive (for this and this reason)'. This opens a discussion, invites reasons for my view, and your reasons for opposing it.

If feedback is given at the wrong time, it can do more harm than good. People need to be prepared for difficult feedback. This does not mean avoiding an issue. It does mean ensuring that the appropriate space (possibly private and certainly uninterrupted) and the appropriate time (when you and the other person can explore an issue rather than rush it) are made.

Kindness is not about avoiding truths, softening them, or using language that makes something sound less serious than it is. Rather, kindness is ensuring, as far as possible, that the feedback is necessary, aimed at the wellbeing of the person receiving it, and comes with appropriate support so that someone is not left trying to pick up the pieces on their own.

Tips for giving good feedback

- Focus on, and understand, your style. Do you get straight to the point? If so, you run the risk of being seen as aggressive and need to make sure that your feedback is precise but not abrupt and needlessly challenging. Do you tend to avoid difficulties and be everyone's friend? If so, you run the risk of taking too long over feedback and fudging it so the person you are talking to is still unclear about what, actually, you are saying.
- If you have to give some challenging feedback, rehearse it with someone else. Ask for their views on your tone and content.
- Clarify to prevent misunderstandings (and save time). If you share your interpretation of what's been said, and the coachee shares their interpretation, you can each pick up on and fine tune any misinterpretation.
- Paraphrase. Similar to clarifying but brings another perspective by using different words to describe what you've understood.
- Summarise to condense and simplify what has been said, the progress made, the stage you are at etc.

Clarifying, paraphrasing and summarising all contribute to successful coaching. Used carefully, they will prevent assumptions, nip any misunderstandings in the bud, build trust and keep focus.