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Performance Feedback: What, Why, Who, When and How

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Learning Outcomes

As a result of taking this course, the student will:

1. Be able to compare and contrast an objective feedback evaluation with a subjective one.
2. Be able to compare and contrast a feedback session with a performance evaluation.
3. Be able to list three reasons for giving feedback about performance
4. Be able to list four elements necessary to make a new task assignment worth assigning
5. Be able to determine whether an activity is productive or simply busy
6. Be able to use a flow chart to determine the cause of a performance problem

Performance Feedback: What

One of the American Heritage Dictionary¹ definitions of feedback is, "The return of information about the result of a process or activity; an evaluative response [emphasis by author]. The teacher asked the students for feedback on the new curriculum."

It can be the roar of approval of the crowd when the home team scores or the shower of debris when they fumble again for the third time. For our purposes in this course, it is all about a reaction to someone else's behavior in the workplace.

The key passage in the definition is AN EVALUATIVE RESPONSE. Also, it is important to realize that the feedback isn't always verbal. Many times, the non-verbal communication of a look or gesture speaks volumes about the observer's internal evaluation of the recent behavior.



Feedback is more about a single recent behavior and reinforcing or correcting it going forward. You do it as many times as are needed and not every employee may need it. Performance evaluations, however, are of a greater scope looking back over the past year or more and setting a series of goals for the future. Every employee gets a performance evaluation.

Also, it is critical for the learning outcomes of this course to break down the word "evaluative" a little farther by specifying an objective evaluation: we DO NOT mean a subjective evaluation. Here is how we will use the terms objective and subjective in this course:

Objective - describing the behavior by using specific data, measurables, objects or actions that are observed and not subject to argument. "*The man in the picture above has his hands on his face, his eyes open, and is not smiling*" is an objective observation because we can see clearly those conditions are true. Whether we like each other or have never agreed on anything in the past does not matter: it would be virtually impossible to disagree about that objective observation: i.e., facts.

Subjective - describing the behavior by using our interpretation of specific data, measurables, objects or actions that are observed. "*The man in the picture above must be sad because he has his hands on his face, his eyes open, and is not smiling*".

Here, we can argue all day whether he is sad, depressed, daydreaming, or was up all night with a sick child (all subjective evaluations) but we will agree quickly that he has his hands on his face, his eyes open, and is not smiling - the objective behaviors. If you will focus on objective feedback based on conditions that are in front of you and the subject, you will be more successful in achieving the purpose of giving that evaluation. If you allow yourself to wander into the subjective arena by guessing at the underlying reasons for the observed behavior, you're setting yourself up for problems.

Performance Feedback: Who

In the workplace, you can give feedback upward to your superiors, laterally to those with whom you work, or downward to those reporting to you. At home, you may give feedback to a spouse, parents, children, neighbors, and anyone else with whom you may interact.

Although there are many opportunities and situations for feedback, the good news is that the principles for good feedback are constant for all situations.

Performance Feedback: Why

The universal reasons why we give feedback are we want someone to:

- Start doing something that is desirable
- Stop doing something that is not desirable
- Continue doing something that is desirable

Let's explore each of these topics a little more.

Start Doing Something...

In all honesty, if we include "start doing something" as one of the reasons for giving feedback, and we previously defined feedback as, "The return of information about the result of a process or activity", a literal person may ask, "How can you return information about the result of a process or activity that has not started yet?" And they would be right.

We're talking about a task or behavior that was overlooked earlier when the duties in question were assigned. Maybe the omitted piece was not relevant at the time or simply did not exist. In either case, we must consider it now and so we must structure our feedback discussion to include it.

Before we simply say, "Be sure to add this new task we overlooked earlier to the great job you are already doing," it is useful to talk about the nature of any tasks we may assign. *If we cannot associate objective -not subjective - requirements to the new task, we risk setting our employee up for performance failure.* Their failure to perform satisfactorily can be directly traceable back to our inability to define expectations clearly.

A new task assignment requires at least these elements for it to be worthwhile assigning:

REALISTIC (*in the mind of the person doing the work*) – The person must feel they have some chance of success or they will not bother trying. ["**This will be a new use for that machine you have been using so successfully.**"]



Quantifiable – It must tell the person **HOW MUCH (Quantity), HOW WELL (Quality),**



and **BY WHEN (Time)**. This knowledge helps them gauge their own progress toward the ultimate goal. We will abbreviate this to “QQT” in this course. ["**We will need you to create six (quantity) new units, with zero defects (quality) by Friday at 4:00PM (time)**"]

JOB RELATED – He/she must understand how this fits in with his understanding of what he is paid to do. ["**These new units will help us expand our market and help you increase your range of job skills.**"]

Doable – They must involve his/her *doing something* that they can observe and measure. A goal that calls for “*Understanding how work flows through the Highway Department*” is useless because you cannot measure **UNDERSTANDING**. It only becomes useful if he/she must **do something** that demonstrates his/her understanding such as, “explain in writing the complete workflow of a request from a citizen for a safety sign on his street until it is installed.”



[The assignment is entirely doable because he is producing tangible outcomes. We can count the units, inspect them for quality, and look at the clock on the wall to see if he's finished by 4:00PM.]

We can take this a little farther and ask, “*Do you think a person can be very busy but not very productive?*” How could this happen?

It can happen because **activity is not always productivity**. Unless you define the QQT aspects of a desired task, you risk having an employee who is just busy. When you focus a task with the three critical performance standards that define “how much,” “how well” and “by when” (**QQT**), you establish goals and become productive.

Think about a light bulb in a nearby lamp. Its light is physically the same as a laser beam. However, the laser has all of its energy narrowly focused upon a particular point that gives it incredible power. How could you compare parts of your workday to the light bulb and the laser beam?

When do you feel more satisfied with your work: when you are acting like an unfocused light bulb or a narrowly-focused laser beam? Which condition ultimately makes your job more enjoyable and your work more productive?

How can you use the light bulb and laser beam example in a discussion with your employees? Why would you want to do that?

Could an employee that isn't meeting your performance expectations possibly be unsure of the specific requirements of the assigned task? Is there a chance they may have been given vague, yet typical, directions like one of these:

- "Make it look professional" (How do you do that using QQT criteria?)
- "Make it timely"
- "You've got to be a better team player"
- "You have got to work 'smarter'"

Practice Activity

Describe in this space an activity that you would like someone to start doing using the quality, quantity, and time requirements and getting them focused like a laser beam.		
The Quality (how well in measurable terms) component is:	The Quantity (how many) component is:	The Time (by when) component is:

Are these situations below productive or just busy? Read each situation and put a checkmark under the appropriate “Productive” or “Busy” column. Remember, we define “productive” as having all three elements of **how much (quantity), how well (quality), and by when (time)** present in a situation.

The situation	Productive	Busy	If “busy,” what is missing?
Grant has been pushing the cart loaded with statements up and down the hall for the past 45 minutes.			
Logan has processed 200 documents in the past 3 hours.			
Ben has the machine running items at a speed of 375/hour and a reject rate of .82%			
Cindy completed 3 hours of classes at night school this past quarter.			
Describe a typical activity of yours that is busy but not productive because you have not been told the three components of productivity; quality, quantity, and time .			
Which of the three components is missing?			
What will you do about it?			

- Grant is just busy. Nothing has been accomplished. What is the “quality” measurement?
- Logan has processed 200 documents but are they the correct ones? Where they processed accurately? There is no QUALITY component.
- Ben has been productive. The quality component is the “reject rate”.
- Cindy completed the courses but what was her grade? If she failed, there is no productivity. If she received an “A”, she was more productive than if she received a “C”.

Stop Doing Something

Giving feedback to an employee to stop doing something can only result from two situations:

1. You *no longer need them to do it* because the quota has been met, the specs have changed, etc.
2. You *still need them to do it but they are not meeting your requirements*. You want to correct them before they waste any more time and resources.

The first reason, stopping because we no longer require their output, is self-evident and requires no further explanation.

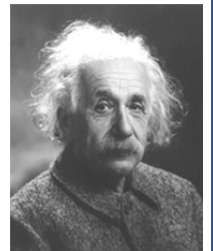
The second reason could be a lot more complicated than we realize. Anytime we deal with human performance issues, we must view them as a series of events that ultimately lead to the final outcome. Bad things or products don't just occur spontaneously. In other words, if the output is unsatisfactory, we must *go upstream and analyze what led to the problem*.

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Also, we humans have a tendency to solve (or try to solve) new problems with old remedies. We look at the new problem and try to determine if any part of it is something we have encountered before. If so, we apply the familiar remedy and hope to solve part of the problem which still leaves the unfamiliar piece

unsolved. We may experiment with other remedies or try the familiar one again in case we missed something the first time. The unfamiliar may go unsolved until it either fixes itself or goes away. Rarely will we try something new – especially if we have many years experience! It's like the old saying – *if your only tool is a hammer, every problem looks like a nail*.

Albert Einstein is credited with saying (paraphrased), *“Insanity is doing things the way you always have and expecting different results.”* For many people, when familiar activities do not produce the expected results, they try harder *doing the same things* that led them to their current predicament.



Did you know that 90% of the causes for unsatisfactory performance outcomes have their roots in situations controlled by management? We offer this flow chart to help you understand what we mean.

Before you begin, ask yourself, "Is this issue worth pursuing?"



Question: How do you know if this issue is worth pursuing?"

If it interferes with your agreed-upon production goals, it is worth pursuing! If it is only a nuisance or aggravation, but does not interfere with production, it may be wiser to leave it alone

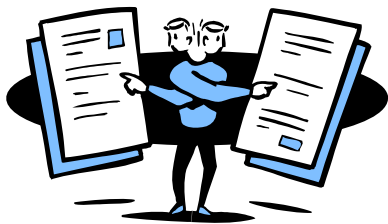
For example, if they do not do something the way you always have for 30 years yet they still get to the same outcome, is it really worth insisting they do it your way? Or maybe they are not a workaholic like you and leave at 5:00 PM to spend time with the family.

If they are meeting their assigned goals, you will gain nothing by raising the issue of "dedication to work" and possibly lose a part of your valuable relationship with them.

If it is worth pursuing, go to STEP #1 below. If not worth it, let it go! Remember, you can stop anytime in this process flow when the problem is "sufficiently solved." (We use "sufficiently solved" to mean it is not worth the time, effort, or expense to "fix it better.")

STEP #1

Ask yourself, "Are my expectations clear?"



Question: What do you say to your employee here?

"I want to make sure I did a good job of explaining my expectations. Please tell me what you think I expect you to do including aspects of quality, quantity, and time."

Notice that you are not asking, "What do you think I want you to do?" as if they did not understand. Some people may feel you are questioning their intelligence.

You are phrasing it as if you are not sure how well YOU COMMUNICATE WITH THEM. If they do not understand, the responsibility is on you to clarify it, not them to ask for clarification.

If that is what led to the problem, change it, and you are done. If it is not, go on to the next step.

STEP #2

Ask yourself, “Are their resources adequate?”



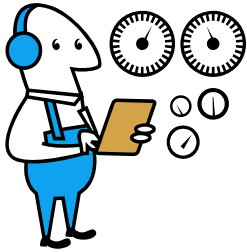
Question: What do you ask your employee here?

(“Do you have everything you need to do what I expect?”)

If that is what led to the problem, change it, and you are done. If it is not, go on to the next step.

STEP #3

Ask yourself, “Do they get fast and frequent feedback on their performance?”



(A gauge is an excellent feedback instrument!)

Question: What do you ask here?

(“How do you know how you are doing?”)

If they have a way to determine the levels of quality and quantity of their output and know whether it’s on time without having someone else tell them, they are good.

If they do not have this ability, they won’t know if they have to adjust what they are doing without someone telling them.

If that is what led to the problem, change it, and you are done. If it is not, go on to the next step.

STEP #4

Ask yourself, “Does the desired performance seem punishing?”

(Hint: What do you usually do if they finish early and **others have not yet finished?**)



Question: What do you ask your employee (or yourself about the situation) here?

“What usually happens when you finish an assignment early?”

If their “reward” for finishing early is you give them the work the slower people have not finished, you will soon have no one finishing early.

You must praise the ones who finish early, let them know you know they finished ahead of the others, and ask if they will help the slower ones.

This way they get praise, know you have noticed their work completion, and they do not feel the slackers are getting away with anything. Otherwise, you are punishing them for their desired behavior of finishing early!

If that is what led to the problem, change it, and you are done. If it is not, go on to the next step.

Please notice that Step #4 and the next step, #5, are opposites of each other yet very common in a production environment.

STEP #5

Ask yourself, "Is poor performance rewarded somehow?"

(Hint: What do you usually do if **they have not finished yet** but others have?)



Question: What do you ask your employee (or yourself about the situation) here?

"What do I usually do when this employee is getting behind and the other one has finished?" (If it is divide their unfinished work among the faster ones who have finished, you have big problems!)

This is the opposite of step #4. If they are behind, let them know you know they are not carrying their part of the workload and have to get the faster ones to help them. This way, they realize they are not getting away with anything.

Otherwise, you are teaching them that they will get help if they work slowly enough. You are rewarding their undesirable behavior and soon you will have ALL SLOW EMPLOYEES!

If that is what led to the problem, change it, and you are done. If it is not, go on to the next step.

STEP #6

Ask yourself, "Is there any penalty for not doing it right?"



Question: What do you ask yourself here?

"Is there any penalty for not doing it right?"

If there is no penalty for doing something wrong, why would they stop doing it?

If that is what led to the problem, change it, and you are done. If it is not, go on to the next step.

STEP #7

Ask yourself, "Can the task be made easier?"



Question: What do you ask the employee here?

"Can you think of any easier way to do this?"

If that is what led to the problem, change it, and you are done. If it is not, go on to the next step.

STEP #8

Ask yourself, "Is their non-satisfactory performance a genuine skill deficiency?"



Question:

What do you ask your employee (or yourself about the situation) here?

"Can they:

- not do it at all
- not do it very well
- do it satisfactorily but just do not want to?"

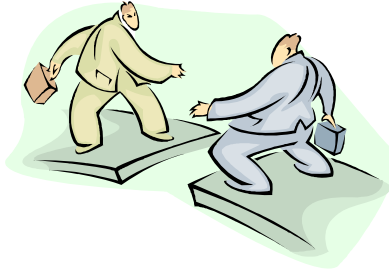
If they have done it in the past but aren't doing it very well now, give them practice to refresh their skills until performing satisfactorily and you are done.

If they cannot do it or do not want to do it, continue to the next step briefly before going to step #10.

If that is what led to the problem, change it, and you are done. If it is not, go on to the next step.

STEP #9

Ask yourself, "Are there any other obstacles keeping them from performing to expectations?"



Question: What do you ask here?

"Can you think of anything else keeping you from doing this?"

If there are obstacles you can remove, do so and you are done. If there are not, go on to the next step.

STEP #10

Ask yourself, "Does the person have the desire to change?"

Question: What do you ask here?

"What plans do you have to change your behavior?"



If you like their response, train them to the desired skill level.

If you do not like their response,
REPLACE THEM!

Have you noticed that nine out of ten steps, except #10 - the employee's choice, is a factor controlled by management?

Can you understand now why we say that nine-out-of-ten (90%) of performance problems have their roots in situations controlled by management?

Continue Doing Something

Obviously if someone is doing what you want them to do, you will want them to continue. And, it is a foundation of human behavior that what's rewarded gets repeated. (We are not talking about bribes or that all rewards are financial.) Many times, words of recognition, appreciation, or encouragement are all that is needed to stimulate more desired behavior.



It is more effective from a feedback standpoint to focus your employee's attention on the things they are doing right instead of reminding them of what they are doing wrong. Think of the Little League baseball coach shouting to his pitcher, "Be sure to cover home plate on a passed ball so the runner on 3rd doesn't score!"

What message do you think he is unintentionally sending between his words? (I expect you to throw a wild pitch, so cover home plate in an attempt to lessen the damage you are going to cause!)

What do you think is the inevitable outcome of his "coaching" of the pitcher? (*There is a high probability there will be a wild pitch!*)

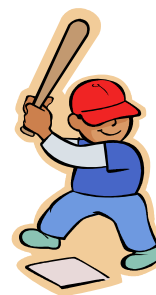
What should he be saying? (Hint - What does he really want the pitcher to do? "Hit the catcher's glove! Throw it across the plate!")

There is a simple, yet very powerful, method an effective leader can use ***in less than 30 seconds*** to provide feedback to help employees focus on what they are doing right. Also, it will increase the likelihood they will keep doing it! This is how it works:

Just remember the word **P-A-C-E-R** (**P**erformance – **A**sk – **C**heck – **E**lse – **R**einforce) to take you through the steps easily. Here is an example of how it works. Imagine you are a Little League parent and your player got a base hit. After the game or as soon as you can, you run up and congratulate him. Your conversation – after learning this technique – will go like this: (This will take about 30 seconds!)

Parent: "Great hit, son! That ball really took off! How did you hit it so well?"
(*This calls his attention to the performance you want repeated.*)

Player: "Well, I held the bat like you taught me, stayed relaxed, and watched the ball. When I thought it was close enough; I turned my hips into the ball and whipped my hands around. Then followed through and the ball took off!" (*You ask what he did and check to make sure it is correct. If he says, 'I just closed my eyes and stuck the bat out there', have him repeat what he **should have done!***)



Parent: “What did it feel like when you hit it? Was it exciting hearing everyone screaming?”
(These questions help him relive the moment and create a desire to do it again.)

Player: “It was great! This is the best baseball day I’ve ever had!” (This is more reinforcement of the moment.)

Parent: “It sure is! Is there anything else we can do to make sure you keep getting great hits like that?” (Asking ‘what else’ gives them a chance to offer any ideas they may have. Remember, you do not have to act on them if they are unreasonable.)

Player: “I can keep doing what I’ve been doing. And, we could start going down to the batting cage!”

Parent: “OK! You keep swinging correctly and we will go to the batting cage some more, too! Son, you are doing great! We are very proud of you! Keep it up!” (This is the ‘reinforce’ by praising him.)

Draw his/her attention to the desired performance you want.

“You’ve finished your work early AGAIN! That is great!”

Get him/her thinking about what he did by asking how he did it.

“Please tell me how do you achieve that EVERY DAY!”

Listen carefully to his/her description to check whether it was an intentional act or random chance. (If random, review with them what they need to do to make it happen consistently.)

Give him/her a chance to continue doing the right thing by asking what else you can provide to make sure it keeps happening. “Is there anything I can do to help you keep finishing early?” (If their suggestion is reasonable, consider doing it. If not reasonable, you are not obligated to do it.)

Reinforce the moment and wrap it up with an encouraging phrase.

“You have certainly made our department look good! Keep it up!”

Some Additional Thoughts

Here are some other considerations when using the **P-A-C-E-R** model. We will continue with the Little League example to explain. Use a little imagination to see how you can apply them at work.

“How did you hit it so well?” Be sure you do not say this with a tone of *disbelief* – as if you never expected him to succeed. Be *amazed* at how successful he was and how he made it look so easy: Never *act surprised!*

“What did it feel like when you hit it? Was it exciting hearing everyone screaming?” This helps him recall the feel and sounds of success. The more you involve all of his senses in the recall, the greater the impression on him.

Especially involve his emotions. The more he recalls his emotions to imprint further the *feeling* of achievement, **“How proud did you feel? Was it exciting?”** “The easier you make it to relive the moment means the greater the stimulus to keep practicing properly. (This works for adults as well as Little Leaguers!)

Performance Feedback: When

Many people believe that that feedback should happen as soon after the observed event as possible for maximum effect. That is ALMOST true - it should happen as soon as possible if you are giving POSITIVE feedback: i.e., a high probability they will like to hear what you have to say.

Feedback such as, "Great job on giving that presentation", "These are the best cookies I've ever tasted", "That outfit really looks great on you (in a non-work environment)" is probably pretty safe to say immediately.

However, bursting out with, "What were you thinking?", "Where did that come from?", or "You're fired!", should probably have some time pass between the event and your reaction to make sure:

- You have all the facts and fully understand what led to the event (remember how 90% of work-related performance problems have their roots in situations controlled by management?)
- You are able to focus on the behavioral aspects of the event (what they did, not them personally) and link them to an impact on work (either theirs or their associates)
- You can meet privately in a neutral setting, if possible, so as not to add additional pressure to the situation
- If the behavior you observed was upsetting to the participants and observers, allow enough time for the principles to settle down before you engage them
- You can identify the three phases of the conversation (we'll cover this next) that you plan to have to minimize the awkwardness and tension you may feel.

Positive Feedback: How to Give It

This will be a short section because giving meaningful compliments is something that most people can do easily. We touched on this earlier on page 14 with the PACER model as a way to continue desired performance.

Although, there are many ways to say verbally and non-verbally that someone has done a good job, it takes some thought if you want them to continue doing a specific good job. The reason we give positive feedback in response to desired behavior is to encourage repetition of it.

The secret to getting that repetition is to identify specifically what we liked about their behavior and not be lazy by resorting to vague generalities.

"Your report was comprehensive, used many colorful charts and pictures, on time, accurate, and wire bound" is much more useful than saying, "Congratulations on doing such a professional-looking report!"



How will they know how to continue pleasing you unless you tell them specifically what you want?

Negative Feedback: How to Give It

The key aspect of giving negative feedback that you only get one chance to get a good start. We mean that thinking to yourself later, "I wish I hadn't said that..." or "I probably could have used a better sequence of statements to make my point" is too late to unring that bell of disaster.



It is important to have a plan even if you do not have a lot of time to think about one. Some rationale to the sequence of topics you will present is much better than just blundering into the conversation and trying to sort it out as you go along.

We recommend that you consider these (not a specific order) elements of the negative feedback session:

Identify the specific behaviors which are causing the problem **and link them to work.**

Remember, in the workplace, we pay people for specific performance and any feedback we give them should be tied to an aspect of performance: either theirs or their impact on someone's else's. "When you are late with your work, everyone downstream from you must wait also."

Be sure to **separate mentally the undesirable behavior from the person.** Think of dealing with someone you care about in your personal life. Whether, spouse, parent, child, or close friend, you can

dislike and comment upon what they do without commenting on them personally. "I do not dislike you, I dislike what you did!" is the simplest way to explain what we mean.

When you're ready to address the issue at hand, start with, "**Help me understand why...**" and then specify the behavior you are talking about. The help-me-understand-why opening is not accusatory and allows the possibility there may be a reason for the behavior that you don't know about and you're willing to hear it. Additionally, it gives them a chance to explain their rationale while making you seem like a reasonable person.

You cannot be an evaluator of performance as a supervisor, family member, or just a good friend and be more concerned about being liked more than correcting the behavior. You are doing this to try to help them: sometimes the right things to do are the hardest. After all, if you didn't care about them, wouldn't it be easier to allow them to self-destruct?



Mentally arrange your comments into three phases of the session:

First is the positive setup where you start by identifying some good aspects of their performance. "Your reports are always on time", helps them see you are trying to see the big picture and this isn't only a focus on the negatives.

Also, from your perspective, you are creating a contrast with the problem behavior to help them see your viewpoint: i.e., "if you do that part so well, help me understand why do you have problems with this."

The **second phase is identifying the problem for discussion and identifying their plan to correct their behavior.** If you use the request to "help me understand why you did this...", you will have already given yourself an opportunity for a smooth transition. That's not to say it will not be a difficult conversation but it will flow easier for you and minimize your stress level.

"Help me understand why you obviously make such a great effort to get your reports in on time but don't seem to put as much effort into making sure the data within are correct. If I can't rely on the information, I can't make useful business decisions."



"What plans do you have to solve this problem?"

Although this is obviously a simple example, the relevance is universal. It focuses on the critical question underlying any feedback session dealing with undesirable behavior: **who owns the problem?** Unless and until the employee realizes and admits the behavioral problem resides within them and they don't blame some external influences, you will never get a behavioral change.

Do not try to solve the problem until they admit they are responsible for their behavior. This is not an attempt to search for the guilty and assign blame but without someone acknowledging they have a problem that needs fixing, you are wasting your time trying to get a behavioral change. They may have a lot of reasons why external factors "made me react that way" but the bottom line is this: regardless of what happened around them, **they chose to respond in that manner.**

The **third phase - ending with optimism** - is closing the loop you began with something positive. In this phase, you end with optimism for the success of the plan they offered (and to which you agreed) so you will not need to have any more conversations like this in the future.

Body Language

If you are observant of any non-verbal communication, you can gauge how your "counselee" is reacting to your feedback. Although many articles and books have been written about this, here are a few of the most common behaviors you may encounter:

- Becoming tense, sitting back, body is "closed" with arms folded across chest
- Becoming at ease, leaning forward, body is "open" with arms on table or arms of the chair
- If they widen their eyes, it's showing interest. Narrowing them means less interest or doubt.
- Tapping their feet sends signal of boredom, impatience, and they want to get out of the discussion.

When a person crosses his arms, it may mean any of the following:

- When You're Talking - He may not agree with what you said, and may be doubting or suspecting you. He may have a bad impression of your motive and may not wish to continue talking with you. It may also depict arrogance or defensiveness.
- When He's Talking - He may be hiding something from you, or may even be lying. A person engages in this protective posture when he feels anxious or nervous.
- He may be protecting himself from verbal attack to maintain his composure.

A person clenching his fist may either be conveying any of the following state, emotions or thoughts:

- He may angry or be frustrated over something.
- He may be resisting your opinions or statements.
- It may be a sign of defensiveness.

Imagine going back upstream in this corporation trying to identify **what led to the original decision here.**

OXFORD, AL (WBRC) - Olive Garden apologizes for refusing to allow 80-year-old Marti Warren to bring an American flag into their restaurant during her Kiwanis Club award banquet last week. Olive Garden issued this statement: "We are very sorry for any misunderstanding about this issue. We do not have a policy at Olive Garden concerning bringing the American flag into our restaurants. Some members of our team were misinformed about company policy by our corporate office. As a company, we take responsibility for that and we regret it."

Checklist

Here is a brief checklist to review before giving feedback that may be received as negative:

- If they are not performing to expectations, have you taken time to analyze what may lead to their unsatisfactory performance in the ten-step flowchart? (Nothing would be more embarrassing than to call them out on unsatisfactory performance than discover that you failed to provide sufficient resources or training necessary for the desired performance.)
- Do you have documentation or **objective** examples that compares their productivity with their expected goals so that the gaps are evident? ("We pay you to do this level of QQT productivity and you are producing this lower level of QQT: help us understand the reason for the gap.")
- Have you found a neutral location to have the session?
- Have you identified some positive characteristics that you can mix into the conversation so it doesn't come across as totally negative?
- Have you rehearsed the three stages of your session in your mind and prepared potential responses to probable questions?
- An identification of something they are doing well. So well, in fact, that it requires some help in understanding why....
 - ...they are having this problem over here and how they plan to correct it.
 - An expression of happiness that you had a chance to resolve this and look forward to not needing to have any more discussions like this. (Or something to that effect.)

Feedback: How to Get

Theoretically speaking, the easiest way to get objective information about your performance is to simply ask. Typically, though, reality is very different.

Some reasons it may be difficult to get meaningful feedback from colleagues, superiors, friends, or family can be:

- The person you are asking does not feel capable or qualified [they may not feel they know enough about what you do or what the task requires to offer meaningful comments]
- The person you are asking does not feel comfortable saying anything that may be perceived as negative regardless of how useful it may be
- The person may not realize you are asking about specific elements of a larger action and may need you to direct them. ["Thank you for saying you liked my overall presentation. Can you identify a few elements of it that you particularly liked?"]
- The person simply doesn't want to get involved



If the feedback is from someone you deem as competent and they do get into specifics, then you must make an effort to listen, take notes (at least mentally), resist arguing, and let them speak. Especially if you asked them for feedback.

The key is to be as open as possible, force your defensive shields down, watch your body language so you don't send defensive messages, and be thankful for someone willing to help you improve your performance.

Common Feedback Questions

What if I don't agree with their feedback?

Think about why you disagree with them. Do they have incorrect facts? Are they using opinion instead of objective observations? Are you in denial?

If it is unjustified, explain to them (as unemotionally as you can) why.

Note: If they are someone you will see frequently such as a friend or co-worker, it will be useful to help them understand why you are choosing not to act on their feedback - especially if you asked for it in the first place. Otherwise, they may not be so willing to help you with feedback again in the future.

How do I comment on something that I thought was important after it is over and done with?

Start off with a positive comment (or at least neutral) about the event and then offer a hypothetical suggestion for the future. "I'm glad that we were able to get the tents up at the picnic just before the downpour came. Do you think that maybe we should just assume rain in the afternoons during this time of the year and have them all set up to start with?"

How do I give feedback about the personal habits of others that may impact my work?

The key point to remember is that you are being paid for performance and anything that impacts that negatively directly touches your paycheck. In other words, don't hesitate to speak up for yourself. Whether it is strong perfume, body odor, talking loudly on the telephone, having the "gang" hang out at his cubicle next to yours is all the same if it lessens your ability to concentrate on maximum productivity.



Caution: Potentially sensitive personal issues such as strong perfume or body odor should be brought to the attention of your supervisor first. They are paid to deal with issues like that and you are in a no-win situation if you try to do it yourself.

Loud on the telephone or the gang hanging out at the next cubicle are less personal. Try to remain as low-key as possible when you ask them to speak a little lower or move the discussion group discussion to the break room because it's distracting while you try to work. In all probability, they may simply gotten caught up in their conversations and not realized it distracted you.

How do I give feedback about the personal habits of others that may impact their work?

We suggest using that three phase process back on page 18 and remember that you must focus on specific behaviors impacting their work: i.e., their paycheck potentially.

"John, you have always set such a high standard of work but lately, you seem very distracted. You have been late to meetings, had to redo those two reports, and seem to have trouble concentrating. Help me understand why you are risking your long time work record. I'm sure this is a temporary situation that can be turned around."

It starts out with a positive comment, uses the help-me-understand transition into the problem, and finishes with an optimistic view of their potential to change for the better.

I've given feedback and nothing has changed.

Even though you may do the best job possible of giving feedback, there is no guarantee they will act on it for any one of several reasons:

- Some condition that you do not know about is preventing it
- Something out of their control is preventing it
- They just may not want to change

ⁱ <http://www.answers.com/topic/feedback>