

## **Feedback Essentials**

### **Additional Learning Resource - Guide for Reviewers and Reviewees**

#### **Introduction**

Effective, regular feedback within an organisation can be an essential tool to help improve contribution and morale – yet this is not always embedded in the culture or in the practice of all managers, leaders or staff with a responsibility for reviewing others. This guide explains why feedback is important, why people sometimes avoid it and how build effective, productive feedback into your role or personal development review (PDR).

#### **1. Why is feedback important?**

Feedback is a key component in developing employees at all levels, reviewing work, contributions and behaviours. If you have responsibility for providing feedback to others, it needs to be direct, specific and about agreed goals and priorities or relevant profiles.

Without appropriate feedback, people may rely on self-assessment, or judge themselves against their own goals and expectations. People may be uncertain about whether they have met criteria for promotion (where applicable) or have demonstrated appropriate readiness for career progression. In the absence of appropriate feedback, people may also obtain views from sources which may be unreliable.

#### **2. The benefits of effective feedback**

Well constructed and delivered feedback has a number of benefits for individuals and organisations. It helps people to:

- understand job expectations and measure their contributions against relevant expectations or profiles
- know what they do well, understand their strengths
- understand where they are challenged and possible reasons for this
- identify opportunities for progression
- identify opportunities for learning and development
- set achievable goals
- identify what is, and is not, within their control
- feel more involved and motivated
- take control of their own goals, priorities and development
- increase self-awareness.

From an organisational perspective, good feedback should:

- reinforce good working practices
- redirect ineffective working practices
- improve working relationships
- improve overall contribution
- Support appropriate progression.

### **3. Fear of feedback**

Despite these benefits, many people are uncomfortable with giving or receiving feedback. People tend to shy away from being evaluated by others unless they are confident the results will be positive - even if the feedback will be constructive and help them improve. Some people feel uncomfortable with receiving praise, finding it embarrassing.

Similarly, colleagues responsible for providing feedback may be concerned about how the other person may react to feedback, fearing that it could damage personal and professional relationships. People often feel they are not equipped to provide feedback when improvement is required or that could be perceived as 'criticism'. Another fear can be about how to deal if a person becomes emotional or strongly disagrees with the feedback. Some people are not used or awkward about giving praise, especially in public, perhaps worrying that it will, indeed, embarrass the employee.

### **4. The role of reviewers, managers or leaders**

If feedback only happens in an organisation when there is an issue to be addressed, then feedback, when given, is likely to cause anxiety and defensiveness amongst employees. The best way to address this issue is to embed a practice of ongoing feedback within the working culture. This will also help to ensure that people receive praise when it is merited, as well as constructive feedback when it is required. A culture where opportunities for upward feedback is also encouraged is beneficial.

There are a number of ways to implement this and feedback should become an intrinsic part of conversations that are inherent with Personal Development Review (PDR). The conversation should be meaningful and ongoing rather than a 'one-off' in order to make feedback a natural part of an organisational culture.

Questions for consideration:

- Think about how you give or receive feedback, how regularly this happens and how quality of feedback could be improved.
- Are you aware of criteria and eligibility for promotion and career progression in Queen's (for Academic staff [here](#)) and other mechanisms for reward and recognition [here](#)?

### **5. Balanced Feedback**

Perhaps the most important factor to consider with feedback is ensuring that it is constructive, and not detrimental to an employee's morale and self-confidence. Remember at all times that the purpose of constructive feedback is not to address only negative issues or assign blame, but to identify ways an individual or team can develop and take appropriate actions or responsibility to improve. There are a number of approaches to effective feedback, but the crucial elements are that feedback should always be:

- specific
- fact-based

- timely
- relevant
- balanced
- constructive.

It is also important that the person delivering feedback is:

- objective
- unemotional
- receptive to responses from the colleague
- open-minded.

## **6. Positive feedback**

One of the main success indicators of an effective personal development review is a motivated and inspired employee. Recognition is a basic need for many people and a powerful motivator.

- In any conversation that includes feedback, always include positive aspects, where possible
- Make sure that it is judicious, sincere and deserved.
- Where someone has done something noteworthy, or outside their usual responsibility, make sure this is recognised.
- Where outstanding performance is brought to your attention by others, make sure that you let the person responsible know that you are aware of this.
- Use appropriate mechanisms for Reward and Recognition (e.g. STAR Scheme, Staff Excellence Awards or other methods of celebrating achievements).

## **7. How might people react to feedback?**

When feedback is given constructively, people will often respond positively. After all, most people are keen to improve. However, because feedback can be seen as criticism, they sometimes react by:

- Becoming defensive
- choosing not to hear what is said – selective reception
- doubting the motives of the person giving feedback
- denying the validity of the feedback
- Rationalising or making excuses for outcomes or actions
- diminishing good performance with modesty or self-deprecation.

## **8. Feedback Tips and simple examples**

*Focus feedback on observations and then explore this*

- The temptation can sometimes be to feedback an interpretation or conclusion from what we observe, e.g. "your work is slow".
- Instead, focus feedback on what you can see or hear in their behaviour. Keep it factual and objective, e.g. "In the last month, you have produced around four reports. I would have expected to see X. Let's look at how this target can be achieved ...".

### *Keep feedback constructive and non-judgemental*

- Word your feedback so that it is a description of what occurred
- Keep your feedback neutral and try not to be judgemental (i.e. don't make an evaluation in terms of good or bad, right or wrong).
- Avoid emotive or critical terminology that could be interpreted as a personal attack
- Treat the issue as an abstract problem, not as a character defect. For example, "the quality of X seems to be declining", rather than "you are not good at Y".
- Describe actions or behaviours rather than qualities.
- Ensure you allow individuals to put their point of view across and take note of explanations or mitigating circumstances.

Above all, concentrate on what the individual can do with the feedback and how they can improve.

### *Think about the time and place*

- Provide feedback at an appropriate time (e.g. not when someone is in a hurry to meet a critical deadline).
- Present the feedback as soon as is practical after the event; this may not always need to wait until an arranged review meeting.
- If something has gone wrong or a specific incident has occurred, it is sometimes better to allow an individual time to reflect and recover. This may be the case if there are emotions involved.
- Ensure there is enough time to provide feedback in a relaxed way and that you will not be interrupted.
- Whenever possible, provide feedback in private, ensuring no interruptions.
- If you are using an office, try to make it informal so that you are alongside the individual rather than facing them across a desk.

### *Focus feedback on the value it may have to the recipient*

- Provide feedback which serves the needs of the recipient rather than your own.
- Phrase any help or support as an offer, not an imposition.
- Whenever possible, treat errors as a learning opportunity.

## **9. Look forward**

It is essential to end a feedback conversation by looking forward. If the feedback has been positive, it should be easy to encourage the person to continue to build on this. If, on the other hand, it has addressed a need for change or improvement, then it is vital that specific, achievable goals are agreed, with which both parties are comfortable. It is also worth establishing a timeframe to follow up and make progress towards agreed goals.

## **10. Summary**

Effective, constructive, regular feedback, can have a positive impact on individuals and organisations. In order to overcome natural concerns about feedback, make it a regular, normal part of working life for all employees and personal development review (PDR).

*Reference: Adapted Knowledge Bank, Advance HE, Member Resources.*

*For guidance on PDR, FAQs and additional resources, including Skills Workshops for PDR Reviewers and Reviewees visit: [go.qub.ac.uk/PDRinfo](http://go.qub.ac.uk/PDRinfo)*