

Effective Feedback Guide for Mentors

Feedback is the cornerstone of any successful mentoring relationship. When delivered effectively, it accelerates a mentee's growth, builds trust, and fosters a safe environment for learning. This guide is designed to help you prepare for and navigate feedback conversations with your mentee.

1. Laying the Groundwork

Before giving any constructive feedback, you must first establish a foundation of trust.

- **Set Expectations Early:** During your first few meetings, discuss *how* you will both handle feedback. Ask your mentee how they prefer to receive it (e.g., in writing first, during a meeting, direct, or softened).
- **Assume Positive Intent:** Approach every conversation with the belief that your mentee wants to learn and improve.
- **Balance the Scales:** Ensure you are providing positive reinforcement alongside constructive criticism. Celebrate their wins and acknowledge their effort, not just their outcomes.

2. Frameworks for Effective Feedback

Using a structured framework helps keep feedback objective and actionable. Consider using the **SBI Model**:

- **Situation:** Describe the specific situation where the behavior occurred. Be precise about the time and place.
 - *Example:* "During yesterday's team meeting when we were discussing the project timeline..."
- **Behavior:** Describe the observable action you want to address. Stick to the facts and avoid assumptions about their motives.
 - *Example:* "...you interrupted Sarah twice while she was presenting her data."
- **Impact:** Explain the result of the behavior. How did it affect you, the team, or the project?
 - *Example:* "...this caused her to lose her train of thought and made it seem like her contributions were not valued."

3. Best Practices for Delivery

- **Be Timely:** Don't wait for a formal review to provide feedback. Address issues close to the event so the context is fresh for both of you.

- **Make it a Conversation, Not a Monologue:** After sharing your observations, pause. Ask open-ended questions like, "What was your perspective on that?" or "How did you feel about how that went?"
- **Focus on the Future (Feedforward):** Instead of dwelling solely on past mistakes, pivot the conversation toward future improvements. Ask, "How can we approach this differently next time?"
- **Be Specific and Actionable:** Vague feedback like "You need to be more confident" is unhelpful. Instead, suggest specific actions: "To project more confidence, try outlining your top three talking points before the meeting."

4. Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **The "Feedback Sandwich":** Hiding negative feedback between two compliments can dilute the core message and make your praise feel insincere. Be direct and respectful instead.
- **Using "Always" or "Never":** These absolute terms usually trigger defensiveness. Stick to specific instances.
- **Making it Personal:** Focus on the work and the behaviors, never the person's character.

5. Asking for Feedback

Mentoring is a two-way street. Actively seeking feedback from your mentee shows humility and models a growth mindset.

- "What is one thing I could do differently to better support you?"
- "Are our check-ins frequent enough?"
- "Is the feedback I'm providing helpful and clear?"

Mentor's Pre-Session Checklist

Before heading into a feedback conversation, take a moment to ask yourself:

- What is my goal for sharing this feedback?
- Have I focused on observable behaviors rather than assumptions?
- Am I prepared to listen to their perspective?
- Do I have actionable suggestions to help them improve?
- Is this the right time and setting for this conversation?