



## How should you deliver negative feedback to contractors, clients or employees?

Giving negative feedback can be a daunting experience. Jude Owens, HR Director at People Puzzles, gives some tips on how best to approach it and how to get the best result.

Feedback is one of the best learning sources there is – no matter who you are! But in order for your feedback to be productive, one of the most important things to remember is that it's a two-way and three-dimensional process – not one way. So if you are prepared to give feedback, also be prepared to receive it back. It may be the starting point for a conversation about how you need to make adjustments yourself.

### When is the best time to give feedback?

The timing of your feedback is almost as important as the content of it! It's best to give it in person and as soon as is possible after the issue has occurred. Make sure you give your feedback in private and that you will not be interrupted. Allow enough time to give the feedback and talk about it – don't just drop your feedback on the other person and run.

### How should I prepare?

As with any difficult conversation, preparation is key. Firstly, it is important to gather information to ensure that your feedback is fair and warranted, before sharing with the other person. If you are giving feedback to a contractor or employee, ensure you are aware of their brief and focus on what they have been asked to work on.

Secondly, it's important to consider your audience when giving feedback. Every situation and person you have to give feedback to will be different, so you will need to tailor

it depending on what you – and they – want to achieve. Having a clear understanding of the other person's aims and goals will help you articulate why your feedback is important to act on. For example, if you are giving feedback to a client who wants to grow their business, focus on the impact the issue will have on growth and discuss how your feedback could help their business continue to be successful.

### What should I say?

Take time to describe the issue and explain the impact it has had – be it on you, the business, clients or other people. If the feedback is based on behaviour, explain the way it makes others feel and perceive them. Provide clear evidence with specific and relevant examples; don't just make sweeping statements.

Ask the other person how they feel about the situation and how they think things could have been done better or differently. Explain what you would like to see change and the positive impact that this will have for them and others, focusing on the benefits and value that acting on the feedback will bring. Then agree what they – and/or you – will do in future and what will change as a result.



### What else should I consider?

Own the feedback that you are sharing – Use ‘I’, not ‘we’ or ‘they’.

Don’t use the word ‘but’ in your feedback. If, for example, you say: ‘Your input into the meeting was great, but I noticed that after you delivered your update, you spent the remainder of the meeting checking your phone and doing emails under the desk.’ All of the message prior to saying ‘but’ is lost – the other person will only hear last part of your message.

Think about the likely reaction of the other person. If they are a reflector, give them time to absorb the feedback and if necessary, have a further meeting.

### What if the other person responds badly to the feedback you give?

This is a common concern and with good reason! People are naturally defensive and may respond in a variety of different ways. They may be surprised and feel caught off-guard. If they become emotional or even aggressive, remember not to take it personally – their behaviour is based on the emotions that they are feeling at the time. Give them time to collect their thoughts and reflect on the feedback that you have given.

Never respond in kind and get defensive, aggressive or emotional yourself. It is your job to be objective and ensure the feedback is delivered in a fair and respectful manner, even if the other person is finding this difficult.

A good phrase to use is along these lines: ‘I can see that you are disappointed with my feedback and that this has upset you. That is not my intention. I suggest that we meet again tomorrow to allow further time for reflection and to allow us to discuss your thoughts on how we can move forwards’.

### Should I keep notes?

Yes - you should always make a written note of feedback, even if it is being shared in an informal setting. This will help you to monitor progress over time. If the situation doesn’t improve and you need to undertake formal action or discussions, you have a record you can refer back to, allowing you to confidently talk to dates, examples and previous meetings. This keeps the discussion objective rather than subjective and personal.

### How do I make sure I’ve covered everything?

There’s a lot to remember when giving feedback, so here are a couple of acronyms to help you structure your meeting, get your thoughts in the right order and make your feedback as effective as possible. See which of these below would best suit your particular situation.

#### DESC

- D** – Describe the issue
- E** – Explain the impact it has had
- S** – Specify what you think the other person could do differently or better
- C** – Consider and share the consequences of their actions.

#### AGA

- A** – Ask how they felt it went
- G** – Give your view
- A** – Agree what they will do differently or better in future.

If you need help dealing with a tricky situation in your business, People Puzzles can help you build the right leadership qualities in your management team and strengthen your HR procedures. Contact us today to find out more about our tailored HR services.

