



Raising behavioral or performance issues

The challenge

The way you express your dissatisfaction to a subordinate can have a powerful impact on what happens next. If your comments – however justified – are perceived as arbitrary or aggressive, the person is likely to become mistrustful and not challenge his or her way of doing things. The seven steps below will help you express legitimate, open-minded, assertive and future-oriented feedback – i.e. feedback that will motivate people to improve.

Seven steps to follow

	Why?	How?
1 Make an appointment	Give the subordinate sufficient advance warning, out of respect and to avoid taking him or her by surprise.	- Seek the person's agreement. E.g. "I would like to meet to talk about... What do you think?" This is a first step in generating constructive dialogue. - If possible, schedule the meeting soon after the event in question. People are more likely to perceive prompt criticism as legitimate and to recall the events. - Choose a discreet location away from coworkers.
2 Carefully prepare for the interview	The quality of discussion can have powerful repercussions.	- Get the facts to support your criticism. When objective facts are not available, gather several opinions on the matter. - Adopt a positive mindset: Remember that you are there not to punish the other person, but to help him or her improve. - Think ahead of potential discussion scenarios. This will help in keeping the conversation on track. Plan time to listen to and have a real two-way dialogue with the person.
3 Start the conversation assertively	Say what you mean. Explaining how you perceive the situation is perfectly legitimate.	- Go over the game rules that all employees are expected to follow. E.g. "Would you agree that the quality of reception influences customer loyalty?" - Discuss the facts and their negative consequences, but avoid criticizing the other person's personality and character, as this is not your role. - Use clear and simple language. Go into details, but avoid generalizations and exaggerations that could make your message less credible. By the same token, don't water down your message with a flood of positive comments.
4 Converse to understand the problem	Listen to the subordinate's point of view and be willing to adjust your understanding of the situation.	Get the person to acknowledge that his or her behavior has problematic consequences. - If you and the person see things differently, review the facts until you reach a common view of the situation. Ask the person to explain what is causing the problem, as this may suggest ideas for potential solutions.
5 Jointly seek a solution	Ask the subordinate to suggest solutions. This will give him or her a greater feeling of control over the situation.	- Once the person admits there is a problem, start by asking how he or she plans to resolve it. Test your ideas with the person, but don't force them on him or her. The feeling of losing a battle may create resentment. Offer your support to solve the problem, if appropriate.
6 Develop an action plan	Demonstrate that the interview is focused on the future by defining concrete initiatives.	- Agree on a list of concrete initiatives and specify when they should be undertaken. E.g. "So, you agree to do... by next month." - Schedule the next interview.
7 Thank your subordinate	Don't forget to acknowledge the subordinate's participation and express your encouragement.	Thank the person for listening and adopting a constructive attitude. Reassert your confidence, by telling the person that you believe he or she will be able to keep his or her commitments. Recognize initial wins.