every woman

WORKBOOK

GIVING AND RECEIVING FEEDBACK IN A REMOTE WORLD

www.everywoman.com

About this workbook

At everywoman, we deliver a range of innovative products and resources that unlock the potential and talent of women in business globally. Whether you're just starting out, looking to progress your career, or even to build and develop your own enterprise, the everywomanNetwork provides a wealth of personal development resources, advice and inspiration to address the challenges you face at key stages in business. We produce workbooks on topics that matter most to our members and we're constantly listening to your views to give you the tools you need to propel you through your life's work, at a time and place that suits you.

Welcome to our new workbook, Giving and Receiving Feedback in a Remote World.

Providing constructive feedback to your direct reports – and hearing it from your own manager – can be challenging even under normal circumstances. Add a virtual element into it, and suddenly this crucial task can become even more uncomfortable to navigate.

The Covid-19 global pandemic has distanced us physically from our colleagues, and without their presence in the room, frank, honest and open conversations about where one of us needs to change or develop can take on all sorts of additional challenges.

But we all know that feedback is crucial to our career development and that of our teams, so avoiding those chats, or saving them up for our annual performance review, isn't going to do us any favours.

In this workbook, we'll explore the many ways you can prepare yourself for both giving and receiving feedback remotely. From the practical – finding the right time and location, to the more emotive aspects – keeping an open mind and remaining empathic, you'll work through a checklist that will enable you to confidently feedback to your employees, and seek and hear feedback from your leaders.

Both elements are crucial weapons in your arsenal for the challenging times ahead. We'd love to know how you get on – email us at karenmax@everywoman.com or tweet us @everywomanuk.

Max & Karen
and the everywoman team

Introduction

Providing feedback is difficult and tricky for most people - adding a virtual element to it makes it even harder and often more uncomfortable to navigate.

This workbook will cover the important aspects of feedback and give you useful tools, specifically for a virtual setting. During and even post pandemic there are more external mitigating circumstances than ever. Employees working environment is not what it was, whether having to work completely alone in isolation or working with family around, home-schooling and dealing with the carnage Covid-19 has caused for individuals, mentally, physically, and spiritually.

Let's start by doing a feedback self assessment, with your virtual hat on.

Self assessment

The first step is to be comfortable with giving and receiving feedback. Let's see where you are now. There are many terms used to describe feedback, for the purpose of this workbook we will use:

- Positive feedback: denotes behaviours and tasks that are working well/should be continued.

- Developmental feedback: denotes behaviours or tasks which need work, changing, or eradicating.

"Make feedback normal. Not a performance review."

Ed Batista

EXERCISE

Think about how comfortable you are with virtual feedback - both positive and developmental - and shade the graph below to illustrate this.
(1 is extremely uncomfortable and 10 is extremely comfortable.)

1. Giving positive feedback

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

2. Giving developmental feedback

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

3. Receiving positive feedback

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

4. Receiving developmental feedback

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

5. Seeking positive feedback

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

6. Seeking developmental feedback

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Use this to help increase your comfort level and build confidence with giving and receiving feedback virtually. You can go directly to the section where you need the most support, or read through each section. Either way, aim towards being able to rate yourself higher once you have completed this new section of the workbook.

What is different about giving feedback remotely?

Not to state the obvious but there is a big carrier to communication, even if it is virtually face-to-face. Communication issues and breakdowns are higher with virtual conversations. Distractions due to personal issues (everything from the dog barking, to working from a bedroom, to juggling childcare), and work-related issues are more likely to happen during virtual meetings than in person, yet they are harder to recognise. It means both parties have to work hard to get the most out of every conversation, especially perfomance related discussions.

Where do you start?

Create a feedback culture!

Feedback is easier, more comfortable and very effective when it is a normal and regular part of your team and organisations culture. If useful feedback loops and habits have not been part of your workplace culture before heading into remote working, now is your opportunity to reset this.

- Avoid the 'no news is good news' style - give feedback!

- Be explicit about why feedback is important - both praise and constructive feedback.

- Explain how the team can help each other.

- Give space to allow people to understand how to give and receive feedback - point them to this workbook, some online learning, a workshop, a book.

- Create habits with check-ins, daily catch-ups or weekly updates that involve an element of feedback.

- Give your team a heads up you will be asking for feedback by putting questions in meeting invites. This ensures feedback is not an 'opt-in' procedure i.e. anyone can do it if they want, it is up to them rather than it is part of our team communications and meetings. For example:
    - Something that worked well this week.
    - Something you think we could work on as a team.
    - Something that would help you do your job better.
    - Something we could do more of to connect with our customers.
    - Something we should stop doing to ensure our meetings don't run over.
    - Something you need me to do more/less of to help you meet your target this month.

- Create a peer-to-peer feedback loop and recognition channels - encouraging everyone to give feedback. This builds trust and empowerment.

- Seek input from team members - ask them explicitly about their thoughts and feelings towards feedback. People often can't articulate exactly what works and what doesn't for them, but using a mixture of questions can help start the dialogue and gives parties some guidance.

Via email beforehand, consider asking them to answer some, or all, of these questions:

Feedback is important to me because...

When giving me feedback please...

My experience with feedback has been...

When I hear positive things about myself I...

When I get constructive feedback I...

The best way to give me feedback is...

The feedback I remember the most was... because...

My worst experience with feedback was...

I think it's very important to have a feedback loop, where you're constantly thinking about what you've done and how you could be doing it better.

Elon Musk

How to give feedback over email - if you have to!

Firstly, feedback should not be done via a system that is used for instant messaging such as text, WhatsApp, Lync etc. Email at least allows for a fuller story.

Feedback is best face-to-face (see our workbook 'Giving and Receiving Feedback' for more information). Remote working teams are often comprised of different locations, time zones, cultures, and realities. During Covid-19 many people were working from not only different environments, but far from work, in a different country.

So, if email feedback is the only way to deliver the feedback, then make sure you take into consideration key points to ensure it lands the way it needs to.

We know that when we give feedback over email, we are missing the social feedback loop - the social cues we get - facial expressions, gestures, eye contact (or lack thereof), and tone. We normally use that loop to help understand how the information has been received, if it makes sense and decide on next steps.

Consider these tips:

- Make sure the subject heading is relevant.

- Start with something friendly and show appreciation - remember you need to set the tone or it will be set by the reader. Nobody wants negativity through their inbox!

- Focus on actionable and specific feedback - give them a direction - e.g. not 'the meeting doesn't seem very organised' instead 'the meeting needs to be in a time that suits London and New York. Could you please attach an agenda to the invite?'

- Don't use command words because without the tone and body language it can feel even more authoratitive and less accessible to the reader. Being told what to do makes the reader feel like a cog in the wheel and less empowered.

Praise through email

Giving praise through email is similar to giving praise in person - dont add anything unrelated to the reason for the praise.

Keep it simple and make sure your email includes:

- Subject (the why!)
- A friendly greeting.
- The reason you are writing.
- Why it matters (the impact it made).
- The reason you are writing.
- Thank them and give them specific appreciation.
- Sign off.

> "Employees who report receiving recognition and praise within the last seven days show increased productivity, get higher scores from customers, and have better safety records. They're just more engaged at work." Tom Rath

Working remotely we have less opportunities to give casual praise and thanks. You might not even be aware of how often you pass by somebody and that triggers you to thank them or point out something you appreciate they did.

Create a specific channel in whatever forum you use just for praise within your team. Encourage everyone to use it.

For example, in Slack, create a channel #WellDoneUs. In WhatsApp, create a Team High Five group.

Giving constructive feedback

In a virtual environment we know context is easily misconstrued or even lost. It is easy for anyone to not understand there is an issue or that it needs attention. If you use waffle words and stay big picture you risk confusing the receiver. Lack of clarity around the issue, the impact, and what is needed to make the change can easily damage any chance the person has to move forward and create the needed change.

Giving constructive feedback needs to be done privately. This can be difficult remotely because of interruptions, distractions and shared work environments (keep in mind you may not be aware that your colleague sits at their table besides their roommate, or their child doing home-schooling). This is why it is more important than ever to give a heads up on a feedback conversation.

There is a huge caveat. If someone displays inappropriate and/or harmful behaviour publicly, it should be dealt with publicly to ensure that the team knows what is unacceptable, and to create and hold true an inclusive culture. For example, a racial slur, or sexist comment. In this instance, ensure you publicly correct the behaviour and find time as soon as possible to discuss the situation more deeply to ensure the issues are understood.

When giving feedback virtually ensure:

- You are set up properly to give the situation the context and importance it needs.
- Have a place where you can be uninterrupted, so the receiver doesn't feel like someone else is listening.
- Make sure your camera is clean and lighting is good so you can be seen clearly.
- Don't have anything else at hand - it is so easy to try and multi-task without even realising - a quick look at your phone sends the message the conversation is not important.
- If the connection is not clear, don't continue - make arrangements for another time.
- Be clear, don't confuse the listener with waffle or jargon words.
- Build in pauses.

Receiving feedback virtually

To get the most out of any feedback discussion you need to be open to hearing what the other person has to say. In a virtual setting it can be more difficult, so take a few minutes to ensure you have the space you need to concentrate on the conversation.

- Take 5 minutes before the conversation to find a private space, it may mean going for a walk or asking someone to give you the room for a short period.
- Gather your own thoughts beforehand.
- Wear headphones if you are worried about others hearing.
- Tell the person giving feedback about your environment, if they need to understand you may be interrupted or have a distraction.
- Have a place to capture the key points - notepad, laptop etc.
- Acknowledge you have understood the feedback (and if you haven't, ask for clarity!)
- Discuss specifically how you will put the feedback to use.

We can' t just sit back and wait for feedback to be offered, particularly when we're in a leadership role. If we want feedback to take root in the culture, we need to explicitly ask for it.

Ed Batista

Seeking

As with face to face, know what you want feedback on to help the person prepare. Give them a heads up you want feedback. If possible, find a short slot that is solely for that conversation rather than tagging it onto a weekly catch-up.

As a leader, if you have created the right culture, your team will be comfortable giving you useful feedback at any occassion. That said, remember to ask and action it in a way they know you appreciate and want openness. You only really get one chance to get it right, if they are made to feel uncomfortable or they aren't being listened to, they likely won't make the effort the second time.

If you would like feedback from your manager, consider crafting an email or note that sits alongside a 10 minute meeting invite to help them reflect on the feedback you need.

Try something like this:

Hi *(insert name),*

I wanted to plan some time for us to speak about your thoughts on the recent *(insert what you want feedback on).*

I have been thinking about what worked well and what could have been even better. and would appreciate your input and perspective.

What would help is insight around 2-3 things you thought worked well, and 2-3 things you think could be improved.

(If you want them to be specific than make that explicit - don't make them guess! For example, 'I am really interested in any input on how I answered the questions throughout the presentation and your thoughts on the action points I covered in the summary).

I am attaching an invite and wanted to give you a heads up on what I would like to get from our chat.

Thanks very much,
(insert name)

ACTION PLANNING

FEEDBACK IN A VIRTUAL SETTING

1 What stops me from giving feedback properly?

2 What do I need to do more of to be more effective?

3 What do I need to less of to be more effective?

4 Where do I need to involve the team more?

5 How will I get feedback?

Giving and receiving feedback in a remote world

Articles

How to give great feedback in a virtual (and uncertain) world
6 ways HR can build a feedback culture with remote teams
Giving feedback to remote team members
How to get the feedback you need
How to master the art of receiving feedback

everywomanNetwork Resources

Giving and receiving feedback - Workbook
Giving and receiving feedback - Webinar
The power of feedback - how to get it, how to use it
Delivering feedback - 3 ways for new line managers

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