

Guide for Delivering Difficult Feedback

Goal

This guide will help you deliver feedback in an objective, thoughtful, and constructive way. It shows how to pinpoint specific behaviors or actions that an employee needs to change and helps you prepare a road map for a clear conversation with a staff member.

Manager Time Commitment

To prepare: 15 minutes
To hold conversation: 15-30 minutes

Staff Time Commitment

15-30 minutes for conversation

How to Use This Tool

1. Collect your thoughts about the situation.

Giving constructive performance feedback can be hard, but it's the best way to help staff know where they're falling short and how they can improve.

When you need to deliver difficult feedback, it's helpful to prepare a clear, simple message in advance. This gives you the chance to think about your main points and prepare to share your thoughts in a way that the listener will be able to easily understand.

The table below page shows a simple message structure for sharing performance feedback. When you need to deliver difficult feedback, it is helpful to separate the message into three components: Performance, Expectation and Consequence (or P-E-C). The table below shows a sample P-E-C message.

Performance-Expectation-Consequence (P-E-C) Message Components

| | Think About | Example |
|-----------------------------------|--|---|
| P Is for Performance | What did your employee do that led him or her to fail to meet performance standards? Cite specific examples of actions or behaviors that you observed. | <i>Jorge is a nurse in the cardiovascular unit. Last Tuesday he left work 20 minutes early without explanation. He missed the unit huddle and failed to pass information to nurses on the next shift.</i> |
| E Is for Expectation | What is the standard that you expect your employee to meet? Explain your expectations using examples of the behavior or actions the employee should demonstrate. | <i>I expect Jorge to complete his full shift and not leave without explanation. I also expect Jorge to stay for the unit huddle and give detailed information about his patients (including status updates, recent medications, and expected visitors) to nurses on the next shift.</i> |
| C Is for Consequence | What is the consequence of your employee not meeting the standard you expect? Describe how his or her failure to meet standards impacts your team and/or the organization. | <i>Since Jorge left early he did not have time to tell Tania, a nurse from the second shift, that one of his patients had a visitor coming that evening. Tania took the patient to X-ray and he missed his visitor. The patient and his visitor were very unhappy about this.</i> |

Source: HR Advancement Center, *The Manager's Guide to Accurate Evaluations*, Washington, DC: Advisory Board, 2014

2. When you are ready to write your own P-E-C message, fill out the blank P-E-C table on page 39.

Your **P-E-C** message contains the heart of the feedback you need to deliver.

Keep in mind, your staff member might be caught off guard and react defensively (and ultimately miss your point) if you jump straight to your **P-E-C** message without easing into the conversation—or if you end too abruptly.

If you feel comfortable delivering the **P-E-C** message to the employee, you can stop here. If you want additional guidance on how to structure the conversation, continue to step 3.

3. Prepare a road map for the conversation. Fill out the blank road map on page 39.

Plan how you will guide the conversation. Think about the conversation in the four parts shown in the graphic below:

Conversation Road Map

| 1. Start | 2. Share P-E-C Message | 3. Seek Input | 4. Wrap Up |
|--|--|---|--|
| Clearly state that you want to talk about a specific performance issue | Share your Performance-Expectation-Consequence message | Use open-ended questions and active listening to encourage dialogue | Indicate your support and/or specific next steps |

The next page contains a sample road map.

Sample Scripting and Examples for the Conversation Road Map

| Road Map | Sample Talking Points | Example |
|----------------------------|---|--|
| Start | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'd like to talk with you about... • I have noticed... • I am concerned about... • I want to discuss... • I have some thoughts about... • I feel I need to let you know... | <p><i>Jorge, I would like to talk with you about when you left work early last Tuesday.</i></p> |
| Share P-E-C Message | <p>P: Cite specific examples of actions or behaviors that you observed.</p> <p>E: Explain your expectations using examples of the behavior or actions the employee should demonstrate.</p> <p>C: Describe how his or her failure to meet standards impacts your team and/or the organization.</p> | <p><i>P: I am concerned about this because you missed the unit huddle, and you didn't let me know that you would be leaving before the end of your shift.</i></p> <p><i>E: I expect you and everyone on our team to complete the full shift. I also expect you to stay for the unit huddle so you can pass along the necessary information about your patients to the next shift.</i></p> <p><i>C: Since you left early and missed the huddle, Tania didn't know that one of your patients had a visitor coming that night. She took the patient down to X-ray and he missed his visitor. The patient gave Tania a hard time when he found out he missed his visitor and his visitor complained to me.</i></p> |
| Seek Input | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is your view of this situation? • What are your thoughts? • Why do you think this happened? • What do you think you can do to improve? • How could you have handled that situation differently? | <p><i>How could you have handled that situation differently, Jorge?</i></p> <p><i>Please tell me your thoughts.</i></p> |
| Wrap Up | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'd like to help you address this issue by... • How can I best support you...? • I expect you to [change the behavior/action]... • Let's meet again [next week, month] to follow up about... | <p><i>I expect you to not miss any more staff huddles or leave a shift early unless you first talk with me about your situation.</i></p> <p><i>Let's meet again next week to discuss how we can both make sure this doesn't happen again.</i></p> |

Source: HR Advancement Center, *The Manager's Guide to Accurate Evaluations*, Washington, DC: Advisory Board, 2014.



Conversation Planning Guide

Your Road Map

P

Is for Performance

E

Is for Expectation

C

Is for Consequence

Road Map

Your Scripting Notes

Start

**Share
P-E-C Message**

Seek Input

Wrap Up

Source: HR Advancement Center, *The Manager's Guide to Accurate Evaluations*, Washington, DC: Advisory Board, 2014.

4. After you have completed the roadmap, consider how your staff member may react to the feedback and prepare your response.

Constructive feedback conversations can be hard both for you as a manager and for the staff member hearing the message. You know you have to stay clear, calm, and levelheaded. But what do you do if the employee you're talking with gets emotional or irritated?

The table on the following page shows the most common ways employees react or push back during performance conversations. Review this table to get a feel for how your employees may react, and the approaches you could take to steer the conversation back on track:

5. Anticipate how you think an employee will react to your performance feedback, and plan your strategy for responding to the feedback.

Think of a specific employee and a piece of difficult performance feedback you'd like to share. List the top two to three reactions this employee may have:

- A. _____
- B. _____
- C. _____

| | |
|--|--|
| Your planned response to reaction A | |
| Your planned response to reaction B | |
| Your planned response to reaction C | |

6. Practice delivering the feedback

You can practice the conversation aloud in a room by yourself, or you can role play the conversation with your manager or a colleague.

Common Employee Reactions and Comeback Scripting

| If the employee becomes a... | Employee says... | As the manager, you must become a... | You say... |
|---|--|--|--|
| Apologizer Jumps to confession before hearing the message | <i>"I didn't mean to create any problems here at all—I know I can do better!"</i> | Clarifier Verify the employee understands exactly where he or she went wrong and is committed to improving | <i>"I appreciate that you are willing to take responsibility for your actions, but I want to discuss the issue further so we both understand what went wrong."</i> |
| Denier Argues with validity of data | <i>"I don't believe this report is right. I am always on time."</i> | Investigator Provide well-researched account of events | <i>"I'm surprised to hear you say that. I checked the timesheets and you have been late five times this quarter."</i> |
| Tear-Jerker Responds emotionally and struggles to articulate thoughts | <i>Through sobs: "I try so hard—I don't know what happened—I'm just so upset."</i> | Calmer Show empathy and responsiveness to the emotions, and calmly keep to your message | <i>"I see this is hard to hear and it's making you upset. This is an important issue and I'm hoping we can find a way to calmly talk about this together."</i> |
| Blame-Shifter Points finger to avoid accountability | <i>"It's his fault."</i> | Reflector Force individual accountability for his or her role | <i>"I am speaking to him this afternoon. Right now we are just talking about your performance."</i> |
| Avoider Shuts down and avoids eye contact | <i>"Oh...I see...sure..."</i> | Engager Pause your comments and ask neutrally phrased questions to encourage engagement | <i>"I'd like to stop for a moment and check in with you. I want to understand your perspective; could you tell me your thoughts?"</i> |
| Subject-Changer Distracts with a different topic of discussion | <i>"So, how's your family?"</i> | Driver Refuse to engage in a tangent | <i>"Great, thanks. Today, however, I need to talk to you about your performance."</i> |
| Rationalizer Offers excuses to justify the behavior | <i>"I don't have time to write everything down between patients. The next patient needs me to come quickly."</i> | Juror Uphold correct behavior in spite of rationale | <i>"I expect you and everyone on my team to document patient information in a timely manner each and every time because it greatly increases accuracy."</i> |
| Score-Keeper Keeps a running list of peers' practices | <i>"Everyone does it, so why can't I?"</i> | Score-Settler Shift focus back to his or her behavior | <i>"That doesn't make it right. The only behavior we are focusing on right now is yours."</i> |

Source: HR Advancement Center, *The Manager's Guide to Accurate Evaluations*, Washington, DC: Advisory Board, 2014.