



Coaching to Improve Performance

Corporate Counsel CPD Webinar
December 15, 2021 | Tim Leishman, Firm Leader Inc.



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Constructive feedback key tips

- 1 Focus on the facts, not the person
- 2 Focus on the future: Offer suggestions for achieving better results
- 3 Structure ongoing dialogue to prevent difficult conversations

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Positive feedback: Why isn't there more of it?

Acknowledge

You handled that question well

Appreciate

Thank you for doing that

Recognize publicly

Sarah had this great idea

Reinforce

Yes, keep going with that

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Poll #1

Aside from time pressures, what do you think is the primary reason senior lawyers don't provide positive feedback as often as they might?

- A. High expectations
- B. Culture (no feedback is good feedback)
- C. Discomfort (giving or receiving)

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Three kinds of feedback*

Appreciation

Thank you.
You handled that question well.
Sarah had this great idea.

Recognized, respected, included

Coaching

Keep going with that.
(Reinforce progress)
Try it this way.
How should we approach this?

Making progress, developing, improving

Evaluation

You are just where you should be on the learning curve
To get to the next level...
This is something you should address

Meeting expectations (or not), what's next

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* Adapted from Douglas Stone & Sheila Heen, *Thanks for the Feedback, The Science and Art of Receiving Feedback Well* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2014)

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A feedback scenario – **The context**

On Thursday, a business leader calls to ask for your advice about a course of action they would like to take. After some initial work, you realize that it will take more time than you have to prepare the written analysis requested by the leader for next Wednesday. You ask Chris, a junior colleague on your team, to get involved.

You and Chris speak on Friday morning and talk through three possible options and related issues. You ask Chris to prepare a draft memo by Tuesday morning so that you can review it and send it to the business leader on Wednesday. Chris agrees.

When you emerge from a meeting at noon on Tuesday, an email arrives from Chris with the draft attached and an offer to discuss the memo's approach and make revisions that afternoon if necessary. The email says the draft omits the third option because, on closer analysis, it seems too weak to be credible.

When you finally get a chance to review the draft on Tuesday afternoon, you see that it still needs significant work, which you do that night without going back to Chris. On Wednesday morning, you send the final version to the business leader with a cc to Chris.

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A feedback scenario – **Your perspective**

You haven't worked with Chris for a while but had expected a better work product.

You were surprised to see that the draft omitted one of the three options, which you had to add on Tuesday night. Even though the third option was not viable, the business leader was expecting to see it.

As well, Chris's draft was wishy-washy about which of the other two options is the better one.

You would have appreciated Chris checking in on Monday – preferably in the morning. At the same time, you know that Chris has a one-year-old daughter, and you didn't want to impose a weekend schedule.

Although you are unhappy with Chris's work product, you are counting on Chris to help you with other matters that are getting underway. You want to provide feedback to Chris without straining the relationship.

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You call Chris to provide feedback.

How will you begin the conversation?

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Possible opening moves

- 1 Say thank you and/or recognize positive contributions?
- 2 Share some responsibility?
- 3 Ask a question to generate dialogue?

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How can you offer criticism without provoking defensiveness?

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When we feel **DEFENSIVE** we instinctively:

Deflect

It was out of my control

It was somebody else's responsibility

There must have been a misunderstanding

Challenge

This isn't fair; you don't have all the facts

Who are you to be giving me advice?

You contributed to this too

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The influence of communication Styles

Direct

Tell

Request

Straightforward

Indirect

Ask

Suggest

Diplomatic

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Poll #2

When you are providing feedback, which is your natural style of communication?

A. Direct

B. Indirect

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How to provide constructive feedback...

1. Deal with issues **right away**
2. Declare your **intentions**
3. Focus on the **facts, not the person**
4. Shift the conversation **from the past to the future**



...so it's received as **coaching**, not a performance evaluation

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Why?

1. Deal with issues right away

Fresh in memory

Builds trust

Lowers the stakes

Avoids "misunderstandings"

Avoids "Why didn't you tell me at the time?"

It's more likely to be received as a coaching conversation rather than a performance evaluation

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2. Declare your intentions

I would like to offer some suggestions
because...

I am going to be direct
because...

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3. Focus on the facts, not the person



What happened
(situation, behaviour, work
product, outcomes)

+

Why it matters
(the impact)

Avoid sharing your
judgments about their:

Capabilities

Intentions

Motivations

Defensiveness

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4. Shift the conversation from the past to the future

Past → **Future**

What happened
(situation, behaviour, work
product, outcomes)

+

Why it matters
(the impact)

Focus on improvement:

“Going forward, here is what I would suggest...”

“If we had the chance to do this over again, I’d suggest...”

Brainstorm and problem-solve together:

“How might we do this differently next time?”

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Give the feedback a structure

The Facts

What you saw in the document

What went wrong with the timetable

How the client reacted

What's needed & why it matters

Take on the client's perspective

Focus on the goal or an objective standard

Advice for next time

"Try this..."

"If we had the chance to do this again, I suggest..."

What

So What

Now What

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4. Shift the conversation from the past to the future

Past → **Future**

What happened

(situation, behavior, work product, outcomes)

+

Why it matters

(the impact)

Focus on improvement:

"Going forward, here is what I would suggest..."

"If we had the chance to do this over again, I would suggest..."

Brainstorm and problem-solve together:

"How might we do this differently next time?"

Move past excuses: Listen to understand and move on to discuss how to handle things next time.

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How might you have managed the assignment differently to avoid a difficult conversation?

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Create dialogue from the start

A delegation checklist

- 1. Learn about their relevant experience
- 2. Explain the "big picture"
- 3. Spell out your expectations for the work product
- 4. Talk about best approaches and resources
- 5. Walk backwards through the timeline to set deadlines
- 6. Talk about schedules and other commitments
- 7. Spell out your expectations for the process

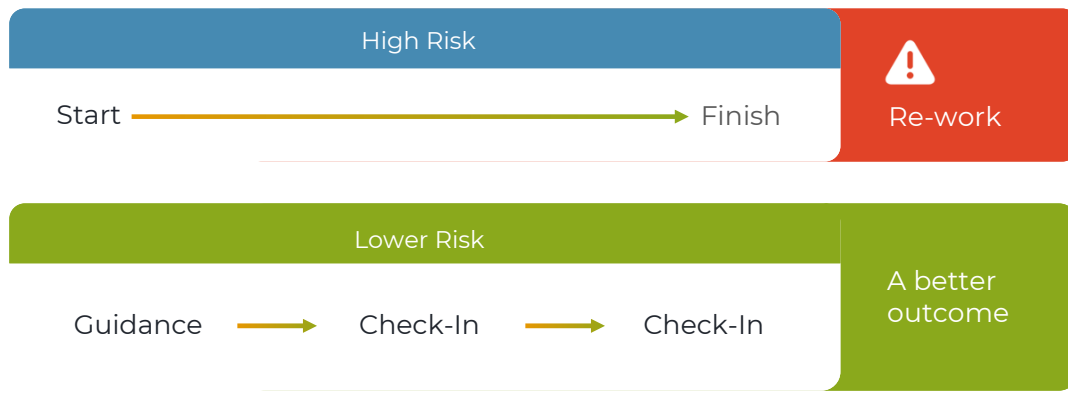
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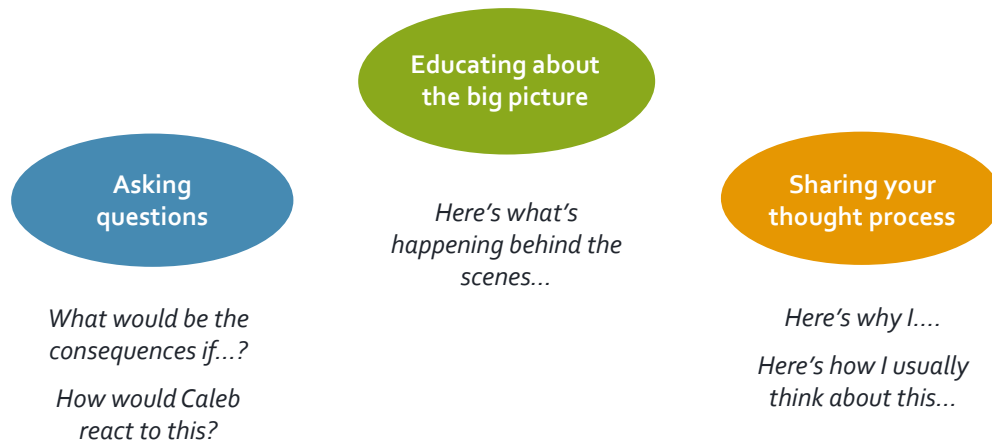
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Structure communications to create coaching opportunities



Schedule check-ins for when you can be **helpful** rather than to "check up" on status
 Segment the **task** (parts, steps) or the **timeline** (decisions, events)

Coaching on the fly



But what if it's **really serious**? One approach:

1. Tell them about the **impact on you**

"When I see a mistake like this, I feel I have to review everything"

"I was expecting something different..."

Or focus on potential consequences: for your working relationship, other people, their reputation

2. Ask questions to prompt dialogue, but don't argue
3. Talk through specific next steps

If the message might be misunderstood...

Clarify it with the "don't – do" method:

"I don't want you to stop questioning the approaches I suggest. *{pause}* I do want you to speak with me before investing time in a different approach."

It's a two-way street

- What could I do differently next time to make it easier for you to do your work?
- What suggestions do you have for how the team could work more effectively?
Modify for a specific context: communicate better... run team meetings more efficiently... use email more effectively...
- What more would you like to know about [this]?
What questions should we be asking ourselves?

What is most important for effective feedback?

Focus on facts,
not the person

Their
best
interests

Focus on
the future

Managing with their best interests in mind



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Plan your next feedback
conversation

Good luck

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