

Focused Feedback in 15

Avoid the dreaded annual review process
with these 4 steps and templates



MENTOR LOFT
Moving Young Professionals Up the Career Ladder

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Is it time to change the way leaders give feedback?

Do you dread the annual review process? It is likely that your employees do too. Is it time to change the way leaders give feedback to employees?

Feedback is tough to give (or receive) in the best of times. Doubly so during troubling times, such as during the Covid 19 pandemic. In a high-stress environment, emotions are high. Sensitivities are raised. Feedback is tricky. However, giving feedback is part of your job as a leader.

Feedback helps employees grow and adapt their behavior. It adds to their knowledge--if the feedback is given properly. The tips and resources in the MentorLoft Feedback in 15 guide will improve how you give feedback any time of year. It will show you how to give effective feedback to employees in 15-minute focused sessions. The content in this guide has been adapted from the "[MentorLoft Leadership Feedback Assessment](#)."

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4 Steps to Give Focused Feedback in 15 Minutes

The end of the year often brings performance reviews, which are a pain. Even though the annual performance review is still alive, it's on its way out. Adobe, Expedia, Microsoft, and Kelly Services are just some of the firms that have dropped the annual review. That process, developed in the 1940s by big business, has long been a plague to managers and employees alike.

It's time to find ways to give feedback that are more palatable to all and that are more effective. Instead of marathon annual reviews, consider giving feedback more frequently in short meetings. An employee might need improvement in multiple areas. Don't tackle all of the areas in one conversation. Limit feedback to one topic at a time. When feedback is given in focused, smaller chunks, employees can absorb the information and act on it.

Below are four steps to give effective, focused feedback in 15 minutes.

1) Ask, don't tell.

Do not start by focusing on what an employee did wrong. That is demoralizing. The sandwich method isn't much better. That's when you start with good feedback, followed by negative feedback, and end up with more positive feedback.

People remember what they hear first and last. Everything else in between (negative feedback) is quickly forgotten. Instead of telling an employee they need to improve, guide an employee down a path of realization. You can do this by asking probing questions.

From there you can probe the issue and provide support as needed to help the employee uncover reality. Probing questions include:

- *How do you think the project went?*
- *I'd like to hear how you tackled X problem.*
- *Help me understand how you approached the problem. (NOT: What were you thinking?)*
- *What have you learned from that experience?*
- *What type of support or resources would help increase your success in the future?*
- *If you're in the same situation again, what would you do differently?*
- *What do you need to learn in order to improve outcomes in the future?*
- *Who can advise/teach you that?*

2) Give feedback in a neutral environment.

There are few situations more nerve wracking than sitting down for a performance review with a boss. This is especially true for employees who have had little to no feedback throughout the year. Instead of limiting feedback to an annual review, meet with employees regularly.

Avoid sitting behind your desk, which reinforces your stature as the boss. Choose a neutral environment, such as a conference room. Select a round table if available. This ensures no one is sitting at the head of the table, the power position.

By regularly checking in with your employees, you can help them improve performance along the way. Provide corrective guidance as needed. This approach leads to better communication and more timely growth for the employee. Don't ask employees to make a hard shift under pressure once a year.



Ask an employee:

- *What are you working on?*
- *How is it going?*
- *What metrics are you using to measure success?*
- *Are there any roadblocks threatening success?*
- *Where might you need additional support to stay on track with your goals? What do you need to be successful?*

3) Take one topic at a time.

An employee might need improvement in multiple areas. Don't tackle all of the areas in one conversation. Limit feedback to one topic at a time. When feedback is given in focused, smaller chunks, employees can absorb the information and act on it.

Let the employee know the purpose of the meeting. The meeting is a chance for the employee to update you on progress. It is also an opportunity for you to coach the employee around specific problem areas impacting growth. If an employee asks for feedback, have them think through their issue ahead of time and bring notes. By thinking through the problem in advance, they can focus their message and not get distracted by miscellaneous details.

Ask the employee to address these points:

- *Why this issue is important to me*
- *Relevant background information*
- *Challenges I'm facing*
- *Options I'm considering*
- *What help I want from my manager*

4) Focus on growth.

The focus of feedback should be on growth, not punishment. Tie feedback to an employee's goals.

Going over goals once a year leads to goals being forgotten. Instead, structure frequent goal check-ins that also include feedback.

Write out all of the feedback that you want to give an employee before your meeting. Get all your thoughts out in a brain dump. Then go back and review. Edit your thoughts. What is constructive? What is overly critical? Help someone understand where they made mistakes so they can grow.

Questions to facilitate growth include:

- *How can I help you? (Builds a positive relationship with the employee.)*
- *Where will you learn that and by when? Let's set a specific goal around that.*
- *Which of your personal goals does this situation fit under?*

Restate the outcome. . .

I've heard . . . and this is what you've committed to do. (Paraphrase or summarize your discussion.) Is that what you heard? Have I missed anything?

Let's plan to meet again on date and time. Keep up the good work.



Feedback in 15 Templates

On the next pages you will find templates that you can use to prepare focused feedback meetings. You will see a sample version that is filled out to show you how to use the template. There is a Feedback in 15 Template for Leaders, as well as a Feedback Planning Sheet Template for Employees. You can download all of the files in the Feedback in 15 Leader's Packet below.

[Download the Feedback in 15 Leader's Packet](#) 



Feedback in 15 Sample Template for Leaders

Employee: Sally Smith	Session No. 4 of 12
Leader: Bob Blakely	Date & Time: 10/23/20 10:00 to 10:15 a.m.
Employee's overall goal: to become a successful new manager	
<u>Agenda</u>	
Employee's agenda: How to get John to do what he's supposed to do	
Leader's agenda: Help Sally realize relationships change when you become a manager	

NOTES

In this example, the leader decides to use Sally's agenda as an example for teaching the new manager that relationships often need to change when one moves into management. This is frequently a problem for new managers.

The leader could share his own examples and refer Sally to resources to learn more about managing people and how to adjust her thinking. He could send her to a training program. He could also have Sally take the EQ-I, which assesses her own emotional intelligence. From those results, Sally and her leader could build a plan for Sally to increase her ability to manage herself and others.

<u>Outcomes</u> Sally gains new insights into what it means to be a manager.	<u>Skills that apply</u> Managing one's self; managing others
<u>Action Items</u> Employee: Sally commits to studying the resources the leader provides. Leader: Send Sally links to learn more.	<u>Next Meeting</u> Date: Time: Location:



Feedback in 15 Template for Leaders

Employee:	Session No. ____ of ____
Leader:	Date & Time: mm/dd/yr X:00 to X:00
Employee's overall goal: to become a successful new manager	
<u>Agenda</u> Employee's agenda: Leader's agenda:	

NOTES

<u>Outcomes</u>	<u>Skills that apply</u>
<u>Action Items</u>	<u>Next Meeting</u>
Employee:	Date:
Leader:	Time:
	Location:

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Feedback Planning Sheet Sample for Employees

Employee: Sally Smith	Session No. 4 of 12
Leader: Bob Blakely	Date & Time: 3/23/16 10:00 to 10:15 a.m.

<p><u>My top issue to share with my leader:</u> I'm struggling with how to manage John on the Acme project. John is not meeting deadlines and doesn't share information with me that he should.</p>	<p><u>Consider:</u> This should be your top concern as of today/this week.</p>
<p><u>Why this is important to me:</u> I've only been a manager for two months, and I really don't have much experience managing people. Managing people is part of my job requirements. I really want to succeed as a manager—it fits in my plans for my career. But I'm clueless.</p>	<p><u>Consider:</u> Is this linked to your performance goals? Have you faced this before?</p>
<p><u>Background information:</u> John and I used to work on projects together. We would usually have lunch together a few days each week. We've known each other for 5 years, so I don't understand why he's holding back on information now. He knows I want to succeed as a manager.</p>	<p><u>Consider:</u> Focus on this issue only. Don't bring up irrelevant information.</p>
<p><u>Challenges I'm facing:</u> How do I grow as a manager and still keep my friendship with John?</p>	<p><u>Consider:</u> Be open about who else is involved, nature of relationships, dollars and time.</p>
<p><u>What I think I should do:</u> I think I need to take John out for a beer and appeal to him as a friend. I'm sure he wants me to succeed in my new role. If we talk it out, I'm sure he'll help me.</p>	<p><u>Consider:</u> What are your top 2 or 3 options for facing this challenge?</p>
<p><u>What I want from my leader:</u> Advice on how to manage John. I don't want my mentor or boss to intervene in the situation.</p>	<p><u>Consider:</u> What level of help do you want from your leader?</p>

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Feedback Planning Sheet Template for Employees

Employee:	Session No. ____ of ____
Leader:	Date & Time: mm/dd/yr X:00 to X:00
<u>My top issue to share with my leader:</u>	<u>Consider:</u> This should be your top concern as of today/this week.
<u>Why this is important to me:</u>	<u>Consider:</u> Is this linked to your performance goals? Have you faced this before?
<u>Background information:</u>	<u>Consider:</u> Focus on this issue only. Don't bring up irrelevant information.
<u>Challenges I'm facing:</u>	<u>Consider:</u> Be open about who else is involved, nature of relationships, dollars and time
<u>What I think I should do:</u>	<u>Consider:</u> What are your top 2 or 3 options for facing this challenge?
<u>What I want from my leader:</u>	<u>Consider:</u> What level of help do you want from your leader?

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MentorLoft Feedback Assessment

Use the tools and resources in the MentorLoft Feedback in 15 guide to improve how you give feedback to employees. The more you use these strategies and tools, the better you will become at giving feedback to employees to help them grow.

Want to know how you are doing? After giving an employee feedback, you can test your feedback skills by taking the MentorLoft Feedback Assessment in the link below.

[MentorLoft Feedback Assessment](#)

Want to become a feedback pro?

You have the basics down when it comes to giving feedback. Good job! Improving how you communicate feedback will make you a better leader. With a little coaching, you can become a feedback pro. We can help.

Every day, MentorLoft
helps leaders grow.

MentorLoft's Executive Coaching focuses on people skills, communication, managing and leading others, business acumen, and more.

[Learn more](#)