

How to Give Constructive Feedback: 21 Examples for Work - BetterUp

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Executive Summary

This article addresses the challenge of delivering constructive feedback in workplace settings, arguing that the quality and delivery of feedback — not employees' resistance to improvement — is the primary barrier to its effectiveness. Drawing on two Gallup findings, the article contends that only one in four employees find peer feedback genuinely valuable, yet employees who receive meaningful feedback several times per week are five times more likely to feel engaged. The author distinguishes constructive feedback from constructive criticism, characterising the former as forward-looking and solution-oriented rather than retrospective and judgmental. The article presents a set of behavioural guidelines for structuring feedback — including specificity, timing, tone, and follow-up — and references SMART Goals as a structuring framework. The bulk of the content comprises 21 scripted feedback examples across six relational contexts: communication skills, time management, peer relationships, direct reports, managers, and leadership. The article concludes with a promotional call-to-action for BetterUp's coaching platform, situating feedback skill development as a professional growth investment.

Key Insights

1. Gallup data cited in the article indicates only one in four employees strongly agree that feedback from colleagues is truly valuable, signalling a widespread quality gap in workplace feedback practices.
2. Employees who receive meaningful feedback several times per week are reported to be five times more likely to feel engaged and connected to their work, according to Gallup findings cited in the article.
3. The article distinguishes constructive feedback from constructive criticism by framing the former as forward-looking and collaborative, and the latter as retrospective and potentially judgmental — a distinction the article treats as consequential for morale and behavioural change.

Practical Takeaways

- The article provides 21 scripted feedback examples spanning upward, downward, and peer feedback contexts, offering concrete language that practitioners can adapt for real workplace conversations.
- The article maps SMART Goals criteria onto feedback delivery, suggesting that feedback framed with specific, measurable, time-bound expectations is more actionable and more likely to produce sustained behaviour change.

Frameworks Mentioned

SMART Goals — A goal-setting framework standing for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound, applied here to structure feedback so recipients have clear expectations and measurable targets.

Critical Analysis

Strengths: The article provides a large volume of practical, scenario-specific language covering a wide range of workplace relationships and feedback directions (upward, downward, lateral), making it immediately usable for practitioners. The two Gallup statistics anchor the argument in recognisable external data. The distinction drawn between constructive feedback and constructive criticism is conceptually coherent and practically useful. **Limitations:** The article is produced by BetterUp, a commercial coaching platform, and functions as content marketing — the closing sections explicitly promote BetterUp's product. The Gallup statistics are cited without specific report titles, years, or methodology, making independent verification difficult. The 21 examples are presented without empirical validation of their effectiveness; they represent the author's editorial judgment, not tested interventions. The 'feedback sandwich' is referenced approvingly despite a body of academic literature questioning its effectiveness. No competing frameworks or critical perspectives on feedback delivery are acknowledged. The article conflates managerial coaching techniques with peer feedback norms without distinguishing the power dynamics involved.

Organizational Practice

The article describes common workplace feedback practices including one-on-one check-ins, team meetings, skip-level conversations, pulse surveys, employee engagement surveys, performance reviews, and cross-functional project collaboration. It depicts feedback flowing across multiple organisational levels — peer-to-peer, manager-to-direct-report, direct-report-to-manager, and employee-to-leadership — and references follow-up as an ongoing practice rather than a one-time event.

Strategic Implications

The article reflects a broader industry trend toward normalising multi-directional feedback, including upward and peer-to-peer channels, as a standard component of performance culture rather than a hierarchical, top-down process. The emphasis on frequency, specificity, and psychological safety in feedback delivery is consistent with emerging organisational research on continuous performance management. The framing of feedback as a leadership and communication competency — rather than a transactional HR mechanism — suggests growing alignment between feedback practice and broader talent development strategies.

Validation Status: warning
