



WORKPLACE WELLBEING

Chapter 5

Using Feedback for Personal and Professional Growth

Turning Insight into Improvement

In this chapter

Explore how to receive, reflect on and give feedback in ways that support self-awareness, confidence, stronger relationships and continuous professional development.

SPACE TO BREATHE THERAPY



Using Feedback for Personal and Professional Growth: Turning Insight into Improvement

Feedback is one of the most powerful tools for learning, development and continuous improvement in the workplace. Whether it comes from a manager, colleague, client or even through our own self-reflection, feedback provides valuable information about our performance, behaviours and the impact we have on others.

Despite its importance, many people find feedback uncomfortable. Some worry that receiving feedback means they have failed, while others avoid giving feedback because they fear upsetting colleagues or damaging relationships. As a result, opportunities for growth can be missed.

In reality, feedback is not about criticism or judgement. When delivered and received effectively, it becomes a conversation that promotes learning, builds confidence and strengthens workplace relationships. It helps us recognise what we are doing well, identify areas for development and continue progressing throughout our careers.

Developing the ability to receive, reflect on and act upon feedback is an essential part of self-awareness. It requires openness, curiosity and a willingness to view every experience as an opportunity to learn rather than as a measure of personal worth.

What Is Feedback?

Feedback is information about our actions, behaviours or performance that helps us understand how we are doing and how we can improve.

Feedback may come from:

- Managers.
- Supervisors.
- Colleagues.
- Clients.
- Customers.
- Mentors.
- Coaches.
- Performance reviews.
- Informal conversations.
- Self-reflection.

Guidance, not judgement

Effective feedback provides guidance rather than judgement. Its purpose is to support learning and development.

Why Feedback Matters

Without feedback, it is difficult to know whether our actions are achieving the outcomes we intend.

Feedback helps us to:



- Improve performance.
- Increase self-awareness.
- Build confidence.
- Strengthen communication.
- Develop professional skills.
- Recognise strengths.
- Identify blind spots.
- Improve teamwork.
- Build trust.
- Support career development.

People who actively seek feedback often develop more quickly because they remain open to learning.

Positive Feedback Is Just as Important

Many people associate feedback with criticism.

However, positive feedback is equally valuable.

It helps us recognise:

- What we do well.
- Which strengths we should continue using.
- Behaviours that benefit others.
- Successful approaches that can be repeated.

Positive feedback builds confidence and motivation.

Examples include:

- “You explained that clearly.”
- “You handled that conversation professionally.”
- “Your organisation really helped the team.”
- “Your calm approach made a difference.”

Notice strengths too

Recognising strengths encourages continued growth.

Constructive Feedback

Constructive feedback focuses on helping someone improve.

Good constructive feedback is:

- Specific.
- Respectful.
- Timely.
- Balanced.
- Focused on behaviour rather than personality.
- Future focused.



Instead of saying:
“You’re disorganised.”

A more constructive approach might be:
“I’ve noticed some deadlines have been missed recently. Would it help to look at ways of prioritising your workload?”

Encourage discussion

Constructive wording encourages discussion rather than defensiveness.

Why Receiving Feedback Can Feel Difficult

Feedback often triggers emotional responses.

People may fear:

- Failure.
- Rejection.
- Embarrassment.
- Judgement.
- Disappointing others.
- Looking incompetent.

These reactions are completely understandable.

Our brains are naturally sensitive to situations that may feel threatening or socially uncomfortable.

Recognising these emotions allows us to respond thoughtfully rather than defensively.

Receiving Feedback Effectively

Receiving feedback is a skill that develops with practice. Helpful strategies include:

Listen Fully

Allow the person to finish before responding. Avoid interrupting or preparing your defence while they are speaking.

Stay Curious

Instead of asking: “Why are they criticising me?” try asking: “What can I learn from this?” Curiosity encourages growth.

Ask Questions

Clarify anything you are unsure about. Questions might include: Could you give me an example? What would improvement look like? What would you recommend? Clear understanding makes feedback more useful.

Avoid Immediate Defensiveness

It is natural to want to explain ourselves. However, pausing before responding allows time to reflect. Not every piece of feedback requires an immediate answer.



Reflect Afterwards

Ask yourself: What part of this feedback is accurate? What have I learned? What action will I take? Reflection transforms feedback into meaningful development.

Giving Feedback Effectively

Giving feedback is equally important.

Poorly delivered feedback can reduce confidence and damage relationships.

Helpful principles include:

Be Specific

Focus on observable behaviour rather than assumptions.

Be Respectful

Speak with kindness and professionalism.

Be Timely

Give feedback while the situation is still relevant.

Focus on Improvement

Offer suggestions and support rather than simply identifying problems.

Balance Strengths and Development

Recognise what someone is doing well as well as where they can improve.

The aim is learning

Feedback should encourage learning rather than create fear.

Feedback and Psychological Safety

People are far more willing to receive feedback when they feel psychologically safe.

Psychologically safe workplaces encourage:

- Open communication.
- Honest conversations.
- Respectful challenge.
- Learning from mistakes.
- Continuous development.

When employees fear criticism or blame, feedback becomes threatening rather than helpful.

Managers play an important role in creating cultures where feedback is viewed as a normal part of learning.

Self-Reflection as Feedback

Not all feedback comes from other people.

Self-reflection is a valuable form of internal feedback.

After completing a task, ask yourself:



- What went well?
- What challenged me?
- What have I learned?
- What would I do differently next time?

Build internal insight

Developing this habit strengthens self-awareness and reduces dependence on external validation.

Feedback and Professional Development

Feedback plays an important role in career progression.

It helps individuals:

- Identify learning needs.
- Set meaningful goals.
- Improve confidence.
- Develop leadership skills.
- Strengthen communication.
- Prepare for new responsibilities.

Employees who actively seek feedback often demonstrate a commitment to continuous improvement.

Common Mistakes When Receiving Feedback

People sometimes:

- Take feedback personally.
- Become defensive.
- Dismiss feedback immediately.
- Focus only on negatives.
- Ignore positive feedback.
- Assume one piece of feedback defines them.

Feedback is information

Feedback describes behaviour, not your worth as a person. Everyone has opportunities to learn and grow.

Building a Feedback Mindset

Developing a healthy relationship with feedback involves changing how we think about it.

Instead of viewing feedback as:

“Evidence that I’m not good enough.”

Consider viewing it as:

“Information that helps me improve.”



A growth mindset

This mindset encourages resilience and lifelong learning.

Practical Reflection Questions

After receiving feedback, consider:

- What did I learn?
- What surprised me?
- What strengths were recognised?
- Which development areas were identified?
- What practical action will I take?
- How will I measure progress?

Reflection ensures feedback leads to meaningful change.

The Benefits of a Feedback Culture

Workplaces that encourage healthy feedback often experience:

- Better communication.
- Stronger teamwork.
- Increased trust.
- Improved performance.
- Greater innovation.
- Higher employee engagement.
- Better leadership.
- Continuous learning.

Make feedback everyday

Feedback becomes part of everyday professional development rather than something reserved for annual reviews.

Key Takeaways

- ✓ Feedback supports personal and professional growth.
- ✓ Positive feedback is just as valuable as constructive feedback.
- ✓ Receiving feedback with curiosity promotes learning.
- ✓ Giving feedback respectfully strengthens relationships.
- ✓ Reflection helps transform feedback into action.
- ✓ Feedback should focus on behaviours rather than personal characteristics.
- ✓ Healthy feedback cultures support continuous improvement and workplace wellbeing.

Final Thoughts

Feedback is one of the greatest gifts we can receive in our professional lives. Although it may sometimes feel uncomfortable, it provides valuable insight into our strengths, our blind spots



and the ways we can continue to develop. When approached with openness and curiosity, feedback becomes a powerful tool for self-awareness rather than a source of criticism.

Equally important is our ability to provide feedback to others with kindness, respect and a genuine desire to support their growth. Thoughtful feedback strengthens trust, encourages learning and contributes to healthier, more collaborative workplaces.

Ultimately, growth does not come from never making mistakes, it comes from being willing to learn from every experience. By embracing feedback as part of our ongoing development, we build confidence, improve our professional relationships and create a mindset of continuous learning that benefits both ourselves and those we work alongside.

Chapter reflection

Think about a recent piece of feedback you received. What strength or development area did it reveal, what can you learn from it, and what is one practical action you could take next?