

## From Feedback to Feedforward

Davon Cook

To conclude my series on human relations and talent development topics, let's consider when and how you provide feedback to your employees.

Before discussing the process of feedback, look at purpose of feedback and the word itself. The [Managerstools.com](https://www.managerstools.com) podcast reminded me the purpose is to influence behavior going forward. It is not to prove that someone made a mistake, or to litigate a dispute of the past. You are providing information so that employees can be more effective in the future. You can use an example from the past to explain or make the information specific, but the focus is on the future. Because of its forward-looking focus, I am adopting the word "feedforward".

How do you practically provide feedforward? First, ask if the person is willing to discuss performance and receive some suggestions. If the answer is "No, not right now", respect that this is not a good time but follow up again soon. You'll be more effective (and less likely to be disastrous) if the recipient is in a receptive frame of mind.

Second, be timely in providing feedforward. I have worked with clients to build annual or semi-annual performance review processes, but don't wait for that to roll around. Your tractor's GPS doesn't wait until you're a row off to correct itself. It is continually making adjustments to stay on course. Why would you wait to adjust someone's behavior until a predetermined session? Talk about the situation soon after it occurs, with wisdom to wait until emotion has passed if needed.

Finally, structure your communication using three steps:

Make an **OBSERVATION** about actions you have seen take place. If you have specific examples, use them. It is easier for the person receiving the feedforward to understand how to apply your advice if examples are given.

Describe the **IMPACT** of the actions—the impact on you, on others, on the person doing it, on the company.

Make a **SUGGESTION** of what he/she should do more or less of.

Many managers struggle with having frank conversations about performance with employees. In many cases, your team appreciates knowing where they stand and values you investing time in them. Take advantage of the opportunity to provide timely feedforward. Everyone will benefit.