

Positive or negative, how can you give good feedback?

How is good feedback constructed? What are the crucial elements that determine if you are giving good feedback? Are there tools that make this complex task easier? Anne Levi, operations manager at MyJob.Company, gives some ideas on how to succeed in giving feedback.

Temps de lecture : minute

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According to a study from Gallup, 43% of the most committed employees receive weekly feedback. Good feedback allows employees to give and receive information about their performance as a worker maintain motivation to make improvements. Several new performance models have a crucial common theme of giving and receiving continuous feedback.

Negative feedback vs. positive feedback

Giving negative feedback – if it is used correctly – is constructive, but it is also important to create an environment of positive feedback. This creates positive reinforcement and builds a positive work dynamic. “I encourage managers to tell their employees when they are satisfied with their work, to congratulate them on a successful presentation or managing a complex file well. It is a good habit to get into,” insists Anne Levi.

However, it is more difficult than it may seem to give it when something

isn't going well. "The challenge is being capable of not just giving negative feedback - I find that word contradictory - but in giving constructive criticism," Anne highlights.

The structure of good feedback

How is good feedback constructed? These three easy steps will help you give constructive criticism.

Step 1: highlight the positives. A manager should start by praising the specific aspects of a worker's performance. "During this step, Americans seem to blow it out of proportion. In the UK they are bit more prudent, but the idea is the same. You must be encouraging and emphasise good practices." The idea is not finding positive things just because you need to say something good about an employee first. A manager should be kind and constructive. In addition, this approach allows you to highlight the good things that an employee does and lean on those practices to find solutions (in step 3).

Step 2: tell them how they can improve. This is where the manager underlines an employee's weaknesses in a direct manner but still remaining kind. "You can't be scared; you need to have managerial strength during this step because no one likes to hear that they did something wrong. It is important to not come off like you are judging them, but rather sharing with them an area that they could improve upon. Everyone can improve on something, that is the main goal of feedback."

Avoid any personal judgement ("you aren't very meticulous," for example) and try to talk about specific situations ("in this document, you weren't very meticulous"). Then, you can get into the specifics while being as factual as possible so that the employee understands what they

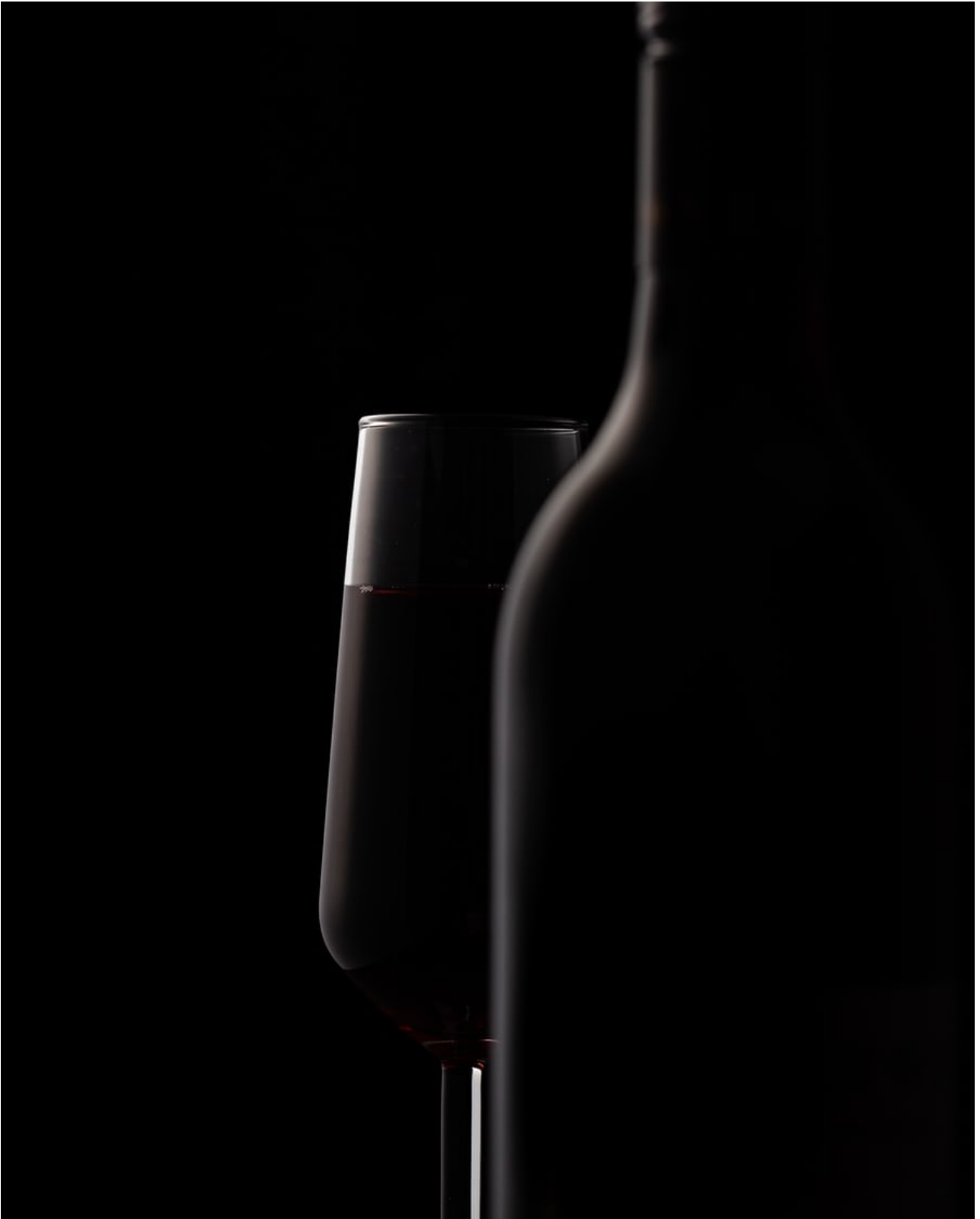
did wrong. Finally, so that the examples that you give are relative, you must give feedback about a certain document or project in short time span after it was turned in or finished so that the employee still has the subject clearly in mind and can say that they will work on it.

Step 3: find solutions. Through this step, feedback becomes constructive because you are offering ways to improve their performance. In some cases, the manager can offer solutions and indicate the correct actions to take to the employee. However, “the best option is to position yourself as a coach and allow the employee to find their own solutions. This way, the employees themselves ask themselves ‘what could I have done differently?’”

Another way to go about it is by finding a solution together by asking clear questions about what doesn’t work, clarifying the goals of each person, and thinking about possible solutions. In any case, this step allows you to talk through solutions and the employees will leave feeling confident and motivated. “Before giving feedback, I always ask the person to tell me what they think isn’t going great and then I build off of that,” recommends Anne Levi.

Example of constructive criticism:

“Your presentation was clear and the important messages were presented well so that the client understood them. However, you could have had a bigger impact if you had used more numbers, as you know that your client is keen on number analysis. What are some numbers that you could have added?”



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The importance of feedback

Feedback rests on two axes: the intention of giving feedback and the end goal after you give the feedback. It is important that whoever is giving feedback does so intentionally and is conscious of being constructive. This is why all feedback is linked to a specific improvement goal. Feedback will allow employees of a company to improve their performance.

To get to this point, the manager should pay particular attention to their word choice and find an appropriate setting. They must also pay attention to the way they say their words because “the non-verbal communication also plays an important role in feedback,” says Anne Levi. “The person receiving the feedback is going to judge the words said just as much as the attitude of their manager and their sincerity. It’s a very complicated situation.”

Create an environment of continuous feedback

Regularity also plays an important role. “Too many managers are fine with yearly sit-downs with employees,” Anne explains. Yet this doesn’t allow for a feedback environment that is normal and natural. “At the minimum, managers should give feedback every six weeks. But this type of feedback is cold, controlled, and formal. The challenge is becoming a manager that is able to give spontaneous feedback while using a good word choice, good tone, good arguments, and a good structure.”

By using both formal and informal approaches, individuals are able to start improving continuously on the basis of continuous evaluations. Another good thing is that giving and receiving feedback will become a

habit and will be less nerve-racking for everyone.

An example of spontaneous feedback:

“After a meeting, while walking through the office I always give spontaneous feedback about how employees did. After a difficult meeting, I always try to add a little positive reinforcement by saying ‘you did a great job, thank you’ or ‘you did the best that you could.’ When this isn’t possible, I make sure that I send them an email, even a short one, that shows that I am paying attention to what they do. The important thing is to really learn how to deliver spontaneous feedback that is less formal than written evaluations.” - Anne Levi



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Positive feedback and a global development plan

Positive feedback can also be a useful tool for managers to motivate employees for their development plan. “While an employee is progressing on an axis of improvement, it is important to reinforce this, even when there is still a lot to be improved on.” It’s a matter of motivation. When a manager notices and encourages progress, employees are more inclined to work harder on their weaker points.

Tools for giving motivating feedback

Nonviolent Communication (NVC), a theory by Gandhi, can be useful as it is based on the principle of cooperation. It gets rid of the judgement that poisons relationships, especially between employees. We can cut the NVC into 3 stages.

1. Observe the facts. This stage requires fighting against bad habits and, if you practise it well, can allow you to go from judging to valuing. You must be able to factually observe a situation. In this stage, what you need to avoid is being too general such as “you are always late” or “you aren’t motivated,”
2. Assessing your feelings. Your perception can be shared through emotional words such as “this is how I feel about this.” Yet it is best if you can express what is the problem while putting aside your emotions and your point of view and accepting what is subjective. No one can contest to the emotions you feel, but they can contest to facts!
3. Tell employees what you need. Let your employees know what you need them to do and stop assuming that they will magically know what you need. You can tell them about the actions that you would like to see put into place “or even better, agree on a collective solution.”

Anne Levi is convinced about the positive impact of creating a feedback environment in companies and business.

“When talking about happiness in the workplace, feedback seems like a great tool that allows individuals to increase efficiency and performance.”

The problem is that too many managers don't know how to go about it or don't think that it is important. Having difficult conversations and talking about delicate topics requires a dexterity that can be learned. I advocate for training managers, coaching, role-playing, etc. Feedback is a powerful and complex tool that can be learned through experimenting, not simply implementing a cold and mechanical feedback regime.” - Anne Levi



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