
Empathetic Feedback

— Or...how not to be a jerk —

What is empathy?

Empathy is:

“the feeling that you understand and share another person's experiences and emotions : the ability to share someone else's feelings”¹

Empathy vs Sympathy



Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Evwgu369Jw>

Empathetic communication

That communication is an important part of the feedback process and what we will focus on today.

WAIT A MINUTE....

**This isn't another talk about “sandwiching”
negative comments between positive ones...**

OR IS IT?

No. It isn't.

What is feedback?

- A way to quickly learn about strengths/weaknesses
- A way to develop an active conversation between you and members of the team
- A way to build unity and engagement which leads to overall happiness with the organization

Feedback ISN'T:

- A way to tear someone down
- A way to get out your feelings
- A way to make it all about you

Giving good feedback

Feedback style

Everyone has a different style for feedback. Ask which one works best for the conversation.

A.S.K. Feedback Technique

When giving feedback, focus on making it:

- Actionable
- Specific
- Kind

S - Specific Feedback

- Use clear and identifiable examples of what you are commenting on. Give context
- Explain the effect of the example
- Give feedback quickly - the longer you wait the harder it is to be specific

Example

Instead of saying:

“You’re always late. You need to get to work on time.”

Say:

“You’ve come in late 3 times this week, missing team standup. Coming in late makes it difficult to start the day as a team and we have to go back to catch you up. “

K - Kind Feedback

- No one wants to hear that they suck at their job or as a person
- Think about how you would want to receive the feedback you are about to give
- Be aware of your tone and body language

Example

Instead of saying:

“You just don’t get it, do you?”

Say:

“It looks like you’re struggling with a few things. Let’s talk about it.”

A - Actionable Feedback

- OK - I know what I'm doing wrong (or doing right). What can I DO about it?
- Ask the recipient what they think can be done to improve
- Develop an action plan together for improvement that includes an outcome
- Give a timeline

Example

Instead of saying:

“Do better.”

Say:

“Let’s try these 3 methods and see if it fixes the problem. We’ll check back in a month to see how we did.”

Feedback pitfalls

Things to avoid

- Making it vague
- Wrong time, wrong place
- Giving emotional feedback

Receiving feedback

How to receive feedback

Listen

Acknowledge what was said

Build a consensus

What happens when you don't agree?

It's ok not to agree. However, you do have to listen. Someone felt it was important enough to give feedback, listen to what is said

What if they are not receptive?

Frame it from a “me” perspective, not a “you” perspective.

Finally....

Final notes

- Give feedback often!
- Don't take it personally
- It gets easier/better with practice

QUESTIONS?

If you would like to chat further and are uncomfortable doing so here, email me at cyoung@pivotal.io or say hi (I'm on the DE team)

Thank you

Notes and Resources

1. Empathy. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/empathy>
2. <http://hazelhq.com/blog/want-to-give-better-feedback/>
3. <https://www.oneclearmessage.co.za/performance-feedback-speaker-empathy-the-art-of-connection/>
4. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/christophernelson/2016/01/17/empathy-why-its-important-to-cultivate-at-the-office/2/#1b43c001105d>
5. <http://www.sbsonline.com/article/the-importance-of-empathy-in-the-workplace/>
6. <https://slack.engineering/on-empathy-pull-requests-979e4257d158>