

Customizing feedback: The 9 different personality types



Ever notice how you can say the same exact thing to two different people, and they each take the comment completely differently?

A manager's "great suggestion" to one employee could be seen as "rude meddling" by another.

The effectiveness of your feedback isn't solely dependent on how it's *given*. The other important half is how it's *received*. The best managers know how to give feedback to different employees. Here are nine personality types and how to handle them:

1. Feedback fanatics

They constantly seek approval, and they demand a lot of time and attention.

What to do: Strike a balance between being supportive and encouraging employees to take initiative.

If the problem lies in employee insecurity, try giving mini-performance reviews every six weeks instead of every six months. Give employees more decision-making power, or at least make authority lines clear. If it's ego-driven, incorporate more.

2. Persecution complex

Such employees tend to argue about things that have nothing to do with the topic at hand.

What to do: Keep bringing the conversation back to the original point. Don't dismiss other complaints or arguments these employees bring up, but don't let them sidetrack you. Reassure them that you'll deal with those issues after dealing with the original one.

3. Intimidators

They try to get the upper hand in the conversation by using "intimidation tactics" such as: walking around the room while you speak, ignoring you, avoiding eye contact, interrupting constantly and getting angry.

What to do: Remain neutral and calm—speak softly and slowly. If that doesn't work, then stop talking completely. Silence communicates to employees that intimidation doesn't work. When they see that you're not

going to put up with the behavior, you'll soon regain control of the conversation.

4. Alibiers

These subordinates are always ready with an excuse; never accepting any of the blame.

What to do: As with the persecution complex types, stay focused on the problem. Don't dismiss the excuses, because some may be legitimate. But concentrate on something the employees can control—their own actions.

5. Hostile employees

Hostility is a common response when employees are hurt or disappointed. But it may also stem from circumstances beyond the feedback session.

What to do: First, make sure you're not criticizing employees personally. Then, get to the source of the hostility by asking clarifying questions, such as: "You say you have trouble all the time with that department. Can you be more specific?" Be empathetic, but authoritative.

6. Insubordinate employees

Certain individuals refuse to accept your authority and any feedback you give.

What to do: First, find out the employees' position—why they are rejecting your feedback and what they want. Take these into consideration, but emphasize job goals.

7. Thin-skinned employees

Managers may become wary about undermining the shaky self-confidence of those who are sensitive to criticism.

What to do: Concentrate on the facts. This prevents employees from blowing the situation out of proportion. Also, they'll be able to focus on what went wrong, instead of how bad they feel. From there, work toward a solution.

8. Overly cautious employees

Workers may be diligent, but their slower pace may mean lower production and bottlenecks for co-workers.

What to do: Find out why they're so cautious, then tailor feedback accordingly. You may need to give them more training, spend more time explaining assignments or give tasks where caution pays. *Most important:* Give praise for a job well done, and done quickly.

9. New employees

Generally, they need the most feedback in order to get up to speed.

What to do: Don't worry about giving too much feedback early on. New employees need to learn the ropes, and getting feedback is usually more reliable than trying to watch and learn everything. (But avoid "hand holding.")

Begin with a discussion of job requirements. Then set short-term goals (say, weekly) to be discussed upon completion. Give extra feedback, especially in the first few months.

Feedback do's and don'ts

- ✓ **DON'T** sugarcoat negative feedback. If you're going to use constructive criticism, don't dilute the impact.
- ✓ **DO** focus on specific events.
- ✓ **DO** make change the goal of your feedback.
- ✓ **DON'T** put employees on the defensive.
- ✓ **DO** solicit input by asking questions such as: "Do you feel that ...," "How would you recommend that ...," and "How did you happen to"
- ✓ **DO** postpone criticizing if your temper is at the breaking point. Take time to cool off.
- ✓ **DON'T** get into the habit of using words such as "always" and "never" when giving performance feedback.
Better: Give specific dates and times.