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Feedback Culture: How to Create Positive Improvement (for Managers)

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"I think it's very important to have a feedback loop, where you're constantly thinking about what you've done and how you could be doing it better. I think that's the single best piece of advice: constantly think about how you could be doing things better and questioning yourself." — [Elon Musk](#)

Feedback is natural at agencies. You get it from your clients, managers, and peers. But there are best practices in the world of managing creatives. Done

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right, feedback can be a source of constructive conversation that guides employees toward improvement. When a strong feedback culture exists, the whole organization benefits.

Feedback culture starts with your managers

Your feedback culture starts with your managers. **Most people** say that when their managers give them feedback, they feel valued. When employees do not receive feedback, they feel discouraged. And yet most employees say they **don't get enough**. With agency life already being fast-paced, you need to nail the best feedback loop. And it all starts with your managers.

So what type of feedback should a great manager give?



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Five positive comments for every constructive comment

Constructive criticism has a [direct effect on](#) employees' performance. There is actually a golden ratio, too, of positive to negative (or constructive) criticism.

According to researchers Heaphy and Losada, “The factor that made the greatest difference between the most and least successful teams,” the [researchers found](#), “was the ratio of positive comments.” This ratio was 5.6 to one. Similarly, another study by psychologist John Gottman found the most successful positive to negative feedback ratio was [five to one](#). This means that for every five or six positive feedback comments, there should be one constructive feedback comment. That creates the recipe for a successful feedback culture.

Positive

"The most successful positive to negative feedback ratio was five to one."

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comments are those that make the employee feel good about his or her performance. These comments create enthusiasm, build confidence and self-esteem, and makes the employee feel acknowledged for a specific job that has met or exceeded expectations.

Constructive criticism helps the employee understand

how to become a more effective employee. These comments help develop the employee and build self-awareness for the effects of the employee's activities. This type of feedback, when combined in the golden ratio of positive comments, can motivate an employee to modify and self-correct his or her own behavior.

How to provide criticism in your agency, for managers

1. **Set clear goals** — Before you give feedback, make sure your direct reports know what you will be looking for.
2. **Touch base frequently** — Your goal is to build a strong working relationship while improving your employees' performance. Don't wait for annual reviews to provide major comments and criticisms. Offer regular, recurrent meetings to deliver your comments on recent work in a timely manner.

3. Make it private — Hold regular one-on-one meetings so your feedback is comfortably received. This may also make you more comfortable giving it.
4. **Be specific** — State specifically what the individual has done. For instance, “When you built the slide deck for our offsite presentation, the sources you used really added credibility to our message.” Alternatively, “When you come in five minutes late some days, the team meeting can’t get started on time.”
5. **Talk to your audience** — Modify your messaging to resonate with your employee. Speak their language. Feedback should be personal and, again, specific to your individual direct reports.
6. Recognize improvements — The benefit of regular meetings is your ability to recognize improvements in the employee’s performance. This type of feedback loop reinforces and encourages positive improvements. For instance, “Last time we spoke, you were sometimes late to team meetings. I noticed

you've been on time for every meeting during the past two weeks, and I wanted to acknowledge how your promptness has helped the whole team [stay on schedule](#).”

7. Praise efforts, not results — When you notice your employee making an effort to change, verbally acknowledge and praise this. Results will likely follow but should not be the sole source of positive comments.

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