

# Five Tips for Providing Feedback To Remote Employees

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Pause before you send that email. Providing guidance, support and feedback to your employees is as important as ever during this unprecedented crisis, but you know your team is juggling personal and professional responsibilities like never before. Stress levels are high and emotional reserves low. How do you provide challenge and support in a way that will enhance psychological safety, foster trust and have the impact you intend — and do it in a virtual environment?

Consider these tips:

**1. First, connect. Be human.** Normalize the full range of emotions we are all experiencing right now, and be transparent about how the current challenges are impacting you. Before jumping to give direction or feedback on an employee's performance, ask how they are doing. A powerful question I have been asking my team is, "What dominant emotion are you experiencing right now?" This will likely lead to a much richer conversation than simply saying, "How are you doing?" Connecting on a human level communicates care, reduces threat response and encourages neuroplasticity — critical fundamentals for healthy teams, creative problem-solving and innovation and sustainable performance, particularly under stress.

**2. Keep it timely and bite-size.** Now probably isn't the best time to give feedback about an employee's performance over the past year, like you might do in a typical annual appraisal. The world has shifted. Instead, focus on providing feedback that will help employees be successful over the next week or two. Let them know what they did last week, on a behavioral level, that was helpful. Your goal is to tell them specifically what they should repeat.

**3. Be selective with your feedback.** Aim for a 4-1 ratio of encouraging versus challenging critical feedback. Your people are likely tired. They are stressed. Many are parenting full time, playing "teacher," navigating new financial concerns, counting toilet paper squares, worrying about at-risk family members and, yes, trying to do the best they can professionally. Ask yourself: What will matter 12 months from now? And is now the time to give this feedback?

**4. Avoid 'hit-and-run' feedback at all costs.** Instead, engage in an ongoing, two-way conversation. Ask how you can be helpful to them this week and if there is clarity you can provide. Modeling that you are open to receiving feedback will go a long way. Adopt the perspective and express it explicitly to your employee that you consider it your job to help them be successful.

**5. Get eyeball-to-eyeball.** With all the technology currently available, there is simply no excuse for not at least occasionally connecting with your staff on video. There is a qualitative difference in the communication that occurs. You will gain insights that will allow you to connect on a more personal level when you notice a pet or family member wandering by in the background. Refuse to believe that physical distance means social distance. The two are not the same.

Follow these five tips and you will be on your way to developing the kind of high-trust, agile team you need to navigate the weeks and months ahead. Your team will be more grounded, connected and ready to strive for the collective success of the team, not just individual survival.

One last thing: Many of you have some new "co-workers" (hint, you live with them) who would benefit from your practicing these same five tips with them. Try it.

Better conversations, better business and a better world begin with you.