

How to deal with a negative reaction to feedback

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Dealing with difficult feedback

When receiving feedback, people may not always react in the same way. Sometimes feedback is taken well. Other times however, further discussion is needed to make sure that everybody is on the same page.

How to deal with different reactions to feedback

The silent treatment

If someone goes quiet after receiving feedback, try to ask open ended questions that will encourage a discussion rather than a one-sided conversation.

You may also want to make sure that they feel like they are in a safe environment where they can be open and honest.

'What are your thoughts about this feedback?'

"How do you feel about what we have discussed?"

"You can take some time to collect your thoughts and when you are ready to talk, I'm here."

Getting defensive

People may respond to feedback that they weren't expecting by getting defensive. This is a coping mechanism that people sometimes use when they are feeling threatened or unsafe.

"I want to understand why you are feeling this way. Is there anything I don't know about that you would like to share?"

"Let's discuss why this feedback is surprising to you, and what we can do about it going forward."

"What do you think would be helpful for you going forward so we're not in this situation again?"

Getting tearful

If your employee begins to get emotional, try not to assume why this may be, and instead have an open conversation with them so they can try to talk through how they are feeling.

"What's going through your head right now? I'm here to help, we can talk through this together."

"Take your time, and when you're ready to talk about it, I'm here."

Resisting commitment

In some cases, while your employee may be saying the right things upon receiving feedback, their attitude might suggest they don't mean it.

"Is there anything getting in the way of you committing to making these changes?"

"How are you feeling? What are your concerns about what we've just discussed?"

"I'm getting the sense that you don't agree with this feedback. Let's talk about it."

Anger

In some cases, employees may react with anger due to feeling threatened. In this situation, make sure you keep calm, and try not to let it escalate whilst still being firm.

"I want you to have the opportunity to provide your point of view. Tell me how you're feeling about this."

"We have discussed the changes that need to happen as a result of this meeting. While you may not agree with this feedback, this is what needs to change"

"I can see you are still quite upset, and I think it would be helpful to take a step back and return to this conversation a bit later. Let's have another chat tomorrow morning."