

Leadership and worker involvement toolkit

How to give feedback



Information sheet from Seven steps > Step 4 > Further tools

Why is the way I give feedback important?

Feedback is a very important tool in the workplace. When people take risks, cut corners or act carelessly, they may put themselves or others at risk. Feedback is therefore key to learning and improving workplace safety.

Most people know when they've taken risks but sometimes it's easier to slip back into old habits, especially when the pressure is on. If you talk to your workers and focus on everything they've got wrong, it's not surprising to sometimes get a strong reaction.

One helpful technique is to get your workers to tell you what they feel they've done well and which areas they need to tighten up on.

Avoid the word 'but'

One word which can be the 'kiss of death' for any feedback session is the word 'but'.

How many times have you said something like:

"You've got your ear defenders on but..."

"You've done a great job storing those pallets but..."

By using the word 'but' you have killed any positive feedback and workers may think: *"Why should I bother if what I do is never good enough?"* Try substituting the 'but' for an 'and'.

"You've done a great job storing those pallets and now I want you to apply the manual handling techniques you've learned when you offload the trucks."

Top tips for giving feedback

- Think specific rather than general. Give specific, accurate examples of what the person has actually done.
- Use facts in your feedback and avoid making any comments of a personal nature, eg *"You couldn't be bothered to use your safety glasses."* If someone thinks they are being attacked, you are more likely to end up in an argument.
- Timing is important. Give feedback immediately rather than waiting. This will help the worker more easily recall the actions they have taken.
- Feedback should be a two-way exchange. For example, ask the worker what health and safety measures they've followed in doing their task. Comment and ask questions as you go.
- Listen to what is said. Show your understanding of the reasons the worker is giving for their behaviour and try to prompt them to state what was wrong, in their own words.
- Focus on areas for improvement rather than focusing on shortcomings.
- Put yourself in their shoes. Try and consider things from that person's point of view and speak to them in a way you'd wish to be spoken to yourself.
- Keep it short and simple. Most people can only remember 3–4 points at a time so focus on information that is useful.
- Use plain language so the person can understand you.
- Be constructive and you can help people learn for themselves how to work in a safer way.

When should I give feedback?

If you are a supervisor or construction manager, you should provide brief feedback to your workforce regularly. You might think about focusing feedback on issues that have been the subject of recent toolbox talks. This shows that you are committed to health and safety and indicates that toolbox talks are not simply a paper exercise.

The *Leadership and worker involvement toolkit* is aimed particularly at small and medium sized businesses and is designed to help improve your health and safety and bring additional benefits to your business performance and productivity. See: www.hse.gov.uk/construction/lwit/

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