



Negative Feedback

The SPIN model

No one likes giving or receiving negative feedback. But not telling someone he or she is failing to meet expectations perpetuates the problem, misleads the individual and will create a crisis of trust and performance later. So deal with it promptly and give the person a way forward.

SPIN	
S: Situation and specifics	Give feedback in a right position: when the person is calm and the event is still fresh in mind. Do not give feedback when people are angry, stressed, upset or very busy. When you give feedback, be specific about your purpose (why are you doing this?) and the circumstances and the event.
P: Personal impact	Do not judge the other person: that invites conflict. Tell the person how his or her actions made you feel: feelings are irrefutable. For example, say 'You have turned up late to three client meetings; it makes me feel you think they are unimportant' not 'You are a lazy idler'.
I: Insight and inquiry	Ask open questions to see if the person understands the problem, to help him or her explore and evaluate options and to discover the way forward. Avoid telling people: make them learn for themselves.
N: Next steps	<p>Mutually agree what happens next. There needs to be a positive way forward. You need to have thought through possible options and actions. But at this point, it is often better to go into coaching mode and get the person to generate the options and the way forward. The person may come up with a better and more relevant solution than yours. In any event, people will feel more committed to their solutions than they will to yours.</p> <p>Get the person to summarise the next steps. This is the best way to check for understanding; people can only summarise well if they have heard and understood well. The act of summarising will also help people consolidate their own thinking and they will remember the feedback much better and, it is to be hoped, positively. Follow up in writing to confirm the understanding.</p>

Once you have validated the problem, you need to find some way of resolving it. The feedback session will be more positive and productive if it is couched in the language of 'development', 'finding a way forward' or 'putting in place the skills and behaviours required for success'. Each person will have language. It is best to use and to find actionable, future-focused and positive language. Backward-looking and analytical language ('Let's see how you messed up') rarely helps.

Giving negative feedback is like coaching. It is about helping other people discover for themselves what they need to do. Like coaching, it is about asking the right sorts of questions. The table below gives a few pointers to success and failure.

Success	Failure
Specific feedback	Generalised feedback
Balance positive/negative comments	All negative
Actionable	Non-actionable
Deal with the problem	Attack the person
Asking, involving	Telling
Understand the situation	No understanding

Exercise

Try any of these role plays with a trusted colleague. Before starting each role play, think about the following:

- How will you apply the SPIN model?
- What are the specifics you have observed and how have they affected you?
- What are the open questions you will ask? What are the next steps you want to see?

Role plays

- A client has complained that one of your team members has been late on delivering key reports twice.
- Some of your team members are complaining that another team member is too negative and drains moral and energy.
- A high-flying team member is suddenly not delivering to the standard or timing you expect.