

# The Importance of Feedback

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*Armando Cano Anzures · 2026*

We all make mistakes. Some are small, like forgetting to pay a utility bill on time, and others are colossal, like miscalculating the equipment needed to meet production requirements for a new product. If you're lucky, the small ones will be trivial and easily forgotten—even if losing power in the middle of summer in Monterrey is no laughing matter—with no major consequences or discussion. However, the big mistakes, those that truly put your department's, plant's, or company's objectives at risk, fall into an entirely different category. Some may even escalate to the point where senior leadership must step in to correct the problem or, at the very least, assure the customer that the error will not happen again.

## Giving Feedback to the Team

Whatever the final resolution of the problem—which may include a corrective and preventive action process—there is one step that is generally overlooked by the person responsible for the system that failed. First, let me clarify that when I talk about the “system,” I am not referring solely to the Quality system. In any value stream, several interconnected systems coexist and work together to achieve the company's objectives: the Accounting system, the Production system, the Materials system, and so on.

Most of the time, failures are the result of poorly designed systems with gaps that allow errors to go undetected in time. Or they simply don't exist—which is much worse—because managing the system becomes a Viking saga: a collection of beautiful stories with no real foundation. Be careful that your root cause investigations focus on the systems, not on the people.

When reaching a conclusion to a problem's resolution, it is important to give feedback to team members about it. Sharing the ultimate root cause with your collaborators helps build a mindset of recognition and prevention to avoid the problem recurring. This is, essentially, a continuous improvement cycle that should be applied to every problem. And yet, I continually observe that this step is either skipped or carried out superficially. If you have gone through a corrective action process, as a team leader: have you made sure the outcome was shared with your collaborators? Or did you settle for sharing it only with the customer?

## Individual Feedback

In general, when I work on corrective actions, my focus is on finding how the system being questioned failed, rather than on the individual who may or may not have originated the problem. It is very important that our collaborators feel confident that the investigation effort is an honest questioning process aimed at discovering how we can prevent the problem. In a previous article, we already mentioned that providing emotional safety to collaborators is part of a leader's responsibility. There is no better opportunity to reinforce that feeling than when we are in Sherlock Holmes mode.

However, there will be occasions when a collaborator's behavior must be confronted and an honest conversation must take place. Before concluding that an individual's behavior is the cause of the problem, you must rule out that the system has failed. Is there a clear procedure for the

task? Has sufficient training been provided for its execution? Have the necessary tools been supplied to carry it out? If you can honestly answer yes to all of the above, then you can truly conclude that an incorrect behavior is the root cause, and it is time to give feedback to the person involved. What is the best way to do this?

## Suggested Steps for Delivering Feedback

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From my perspective, here are the steps I recommend for preparing and conducting this conversation:

- ▶ **Confidentiality comes first.** Hold the meeting in a private, comfortable setting. The goal is to give feedback, not to embarrass your collaborator. If you feel there is any risk of misunderstanding, invite the Human Resources Manager to participate as an observer. This is especially important if there is a history of repeated misconduct by the same person.
- ▶ **Be factual.** You must have concrete, verifiable facts that are not subject to interpretation. This makes it easier to demonstrate the need for the conversation and prevents you from getting drawn into a debate with the collaborator about the problem.
- ▶ **Clearly identify the behavior you want to correct.** What you ultimately want to change is an observed behavior. Keep in mind that it may be unintentional, which will make it harder for the collaborator to recognize it—so you need to be very clear about it yourself.
- ▶ **Express your feelings.** Do so only for emphasis, not to make accusations. Expressing them calmly conveys the seriousness of the situation. Be careful: do not use humor, as that is completely at odds with the purpose of the conversation.
- ▶ **Use the sandwich technique.** Start with a positive comment, then address the difficult part of the conversation, and close with another positive comment. The goal is for your collaborator to have a positive feedback experience, so the final part of the exercise must always end on a high note. You might, for example, express your confidence that the feedback will make them an even more valuable member of the team.
- ▶ **Obtain a commitment.** Toward the end of the conversation, ask the collaborator to explain in their own words: the incorrect behavior, the reason it occurred, and what actions they will take to avoid a similar situation. This is the most important step—it allows you to walk away with a genuine commitment to positive change, rather than having simply held a complaint session.
- ▶ **Follow up.** Observe the collaborator's behavior in the following days, and if you notice a positive change, acknowledge it. If you do not see the expected change, hold another session to check whether there is another issue that was not discussed, listen to your collaborator, and obtain a new commitment.

In a podcast I listened to recently, the point was made that most continuous improvement tools work effectively when collaborators change their behaviors. Think about that for a moment and you will realize just how right that is. Think also about how a procedure actually tells us what behaviors we should adopt when carrying out a process—for example, when receiving materials—. Having this clarity will sharpen your ability to supervise your collaborators, regardless of the system in which they operate.

I hope this article gives you some ideas for delivering effective feedback to your team members. At the end of the day, we all deserve to be told, in the right way, when we have made a mistake—and to be given the opportunity to correct it. When done well, you will strengthen the emotional safety of your collaborators and make your leadership far more effective.

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