

3 Ways to Get More Positive Feedback from Your Boss

Let's not overlook the importance of receiving positive feedback. When we get information about what we're doing well -- whether it's achieving (or even exceeding our goals) or demonstrating helpful behaviors that have a favorably impact on other people and on the business -- we are more likely to feel appreciated, valued, and encouraged to keep doing what's working.

Recognition for a job well done matters. It increases happiness at work, job satisfaction and retention. And yet, many managers don't give positive feedback.

Some of the leaders I coach have shared that they feel reluctant to do so, fearing that their employees might become "feedback dependent" and then will only work for praise. Others have cited the fact that their bosses don't give them positive feedback, so they think, "If I can do my job without it, so can everyone else!" Still others have shared that they don't have time, don't have a model of how to do it well, or simply forget to do it.

What to do if you *are* the boss? Recognize that feedback is critical to your team members' progress, success and satisfaction -- and that it's core to your job to provide it.

Here are three strategies to consider to get more useful positive feedback:

1. Dig deeper.

Let's say you get the occasional "nice job" or "keep up the good work!" from your manager. Chances are, you're left feeling more deflated and less motivated than you'd hoped. There's no specific behavioral feedback in those kudos that point to what you did well and why it was beneficial. And without specifics, you can't replicate it in the future.

So rather than leave it at a pat on the back, press your manager for details. You might say something like, "Thank you for the vote of confidence. I appreciate it. And so that I can do as well -- or even better - - next time, would you share with me 1-2 specific behaviors you observed in me that contributed to our project's success?"

2. Give more positive feedback.

Ask your boss if you can share a piece of positive feedback with them. It's highly unlikely that they'll say no to that. Give them a single piece of specific behavioral feedback you've noticed, and express the positive impact it's had on you.

For example: "In our last client meeting, when you stopped the discussion to say to me, 'We haven't heard your perspective yet,' you gave me the invitation into the conversation that I needed. I really appreciated that you did that because it made me feel respected and like my opinion mattered. Thank you."

Try that a few times (all of them genuine, of course), and you might notice that their reciprocity bias kicks in. It's our impulse to reciprocate actions others have done to us.

3. Don't call it feedback.

If you think that asking for more positive feedback is going to feel like fishing, ask for something else that's "feedback adjacent." Like what? Like saying, "I would really like to be helpful to our team. Is there something you'd like me to help someone on our team get better at?"

Their answer to that question will let you know what you're doing well. Even if it's not as direct as you might like, it will give you some useful insight into how they see your strengths -- and you get credit for being generous!

Another option is when your boss gives you negative feedback, receive it well, and then shift the conversation. You could say something like: "It sounds like there are a few things I need to start doing differently in order to be more effective. I am going to put together an action plan to address those. Will you also share an example of something you want to make sure I don't do differently, because it's working?"

As management expert Ken Blanchard once remarked, "Feedback is the breakfast of champions." You may need to do a little extra work to get the nourishment you need to stay motivated, but in the end, it will be worth it.