

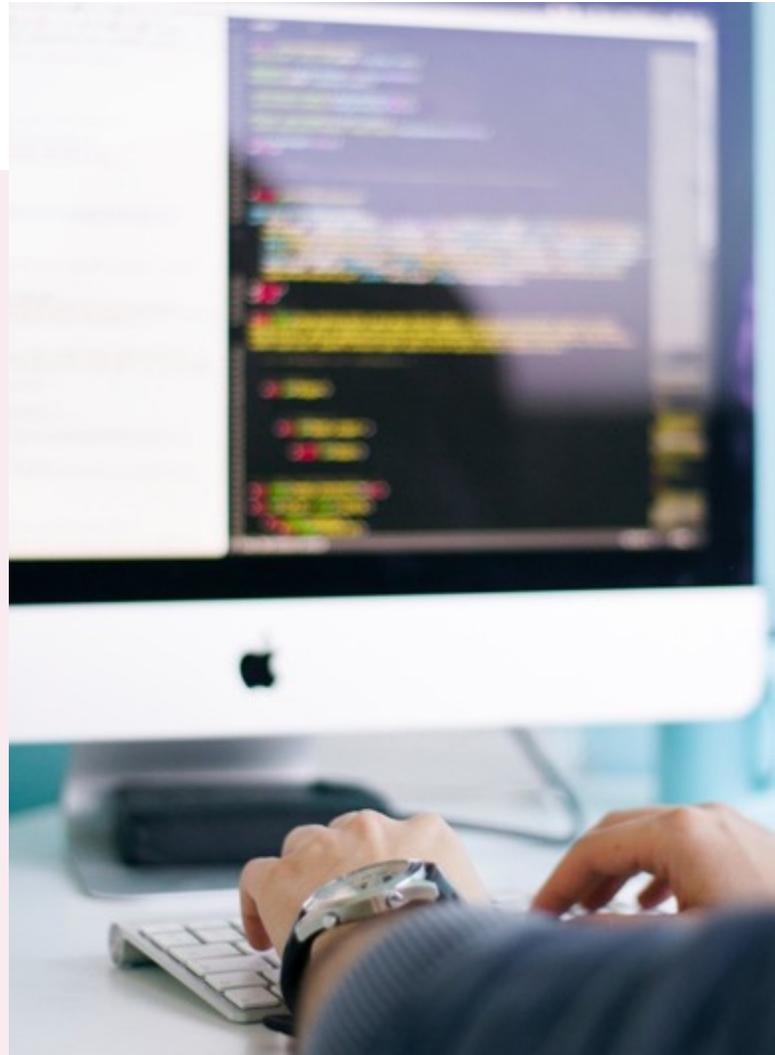
The Art of Giving Constructive Feedback with Real-Life Examples

(Remote Work Special)



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Introduction

The COVID-19 crisis has us all struggling to find a proper work-life balance as we work remotely (some of us for the first time) for an indefinite period.

As managers, the morale of your remote workforce takes priority in the current climate of stress and uncertainty.

When people who have so far been accustomed to face-to-face interactions are expected to communicate solely over voice and audio calls, unresolved issues can quickly escalate.

Non-verbal cues that signal a person's intentions and opinions can be easily missed in a virtual environment.

You can minimize negative feelings and confusion by incorporating a regular exchange of feedback into your one on one meetings and conversations.

Read on to find some real-life examples of constructive criticism to help you initiate what is bound to be an uncomfortable conversation with your direct report.



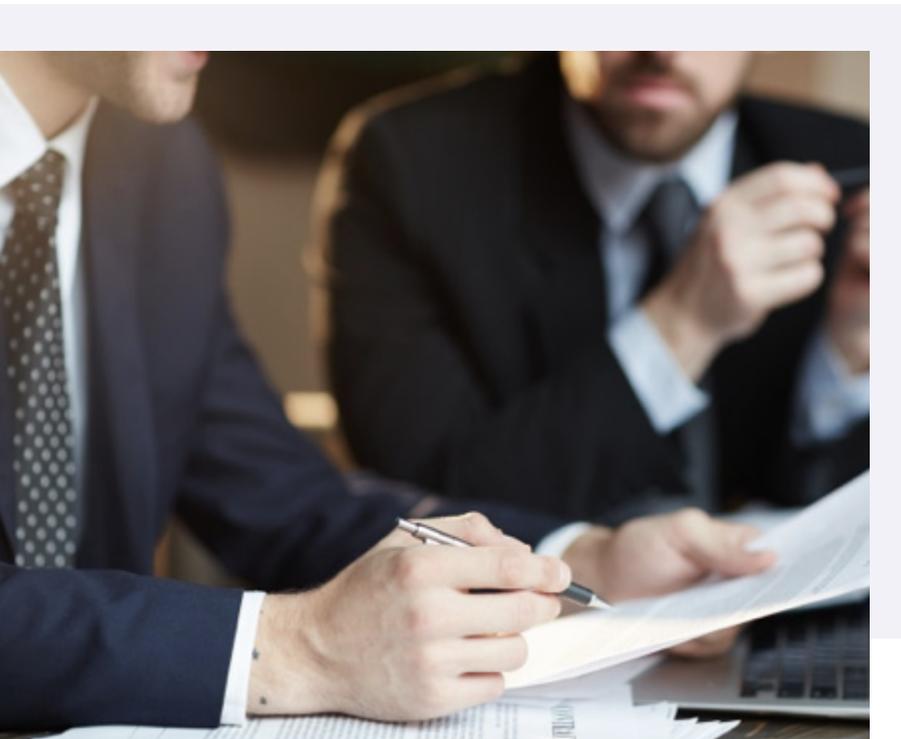
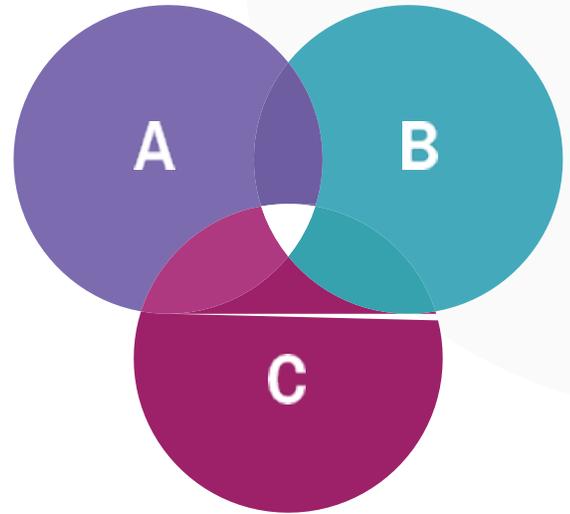
What is constructive criticism?

Constructive criticism is distinct from negative criticism.

It is feedback offered with the intention of improvement, thus includes specific suggestions for positive change.

Constructive criticism is most effective when it is timely, actionable, specific, and clear.

Providing constructive criticism in a remote work setup is imperative.



Chapter 03

Why is constructive criticism necessary?

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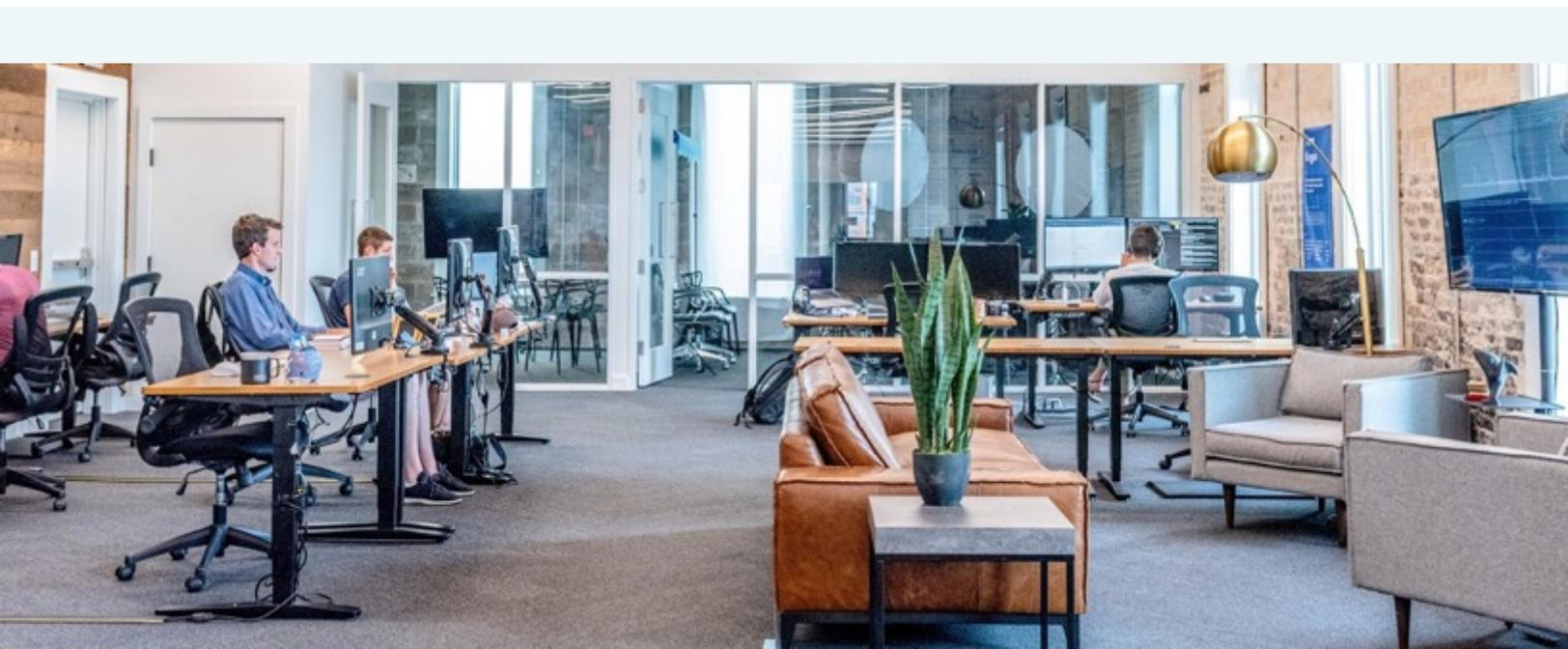
Constructive criticism is most effective when it is timely, actionable, specific, and clear.

And, when you are working remotely, it gains even more importance as your team

now does not have access to non-verbal clues they had when you were sharing the same office space.

When feedback is delivered with empathy and patience, your direct reports will respond positively.

In fact, research shows that employees do understand the importance of constructive criticism – and even prefer it to praise and congratulatory comments.



Obnoxious Aggression vs. Ruinous Empathy

Kim Scott, author of **Radical Candor**, says something similar.

“Employees prefer obnoxious aggression to ruinous empathy.”

Her simple, yet powerful tool to build effective employee relationships is called ‘radical candor,’ which has two dimensions:

- Caring personally
- Challenging directly

She developed the following quadrant based on her experiences at the workplace.

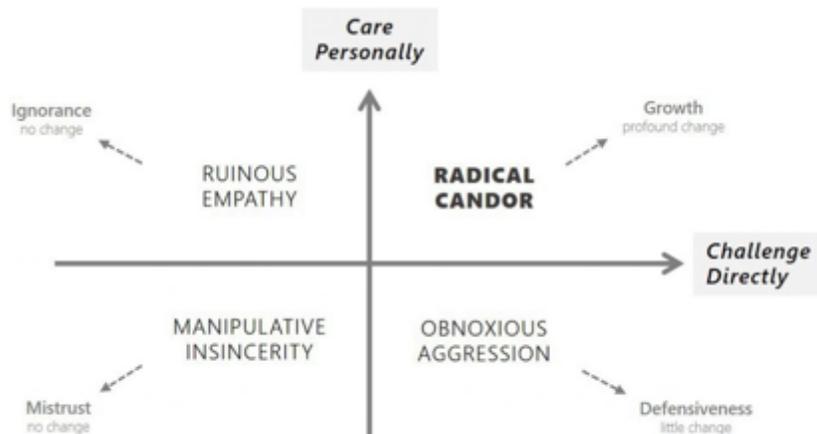
Obnoxious aggression and ruinous empathy are both unhelpful for your direct reports.

When you criticize somebody with little or no indication that you care, you’re being obnoxiously aggressive.

Ruinous empathy is the opposite—you care for the person, but you’re scared to provide direct criticism.

If you continue to speak and behave as if nothing is wrong just because you want to spare your direct report’s feelings, nothing is going to change.

In short, it’s not about what we’re saying, it’s about how we’re saying it.



Concept: Kim Scott, 2017, www.radicalcandor.com
Image: Takeshi Yoshida, 2018

What is F.A.S.T & why should you follow it?

You can deliver constructive criticism in a variety of ways, each suitable for a given situation or direct report, but all these methods should follow the principle of F.A.S.T.

F = Frequency
A = Accuracy
S = Specificity
T = Timeliness

Frequency:

Not all your direct reports will be alike, so you cannot apply the same management style to everyone. Find out how often each person needs feedback and connect individually as required.

Accuracy:

Trust is the glue that holds teams together, especially those working remotely.

Before you offer constructive criticism, take care to ensure that your facts are correct.

Specificity:

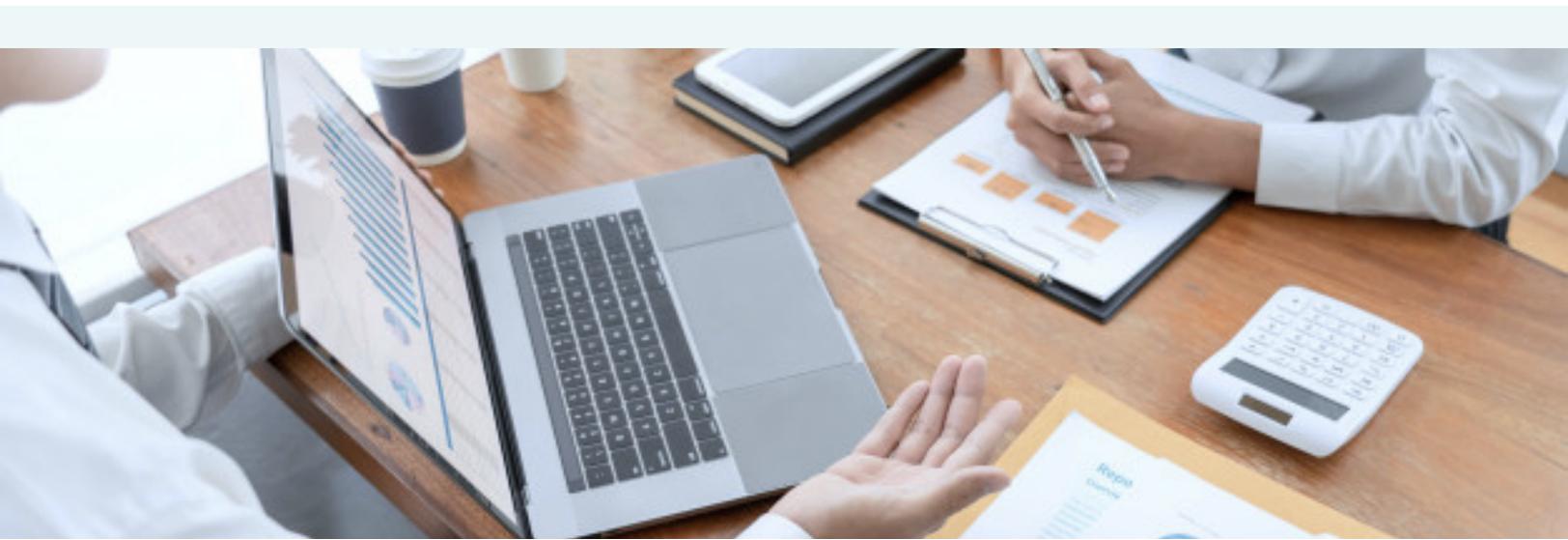
You'll want your advice to be taken seriously and have an impact. Skip the generalizations and quote specific examples.

Follow up with an offer of support to show that you're invested in the progress of your direct report.

Timeliness:

Perhaps the most important factor of all, sharing constructive criticism as promptly as possible will help you minimize friction and negative feelings.

You don't want to delay feedback, however harsh, because your direct report will continue with the undesirable behavior and you'll be frustrated with his poor outcomes.



7 tried-and-tested methods to provide constructive criticism

We have explored some of the most popular methods managers use, along with examples of constructive criticism, that you can use especially when you are working remotely.

Not all of these can be used regularly, and some are more effective than others in certain situations.

You must take your time choosing the method that best works for you and your direct report.

You can pick a method that suits you best or combine a few methods to arrive at your own unique strategy.

Constructive criticism is a normal and essential part of work.

Make your direct reports look forward to it, if not love it.



Method #1

The 3×3 Method

Proposed by Bert Decker in his book 'You've Got To Be Believed To Be Heard.'

When to use:

When you need a method to offer (and solicit) continuous feedback from your direct reports, the 3×3 method is most effective.

According to Decker,

"Receiving three bits of feedback at a time allows people to make course corrections, like a guided missile, as they keep moving onward and upward."

It involves sharing three strengths and three areas of potential development. Remember, authenticity is key.

You'll want to keep the feedback succinct and limit the number of items you talk about during one meeting to avoid overwhelming your direct report.

By offering constructive criticism in this way, employees view the feedback as a challenge to improve instead of a strategy to quash their ego.

Real-life example:

Suppose you're a manager and your direct report has just concluded giving a presentation.

You need to help her work on her weaknesses while ensuring she doesn't think she's a failure.

You won't be helping her by saying this: "The content was fine but you need to put more emotion into your speech. Didn't you see the audience was getting bored?"

And why did you generalize so much in your responses during the Q&A session? It didn't help your listeners at all."

Instead, you could use the 3X3 method and talk to her like this:

"The presentation was very well put together. However, it could have been more impactful with a more emotional delivery.

The introduction and closing were especially strong, but a conversational tone would have engaged the audience better.

It was interesting to see how you quoted from a wide variety of sources, but more specific examples in the Q&A session would have been good."



Method #2

5 Word Review Method

Created by Paul English, CEO of Kayak.com

When to use:

When you want to offer high-level feedback to your direct reports as you observe trends in their performance and behavior, the 5 Word Review method can get your message across in a non-threatening, relaxed, and friendly manner.

It is a great way to build and strengthen your working relationship with your direct report.

Here's how it works:

1. Note down 5 words to describe your direct report. (2-3 positive, 2-3 negative)
2. Meet in an informal setting, such as a cafe or over lunch (a one on one meeting would be great!) and look over these words with your direct report. (~1 hour)
3. Discuss each word in detail to understand it fully and generate several perspectives.

Real-life example:

Let's say one of your direct reports works well as an individual contributor, but less so as a team player.

However, the project he is involved in requires him to collaborate with others.

You could give him the following words:

1. Quick
2. Technical
3. Controlling
4. Conservative
5. Organized

During the discussion, you can praise his timeliness and his ability to grasp the nuances of a project quickly.

You can appreciate the strength of his technical knowledge.

Next, you can discuss how he's possessive of his work and unwilling to take risks or think out of the box—which is harming the outcomes of the project he's working on. Talk about how he can try to be more trusting of his teammates and rely on them to contribute useful ideas.

Lastly, you can say that his organizational skills are helping his team members work smoothly on the project.



Method #3

The SBI Method

Developed by The Center for Creative Leadership

When to use:

This method of giving constructive criticism is most useful when a situation has come up suddenly and you're required to offer feedback immediately.

It helps you manage difficult, unexpected situations, and communicate negative messages in a delicate manner.

The steps are:

1. Explain the situation.
2. Highlight the specific behavior you're addressing.
3. Describe how this behavior affects you, the team, or the business.

Remember to use "I" statements and keep judgments out of your feedback to prevent undermining your message.

Real-life example:

Imagine you have a direct report, Susan, who is consistently coming late to work. You don't want to attack her like this:

"Susan, you're coming in late every day. If this continues, we'll have to dock your pay."

Instead, use the SBI model to say something like this:

"Susan, I want to talk to you about logging in late every day.

When you're late for your shift, we must hold someone over from the previous shift.

This requires us to pay that person over time, it causes your co-worker inconvenience, and it may also affect the quality of work if she doesn't fully understand your job. Do you understand?"

S **Situation**
Describe the situation. Be specific about when and where it occurred.

B **Behavior**
Describe the observable behavior. Don't assume you know what the other person was thinking.

I **Impact**
Describe what you thought or felt in reaction to the behavior.



Method #4

Pendleton's Feedback Model

Developed by Pendleton in 1984

When to use:

When you're looking to involve your direct report in the feedback and give him a chance at self-reflection, Pendleton's feedback model is the best.

This method helps you set a positive tone for the feedback session right from the start. The guided self-reflection helps your direct report meet his professional goals successfully.

You can follow these steps:

1. Encourage your direct report to describe what he thinks is going well.
2. Talk about positive interactions and discuss the factors that lead to good results.
3. Describe the areas of improvement and explain what your direct report could have done differently.

Real-life Example:

An example of constructive criticism using Pendleton's feedback model is:

Manager: So David, how do you think

things are shaping up with your current project?

Direct report: It has been good so far; just that initially the guidelines were not clear so there was a bit of confusion about which approach we should take.

Manager: Right, now that that has been taken care of, I can see things are going really well. Our client was really happy with the quality of our first submission.

Direct report: I'm glad, and I hope to continue delivering satisfactory quality. My editor has been super helpful with suggesting ways I can make my document better.

Manager: That brings me to a topic I wanted to discuss. Perhaps it would be good if you could block off some time on both your calendars to discuss changes to your document instead of dropping in by her desk every half an hour with queries. Not everybody likes to be interrupted frequently because it prevents them from concentrating on their work.

Direct report: I didn't realize that. I'll do so going forward.



Method #5

Stop, Start, Continue Method

Developed by Phil Daniels

When to use:

When you need to coach new team members and familiarize them with the organizational culture, the Stop, Start, Continue method is quite helpful.

This is how you can go about it:

1. Discuss things that do not work and the direct report should STOP doing
2. Shift focus to new things the DR should try out instead, stating what she should START doing
3. End the session by pointing out things the DR is doing right and should CONTINUE doing

The stop, start, continue method is a neat and organized approach to offering constructive criticism.

Real-life Example:

Let's say you have a new direct report who is great at his work but tends to get angry and confrontational during discussions.

You could say something like this: "When you raise your voice during our meetings whenever somebody contradicts you, you make your team members uncomfortable. This is something you need to be aware of and not do in the future.

What you could do instead is practice flexibility with your ideas. You could discover new approaches by listening to the opinions of others.

In fact, you excel at creating eye-catching presentations with innovative ideas, and I would love to continue seeing that from you."



Method #6

The STAR Method

Developed by Development Dimensions International Inc.

When to use:

When you want to give feedback on certain specific actions of your direct report, the STAR - Situation, Task, Action, Result-feedback model is effective.

This model breaks feedback into 4 categories:

1. **Situation & Task:** You explain the specific situation or task your direct report was involved in.
2. **Action:** You describe the action taken by the direct report, including details of what was said and done. The action can be negative or positive.
3. **Result:** You outline the result of the action taken so that your direct report understands what he did right or wrong.

If your direct report took a negative action, you should talk about an alternative action and its consequences to show what could have been done and how it would have been more effective.

Real-life Example:

Let's say Sarah, one of your direct reports, has a habit of procrastinating and tends to complete her work too close to the deadline. You want to talk about time management with her.

You could go about it like this:

"Sarah, we almost missed our project submission deadline.

I saw you coming in early and staying back late to finish the work just before the end date.

While it's good that you're dedicated enough to ensure that you don't miss the deadline, your delay caused your team members to work overtime, too.

This causes them a lot of inconveniences. Do you understand?"



The DESC Model

Developed by Sharon and Gordon Bower, authors of *Asserting Yourself*

When to use:

Use the DESC feedback model when you're stressed about giving constructive criticism to your direct report and you need a structured method to make your method clear.

The steps involved are:

1. **Describe:** your direct report's behavior clearly using "I" statements.
2. **Express:** the impact the behavior had on you, the team, or the company.
3. **Specify:** what you'd like your direct report to do the next time around.

You can use a directive tone (Next time, when something like this happens, I would like to see....) or a participative tone (How do you think we can avoid something like this in the future?)

Ask your direct report if he agrees to what you've said.

4. **Consequences:** You can make the consequences of the desired behavioral change clear.

Of course, it helps to prepare what you're going to say beforehand so that no important details are missed.

Real-life Example:

Let's take the example again of a direct report turning up late consistently.

A good way to discuss the issue would be: "Terence, I want to talk to you about your late coming, especially the fact that you have come an hour late three times this week.

When you regularly come in late, it makes the whole team look unprofessional. Also, it sets a bad example for our new team members.

I'd like to see you make an effort to come into work on time every day unless there's a pressing issue.

You'll also be able to attend the daily stand-ups if you step in at 9 every day. I hope you understand."



Use 1-on-1 meetings for constructive criticism

One on one meetings are a powerful way to offer constructive criticism because it is a face to face conversation instead of a written message.

It is also a recurring event in your calendar, a private and psychologically safe space where you and your direct report can talk about things you normally wouldn't say in a group meeting.

You don't need to schedule a special meeting to give feedback; since feedback can be a part of the one on one meeting agenda.

The regularity of one on one meetings ensures that you are offering constructive criticism in a timely manner, although not in the heat of the moment (which could be damaging).

And a one on one meeting can work wonders for you, especially in a remote work setup.

You can use a one on one meeting software to provide structure to your sessions and make sure actions are taken on the points discussed.



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feedback and track actions – all in one place.

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