

# PROFESSIONAL OPINION

IF YOUR CAREER IS IMPORTANT TO YOU, THEN RECEIVING CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK ALONG THE WAY IS ONE OF THE BEST THINGS YOU CAN DO FOR YOURSELF

BY ERIN COE



**YOU'RE AMBITIOUS,** smart, and know what you want in your career. But if you can't handle asking your boss for feedback, you're placing yourself at a serious disadvantage. Not convinced? Look at it this way: You might think you come across as smart and ambitious, but without getting feedback, you will never know how others actually perceive you. And this could have dire consequences for your career. According to career coach and business mentor Julia Fourie: 'By discussing how you are doing, what is working and what isn't, you remove assumptions and clarify expectations.' The result? You become better at your job. Now that we've convinced you about the benefits of feedback, let's look at some tips and tricks on how to ask for and implement it.

### Ask at the right time

Just because you're ready to receive feedback doesn't mean the person you're asking is ready to give it.

That's why posing the question at the right time is vital. After all, you want to get the most out of this conversation, so it's important they're committed to the task. So don't ask them at the end-of-year staff party, or while they're taking their lunch break – rather send them a meeting request and explain that you would like feedback on your performance. Career coach Penny Holburn also suggests that you be wary of scheduling time when the person is busy and stressed or battling to meet a deadline. 'You really want them to be in the right headspace to focus on you, rather than worrying about something else in the back of their mind.'

### Know what you want to be answered

To get the most out of your feedback session, it's crucial you know what you want to discuss and if there are any specific questions you want addressed.

Having an agenda is a great way to keep the conversation on track. But it's not completely necessary, says Julia. 'Structure is something that should be held lightly. It's good to have some clarity on what you want to chat about, but be open to exploring what comes up in the conversation.'

### Ask the right questions

That means steering clear from questions such as 'So, how am I doing?'. You want to make it as easy as possible to get feedback, so asking open-ended questions like that may result in an equally vague response. Penny suggests a more targeted approach. 'You could ask, "Is there anything I am not doing in my job that you want me to be doing?" or, "Is there something I am doing that I should not be doing?" This makes it easy for someone to make suggestions without being critical or negative. They can simply explain to you what they want from you.'

### Don't get defensive

If you do, you'll miss out on the opportunity to really learn from what they're saying. 'Often we listen to respond,' says Julia, 'but we must listen to understand.' Her suggestion? 'Before the meeting, remind yourself to be curious and try to stay in that headspace throughout the discussion. This means that you shouldn't immediately respond defensively to what is being said, but rather maintain curiosity around how the other person sees you and what they want from you at the office.' A good idea is to suggest that you have two sessions: One where you simply listen and try to understand their point of view, and a second where you come back with a plan of action, or even some clarification on why you do certain things. Another good idea is knowing your trigger points and what upsets you. 'Think about these points before the

## NEGATIVE NANCY

It would be great if all feedback was positive, but that's just not realistic. Here are three scenarios where things may not be as straightforward.

### When you disagree with them

If you don't want to commit to implementing solutions that you don't agree with, say: 'I hadn't thought of that, and I'm going to look into it right away.'

### When they seem to be nitpicking

You might think they're nitpicking, but this is actually an opportunity for you to expand your skills. Say: 'You're so good at those little details, and I need to be better at that. Thanks for the reminder.'

### When the feedback is really harsh

You may want to ignore it, but when feedback is more on the savage side, there are usually bigger overall issues that need to be addressed, and you'll want to get to the root of the issue. Say: 'Do you have any suggestions for some overall changes I can make?'

meeting,' Julia advises. 'This way, if something upsets you, it will be easy to recognise it for what it is, put the negative aside and focus on what the other person is saying.'

### Implement the feedback

'This might seem obvious, but once you've asked for feedback and gotten suggestions on what you should or shouldn't be doing, then follow the suggestions,' says Penny. 'Otherwise you will look worse than if you didn't ask for feedback at all. If a manager tells you what you need to be doing and you don't do it without a good reason, it is really going to reflect badly on you.' **EL**