

Feedback Is a Two-Way Conversation

(For Supervisors)

Rather than relying on a feedback hierarchy, supervisors should consider a partnership model that distributes power and increases two-way conversation with their employees — leading to a more authentic and revealing feedback experience that fosters trust, flows with the rhythm of work, and sets the conditions for positive, lasting change. Here are a few recommendations for developing that partnership in your mid-year conversations:

Ask “hero questions”

Unlock the potential of your employees by asking “hero questions” that focus on their strengths and stories of success. These questions cut to the heart of employee experience — how individuals perceive their competencies and contributions.

Some of my favorite hero questions include:

- Tell me about a time this month you felt energized.
- What have you learned about yourself from working on this project?
- What strengths have you found most useful on this project?
- Who have you recently helped, and what difference did it make in their work and yours?

Asking employees to look back at these peak moments helps supervisors better understand what it took to get there — and, more importantly, what it will take to get there again.

Diagnose challenges

When employees hint to a challenge, pay attention to their cues. Is this person holding back? What does that individual’s body language and tone of voice convey? This process of scanning and listening can alert supervisors to the unseen emotional toll of work and how it is affecting performance. Try to uncover the employee’s perception of the challenge and how to address it with these prompts:

- What outcome are you trying to achieve?
- What is happening? Why do you think it’s happening?
- What have you tried so far? How have you handled similar challenges in the past?

- Have you tried to resolve this challenge? What happened as a result?

Also, ask your employee if they are experiencing undue stress or strain in or outside of work? Please remind your employees of the EAP benefit offered to all UNT System employees at no cost. <https://hr.untsystem.edu/employee-assistance-program>.

Helping others recognize work challenges can provide the first measure of relief. When issues are brought into the open, both sides gain clarity and can begin working towards a shared solution.

Shape the path

If performance is a journey, then it's the supervisor's job to help shape a path towards commitment. Once employees suggest a way forward, supervisors should guide their next steps. This steers the conversation towards actionable progress, making feedback more concrete. Try closing the feedback exchange with questions like:

- How do you think you'll act on this?
- What is holding you back from achieving your goals?
- What would happen if you tried this?
- How can I help you recreate the conditions of your success?

The best feedback helps others understand their strengths and provides the encouragement and guidance to build on those strengths. Making these small adjustments in your mindset can produce a world of difference in your message — and just might help others see themselves in an entirely new way.