

Now What? Have *THAT* Conversation

Not to belabor the obvious but... these are weird times. Everything is a little bit crazy, and so much is just not the way we want it to be. We're all trying to get used to a new normal that we haven't really figured out yet.

Acknowledging this, it would be easy to say to yourself, now is not the right time to have that difficult performance conversation you know you need to have. Our natural tendencies are not to burden someone who may already be overburdened (with work, with family obligation, with the general state of weirdness we're all working through). That important performance conversation can wait. Let it slide for now, you don't want to impact morale.

These feelings may be natural, and the intention behind them may be (somewhat) admirable, but they are also the exact urges that we must avoid.

The reality is, most of us struggle with potentially tough performance conversations during regular business cycles. Oddly, though, while most people don't like giving constructive feedback, most people DO want to receive it. In fact, one study published by [Harvard Business Review](#) found that more people *prefer* corrective feedback (57%) to praise or recognition (43%). This is primarily because most people believe that negative feedback does more to improve their performance than does positive feedback. *

So, how do we, in a virtual and emotionally charged world, ensure we give the feedback needed without sugar-coating the message, or watering down the message? It requires a little work, but it is definitely possible. Here are some tips to consider:

1. **Acknowledge reality**—Start the conversation by acknowledging that yes, times are a little strange now and we're all working through that. However, we still have jobs to do and a certain level of performance is expected of all of us.
2. **Schedule ample time for the conversation**—If you find yourself stressed for time, or distracted, your feedback will lose the necessary compassion that is so important. Make sure you're not trying to quickly squeeze this conversation between two other meetings.
3. **Use video**—Ensure the person you're speaking with can see your body language and make sure you can see his/hers. Communication has three critical elements—verbal (words you say), vocal (tone in your voice), and visual (body language). Of the three, body language is what most humans focus on when conveying or receiving a message. Use all three to ensure you have the most clarity possible in your conversation.
4. **Focus on the Future**—Create space in the conversation to discuss what can be learned, and how to grow from the feedback. Don't dwell on the past.
5. **Finalize forward**—Clarify what the specific expectations are going forward and agree on a period of time in which to regroup, reassess and ensure things are moving in the right direction.

Finally, don't forget to recognize those traits that are especially helpful during times of uncertainty from remote workers. Don't forget to provide positive feedback on these traits—just do it in a different meeting: **

- **Accountability**—Working without structure at home requires discretion. Encourage those who are doing it right.
- **Grit**—Those who go beyond the traditional and typical and get it done without being asked.
- **Flexibility**—Living in the ambiguity and adapting to the minute-by-minute changes.

It's true there may never be an "easy" time to have these conversations, but they still matter—maybe even more now than ever. Be sure to give your people the data they need to perform at your level of expectation.

On a final note, we wanted to let you know that next week's Now What article will be the last in this series. We hope the information we've curated for you has been helpful. Have a great week and please remember that if you need ideas, communications, tools or other support, Jenn and Ron are here to collaborate with you. Thank you!

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* <https://www.fastcompany.com/90497622/delivering-constructive-criticism-remotely-without-sinking-employee-morale>

** <https://www.thelasalnetwork.com/lasalle-network-blog/evaluate-employee-performance-virtually-amid-covid-19/>