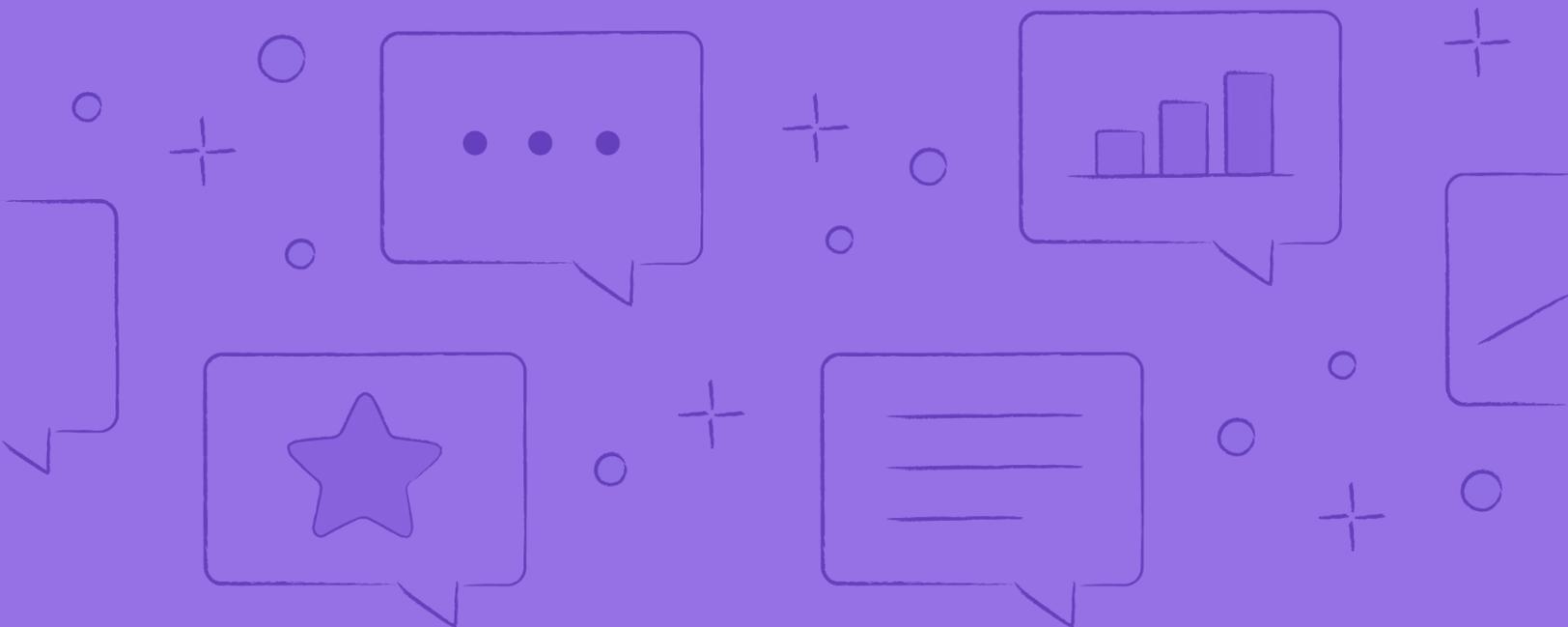




How to Build a Culture of Continuous Feedback & Development



Intro



Feedback is an essential part of a high-performance culture and can have a significant impact on employee engagement and retention. Companies that promote regular employee feedback have **14.9% lower turnover** rates and **78% of employees said receiving recognition** motivated them in their job. Employees crave feedback in order to learn and develop, but at the same time it's an area where many companies and individuals struggle.

Throughout this series, we've been looking at where most companies currently are when it comes to feedback as well as where they're striving to be. If you've been following along, you may remember that in the first eBook, "**Why Feedback Drives a High-Performance Culture**," we looked at the disconnect between the modern way of working and the traditional approach to feedback (in other words, why feedback is currently so unsatisfactory). In the second eBook, "**How to Deliver High-Quality Feedback That Drives Performance**," we provided a step-by-step guide to giving effective feedback. In this eBook, the final installment in the series, we'll be looking at how you can take those best practices and build a culture of continuous feedback and development.

By creating an ongoing dialogue, companies can encourage coaching and development year-round. This approach to feedback benefits everyone: Employees can grow and perform to the best of their abilities, they feel motivated and engaged on the job, and the company benefits from increased retention and enthusiasm.

But, for many, approaching the concept of continuous feedback can bring up some tough questions. How will employees adjust to this new process? Will people be too squeamish to give honest, direct, and meaningful feedback? Who should give feedback to each other? How will we make sure people keep giving it?

These questions are all too common, and there are various ways to make sure you create a culture that's open, receptive, and ultimately, far more successful thanks to developing a culture of feedback.

Let's dive in!



STEP I

Start with a culture of safety

In recent years, psychological safety has become an increasingly popular buzzword with the HR space, and with good reason—according to **Google**, psychological safety ranked number one among a list of five important traits of successful teams. This is especially important when discussing someone’s weaknesses or areas for improvement. University of North Carolina professor **Barbara Fredrickson** states, “We become more open-minded, resilient, motivated, and persistent when we feel safe.” If you’re truly committed to promoting continuous feedback, you need to create a space where employees don’t feel threatened by giving and receiving feedback. This means promoting openness, honesty, and transparency while showing that you don’t expect anyone to be perfect. Employees need to feel comfortable sharing their weaknesses and know that they won’t be penalized for making mistakes.

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We become more open-minded, resilient, motivated, and persistent when we feel safe.

Barbara Fredrickson



STEP II

Collect feedback from the right people

Traditionally, managers would be the main (or only) person to give feedback to their direct reports. But many teams are moving away from a hierarchical structure and towards what Josh Bersin calls the “**network of teams.**” Throughout the course of a year, you may work with others on your team, people from different teams, and managers from other departments.

Some companies have attempted to overcome this by adopting a 360° approach, which means any given employee must collect feedback from their manager, their peers, and their direct reports. Others emphasize peer feedback and ask employees to collect testimonials from people they consider to be their peers. However, these approaches are still susceptible to **confirmation bias**: Employees will seek out reviews from fellow employees who they believe are likely to give them positive feedback, both as a way to protect their ego and to ensure they get a bonus or raise in the cases when financial rewards are tied to performance.

The best approach is to use a system that can automatically generate feedback requests based on the people an employee works with most closely. By using data from email, calendars, IM, etc., this type of system can ensure that employees get feedback that’s relevant—and well-rounded.



CASE STUDY:

Midtown International School

Midtown International School (MIS) serves gifted and academically superior students who thrive in small class environments. MIS was facing some challenges with its approach to feedback. Many teachers found that there was a lack of structure or consistency around the feedback process, which made it hard to focus on development and improvement.

In the absence of a truly formal performance management process, MIS relied on sticky notes to document goals that would find themselves lost in folders, only to be revisited near year’s end for evaluation. This was coupled with undocumented, verbal feedback between supervisors and reports that rarely led to actionable development. Not only did this process make it cumbersome to look back on performance, but it also made it challenging to identify areas for growth and propel employees to find new paths to grow professionally.

One of the most notable outcomes of switching performance management solutions was not only creating a rich culture of feedback, but democratizing the feedback itself. MIS employees can now receive feedback more often, and from a wide range of team members. Breaking down traditional hierarchy paved the way for more inclusive, helpful feedback to drive employee development.



Using feedback templates has really challenged the team to think about how to constructively effect change, and to not just list positives. By touching on one thing someone could have done better in a template, it really allows peers to receive feedback that pushes them to develop.

Kascha Adeleye, Elementary Coordinator



STEP III

Create interest

If you're serious about creating a culture of continuous feedback, it's important to think about how you'll encourage and prompt employees to give feedback throughout the year. The benefits of receiving feedback are pretty clear—it will help you grow and get better at your job while developing professionally. Research confirms this: **73% of employees** said receiving recognition made them feel more satisfied with their work and position in their company.

Having a small percentage of employees who give and receive feedback is a good start, but it's not enough to build a true culture of feedback. In order to make this happen, you'll need to help your employees develop the new habit of giving regular feedback whenever it's appropriate (check out the sidebar for more on this topic). Once a number of people adopt the habit, it'll become the norm in your organization. So it's important to think about how you'll encourage wider interest and participation.

While some people may naturally enjoy giving feedback to others, it's not something that everyone enjoys. You may need to look for ways to incentivize employees to provide feedback to their peers.

One approach is to require employees to give feedback to someone before they're able to access the feedback that someone has left for them. By appealing to people's curiosity in this way, you can boost their chances of giving feedback and encourage more active participation. Another way to incentivize giving feedback is to create a "leaderboard" of employees who give the most frequent feedback. Ultimately, employees will probably find feedback to be enough of a reward to want to continue participating, but there's nothing wrong with providing a little extra incentive to help build that habit initially!



WHEN SHOULD YOU GIVE FEEDBACK?

When is the right time to give feedback? Here are a few suggestions of common times when it makes sense to offer feedback.

- After observing quality work, when projects wrap up, or other positive behavior deserves to be recognized
 - When the skill in question is something the person uses frequently and therefore is likely to practice and improve
 - If the person is already expecting feedback, such as during an in-person check-in
 - When there's a persistent problem that negatively impacts a colleague, the team, or the organization as a whole
 - When there is a skill you believe would be helpful for this person to develop based on their goals or role, and you can give them actionable steps to improve
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STEP IV

Make it quick & easy

One of the hurdles that prevents employees from providing feedback to their coworkers is that the process can feel cumbersome and difficult—**37% of managers say that they're uncomfortable giving direct feedback** about an employee's performance. If you're not used to this process, it can be hard to know what to give feedback on or how to word your feedback. That's why templates can be so useful. You provide the structure and the person who's giving feedback simply customizes it for their recipient. Not only does this simplify and streamline the process for the person giving the feedback, but it also makes it crystal clear for the recipient—they'll always know exactly which type of feedback to expect.

Another way to facilitate giving feedback is to make it as seamless as possible for employees to share feedback with each other. Look for ways to integrate feedback into employees' existing workflow such as sending them prompts via email or allowing them to jot down their feedback and send it from within email. The less feedback feels like an interruption and the more it feels like a normal part of an employee's work, the more habitual it will become and the more receptive they'll be to the whole process.



STEP V

Keep the development private

If the goal of feedback is to truly help employees grow, it's best for development-related feedback to be kept private between the giver and receiver. This approach empowers employees to seek and give feedback without any restrictions—they understand that it's a safe space and that feedback is being given without any ulterior motives and with their best interests at heart. There's no fear that a manager will use the feedback against the employee or as justification for not giving them a promotion or raise. In this environment, employees can be honest about the areas where they'd like to improve and can feel comfortable acknowledging their weaknesses. With support from coworkers, they can use this opportunity to grow and improve.

This doesn't mean that managers shouldn't give feedback to their direct reports—they absolutely should—but employees should also be encouraged to gather feedback from the people they work most closely with. And employees should be given the option to keep developmental feedback from their peers to themselves.



STEP VI

Make feedback part of new hire onboarding

One of the easiest ways to build a culture of continuous feedback is to help encourage employees to start this habit when they're most impressionable: right when they join your company. If you teach employees from day 1 that feedback is expected and encouraged, they'll internalize that message and help make it part of the culture.

Some companies go so far as to incorporate feedback training into their new hire onboarding. By scheduling a dedicated feedback session with new hires, you demonstrate that feedback really does matter at your organization, and you can help them understand how to give the most effective and actionable feedback.



CASE STUDY:

Enjoy

Enjoy is reinventing the way people buy the world's best technology products. With every purchase, an Enjoy Expert hand delivers the product in as fast as four hours. Feedback has always been important at Enjoy, but the level of adoption and comfort depended on team leaders' personal preferences.

Initially beginning with anonymous feedback, Enjoy noticed this wasn't driving the full culture of feedback the company envisioned. So, Enjoy took two key steps: They decided to teach new hires about the importance of feedback during the onboarding process and they opted to make the switch from anonymized feedback to "named" feedback, so everyone would know who was giving them peer-to-peer feedback.

Teaching new hires that collaborative feedback was integral to their company culture helped create a steady stream of employees who began their career at Enjoy with a habit of regularly giving and collecting feedback.

And the switch to named feedback led many employees to feel more comfortable giving their peers feedback as well. Enjoy used Zugata for all peer-to-peer feedback, and found its simplicity and consistency to be game changers.



I can't tell you how much I value this tool.
I am so happy we have something like this.

Meredith Eisgrau, an Enjoy Field Leader

Conclusion

Many companies struggle to build a culture of feedback—only **1 out of 3 employees** received recognition or praise in the past week and only **1 out of 5** employees feel their performance is measured in a meaningful way. But there's a big payoff when they succeed: Companies that implement regular employee feedback have **14.9% lower turnover rates**, significantly higher employee engagement, and **69% of employees are more likely to work harder** with better recognition. Plus, it's been proven that a sense of progress is the most powerful motivator in the workplace. It all comes down to this: Create a culture where employees are encouraged and empowered to give and seek out feedback, and you'll boost motivation, engagement, and performance as a result. In this eBook, we've given you some tips on how to accomplish this.

Give it a try and let us know how it goes!

Zugata is Performance Management Software for high-performance cultures

It is the only solution that enables both performance evaluation and performance development, driving performance forward and impacting your company's bottom line. Our robust platform accelerates employee performance by using sophisticated algorithms to gather continuous feedback, enabling meaningful check-in conversations, and delivering personalized resources to help employees advance their skills.

Over 1,000 companies like Lyft, Gusto, and Greenhouse use Zugata to accelerate employee performance.

Join them and create a high-performance culture at your organization.

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