

# Give Better Feedback with CSAW

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Working on a team requires great communication—giving clear directions, aligning on expectations, and offering (and receiving) feedback that helps people grow. In this article, we share a simple framework for giving more and better feedback: **CSAW (Connect, Share, Ask, Wrap up)**. You can use CSAW with staff you manage, with your manager, and with peers or collaborators. You can use it for positive as well as developmental and corrective feedback.

- **Positive:** Reinforces and affirms what you want to see and grow in the future
- **Developmental:** Helps people take their skills from good to great, or from meeting to exceeding expectations. This feedback is for helping someone take their impact to the next level.
- **Corrective:** Helps someone get from off track to on track when it comes to results (e.g., meeting goals) or relationships (having a negative impact on others).



Illustration: Kiely Houston

Here's how CSAW works:

## Connect and get consent

Feedback is like playing catch—your goal is to throw the ball so your teammate can catch it. Rather than lobbing the ball at them without knowing if they're ready, you wait for them to face you, get the hair out of their eyes, and make eye contact.

“Making eye contact” in the realm of feedback involves connecting over a shared value, goal, or experience; being explicit that you have feedback to share, and getting consent to share that feedback. (Check out this video by LeeAnn Renninger about [why the “connect” is so critical](#).)

*Note:* This isn't to say that it's okay to straight up refuse feedback related to performance. A big part of the manager/staff relationship is being able to give one another feedback, an expectation that was ideally established upfront (and if not, set the expectation at your next check-in). It is to say that people should feel agency in how and when they get feedback, so they can be in a place of receptiveness.

Examples:

- **Positive:** “You have been working so hard on the campaign rollout. I have feedback about several things you’ve done that have really impressed me and that I want to see you keep doing. Can I share that with you?”
- **Developmental:** “Thank you for stepping up and facilitating yesterday’s meeting. I thought that demonstrated a lot of initiative and care for the team. I have feedback about two concrete ways I think you can be even sharper in your facilitation. I’m happy to share that verbally now, or send it to you in writing. What’s your preference?”
- **Corrective:** “I know we’re both coming from a deep investment in this project’s success—I’ve seen you name and demonstrate that. And I have some feedback for you about your follow through on the details. Is now a good time?”

## Share your observations, the impact, and any requests

Share what you observed with specificity. If this behavior is part of a pattern, share that. However, make sure to check your assumptions! State what you think happened, not judgments about the other person's motives, mindset, or character (i.e. “You don't seem to care about this,” “You're distracted”).

Then, share why it matters to you by being explicit about the impact on you and/or the work. You might also share any concrete requests.

Examples:

- **Positive:** “I loved how you incorporated images in the text. It really made the points come to life for me. How much extra time did that take? I’d love to support you to do more of that in the future. Is that something you’d be interested in?”
- **Developmental:** “In our client intake meeting, I noticed how welcoming you were and how well you established a rapport with them. How would you feel about eventually leading client intake meetings instead of playing a support role? With a little bit of support and practice, I could really see you owning client intake meetings moving forward.”
- **Corrective:** “I’ve noticed that for the last few months, you’ve been turning in your expense reports late. Can we discuss that? Being late on reports not only slows down our ability to bill for the work, but it also increases the burden on our administrative staff and reinforces a false hierarchy about whose work is more important. It’s important that you get to a place where you’re turning these in on time—so let’s talk about how to do that.”

Keep this piece brief. This isn’t a trial, and you’re not a prosecutor making your opening statement. The more space you leave to seek the other person’s perspective, the better your feedback will be received.

## Ask questions to better understand their perspective

It takes two to CSAW. The conversation isn’t done once you’ve said your piece. Get curious and make space for the other person to share their perspective. Ask questions to help you both gain a better understanding of what’s going on. The key here is to listen with an open mind, without assuming you already know the answers to the questions you’re asking.

Examples to...

### Check for alignment on your assessment:

- How do you think that went?
- What’s your take on what’s happening?

### Unearth causes:

- Why do you think this happened? Why do you think this keeps happening?
- Are there things I’m missing?

### Surface solutions:

- Do you have thoughts on how to move forward?
- Is there a better system or process we could try?

## Wrap up with next steps

Once you’ve both shared your perspectives, you should agree on a set of next steps. This is also the place to share or reiterate specific requests. If you’re aligned about the issue and steps to fix it, this might be super concrete. If not, next steps might be for both people to chew on the conversation and come back together to identify alternatives, a compromise, or a solution. Either way, schedule a time to revisit the conversation.

Examples:

- “Just to make sure we’re on the same page, can you do a quick repeat-back on how we’re moving forward?”
- “We have really different perspectives about this. Why don’t we both sit with this conversation and revisit it early next week? I’d like each of us to come with a proposal about how to move forward that takes into account the other person’s perspective. Does that work?”
- “Let’s revisit this at our check-in next month.”

Ready to try it for yourself? Use our [CSAW worksheet and see a sample](#) to prepare for your next feedback conversation. Or, if you’re looking for more support and practice, take our [Giving Feedback](#) training.

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Published: August 16, 2021