

A FRESH TAKE ON FEEDBACK:

THE SHIFT POSITIVE METHOD

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In today's rapidly evolving and increasingly complex workplace, the way we approach feedback can significantly impact success at individual, team, and organizational levels. The Shift Positive Method comes from Peter Berridge and Jen Ostrich's book "Feedback Reimagined," and offers a fresh perspective on this crucial skill that impacts so many aspects of our professional interactions.

This method envisions feedback as an energizing, collaborative process rather than a source of anxiety. It contrasts with traditional approaches across five key dimensions:

1. **Strength-Focused:** Emphasizes employee strengths over weaknesses.
2. **Collaborative:** Transforms feedback into an inclusive team effort.
3. **Continuous:** Encourages ongoing dialogue instead of annual reviews.
4. **Proactive:** Focuses on growth opportunities rather than problem-solving.
5. **Holistic:** Provides comprehensive support for sustained development.

The Shift Positive Method is presented as more than just a technique - it is a fundamental reimagining of workplace communication and development. By fostering a culture of positivity, collaboration, growth, and mutual allyship, this approach could transform how organizations approach feedback and incorporate it into the core fabric of daily business interactions.

If embraced and implemented thoroughly, this method promises to enhance employee satisfaction, boost performance, and cultivate a more positive organizational culture. In our rapidly changing professional landscape, where adaptability and continuous learning are paramount, the Shift Positive Method could be key to unlocking untapped potential and driving sustainable success.

Let's dive in and explore Berridge and Ostrich's theoretical framework. More importantly, we'll review practical insights and strategies for adopting this model.

1. Strengths Focused



Traditional Feedback: Traditional feedback centered on identifying areas that need improvement. While this approach highlighted skill gaps, it frequently left employees feeling demotivated and inadequate, leading to disengagement and reluctance to participate in developmental feedback.

Shift Positive Approach: The Shift Positive Method transforms this narrative by primarily focusing on strengths. It emphasizes individual talents, positive behaviors, and successes, encouraging employees to leverage these attributes to overcome challenges. This approach builds confidence and increases motivation by recognizing employees as capable contributors.

Strengths Application

For supervisors: Begin feedback sessions by highlighting recent achievements and how the employee's strengths contributed to success. Link these positive qualities to areas where growth is needed.

For employees: Reflect on how to leverage your strengths in areas needing improvement. Seek feedback on applying your skills in new or challenging situations.

2. Collaborative Approach



Traditional Feedback: The traditional model delivered feedback unilaterally from supervisor to subordinate. This top-down approach could be intimidating and disempowering, leading employees to feel judged rather than supported.

Shift Positive Approach: The Shift Positive Method introduces a more collaborative feedback approach, involving peers, team members, and other stakeholders. This peer-supported model creates an open and inclusive environment where feedback is seen as a collective effort to help individuals succeed.

Collaborative Feedback Application

For supervisors: Seek opportunities for feedback from peers and employees, and incorporate it into performance discussions. Engage work teams to provide constructive input, making feedback a shared, supportive experience.

For employees: Actively seek feedback from colleagues, not just managers. Model this behavior to encourage a culture of open communication.

3. Continuous Improvement

Traditional Feedback: Feedback was given infrequently, typically tied to annual performance reviews. This sporadic nature resulted in missed opportunities for improvement and lack of clarity on progress.

Shift Positive Approach: This method encourages continuous feedback with frequent dialogue and reinforcement of positive behaviors. It focuses on the active involvement of the receiver in processing and applying feedback.

Continuous Improvement Application

For supervisors: Implement regular one-on-one meetings focused on joint discussions about development and progress.

For employees: Take ownership of the process by requesting feedback regularly. Use brief check-ins to assess progress, ask questions, and reflect on your needs and goals.

4. Proactive Mindset

Traditional Feedback: Traditional feedback was reactive, given in response to specific incidents or problems. This limited growth by focusing only on fixing immediate issues rather than fostering long-term development.

Shift Positive Approach: This style is proactive, focusing on growth opportunities and potential rather than solely addressing mistakes. It helps employees continuously develop their capabilities by looking forward.

Proactive Application

For supervisors: Engage in regular feedback discussions, even when there's no pressing issue. Be a thought partner to identify new skills employees can develop or future challenges they can prepare for.

For employees: Actively seek feedback when planning future projects or aiming for new responsibilities. Ask about skills or behaviors that could help you excel in future opportunities.

5. Holistic Support



Traditional Feedback: In many traditional models, feedback ended once delivered. Employees were left to implement changes on their own, resulting in limited progress.

Shift Positive Approach: This method provides ongoing, holistic support. It integrates continuous feedback, follow-ups, and access to resources that help individuals make meaningful changes, ensuring that feedback leads to sustained growth.

Holistic Application

For supervisors: Follow up after feedback sessions to check on progress. Engage in dialogues about additional resources like training, mentoring, or coaching to help employees achieve their goals.

For employees: When you have supportive allies in your circle, have the courage to ask for feedback and assistance with applying improvement areas.

Case Scenario: Implementation

Let's dive into a real world situation to see how Sarah, a marketing team supervisor, recently learned about the Shift Positive Method and decided to implement it with her team.

She chose to start with Tom, a graphic designer who had been with the company for two years. While Tom was creative and produced high-quality work, he often struggled with meeting deadlines and collaborating effectively with other team members.





1. Strengths Focused

Before, Sarah would have started by addressing Tom's issues with tasks and approaching deadlines, potentially adding stress and putting him on the defensive. **Now**, Sarah began the conversation by highlighting Tom's recent achievements:

Sarah: "Tom, I wanted to start by acknowledging the incredible work you did on the Johnson account. Your designs really captured the essence of their brand, and the client was thrilled. Your creativity and attention to detail are truly impressive."



2. Collaborative Approach

Before, Sarah would have given her observations and instructions for improvement. **Now**, Sarah involved Tom in the feedback process:

Sarah: "I'd love to hear your thoughts on how things are going. What do you feel has been working well, and where do you believe efforts should be focused?" Tom shared his perspective, including some challenges he's faced with time management.



3. Continuous Improvement

Before, this typically would have been an annual or semi-annual review with very little follow-up. **Now**, Sarah established a framework for ongoing feedback:

Sarah: "I appreciate your insights, Tom. Moving forward, I'd like for us to have brief weekly check-ins. This will give us both a chance to discuss progress, address any challenges, and celebrate wins. How does that sound to you?"



4. Proactive Mindset

Before, Sarah would have focused solely on fixing the current issues with deadlines and collaboration. **Now**, Sarah looked ahead to future growth opportunities:

Sarah: "Given your exceptional design skills, I see the potential in you to take the lead in client presentations. This could also help with project timelines as you'd be more involved in the planning stages. What are your thoughts on developing these skills?"



5. Holistic Support

Before, Sarah would have given Tom a list of things to improve and left him to figure it out. **Now**, Sarah offered comprehensive support:

Sarah: "To help with time management, I'd like to recommend a workshop being offered next month. I'm also happy to set up mentoring sessions with Lisa from the senior design team. She has excellent project management skills that could be valuable to you. Do you think would be helpful? What other resources might help?"

Reflection

Changing your feedback style can be challenging, but with practice and persistence, you can successfully adopt the Shift Positive Method. Here are some practical tips and strategies to help you make the transition:

S H C Strengths Focused

- Acknowledge strengths and recent achievements
- Maintain a "strengths journal" for team members
- Balance mix of positive and constructive feedback
- Reframe weaknesses as growth opportunities

H C Collaborative Approach

- Invite team input before providing feedback
- Use "we" language to promote shared responsibility
- Implement 360-degree feedback for diverse insights
- Foster employee self-reflection on performance

I H C Continuous Improvement

- Schedule brief, regular check-ins in addition to annual reviews
- Track feedback to log contributions and areas for growth
- Encourage "micro-feedback" for real-time observations
- Promote proactive feedback-seeking among employees

H P Proactive Mindset

- Identify growth opportunities for team members monthly
- Include forward-looking questions in feedback sessions
- Create individual development plans aligned with projects
- Discuss industry trends affecting skill requirements

H H H Holistic Support

- Develop a resource library for employee learning
- Use resource partners for personalized learning paths
- Implement mentorship systems for ongoing support
- Schedule follow-ups to discuss progress on development goals

Application Questions

Here are a few questions intended to reflect on the material and consider ways you might approach applying the Shift Positive Method.

How can I / will I:

- Better recognize team strengths and achievements?
- Implement a "strengths journal" for my team?
- Reframe "weaknesses" as growth opportunities?
- Involve the team more before giving feedback?
- Use "we" language to boost shared responsibility?
- Encourage more employee self-reflection?
- Incorporate more frequent check-ins in addition to annual?
- Track feedback to log contributions and growth areas?
- Promote "micro-feedback" for real-time observations?
- Encourage proactive feedback-seeking?
- Identify monthly growth opportunities for team members?
- Reframe questions to be more forward-looking?
- Align development plans with current projects?
- Develop and implement my personalized learning paths?
- Ensure substantive, meaningful follow-ups on goals?

Final Thoughts

The Shift Positive Method offers a transformative approach to workplace feedback. It provides an opportunity to reimagine your approach to feedback by focusing on strengths, collaboration, continuous improvement, proactivity, and holistic support. As organizations navigate the complexities of modern work environments, adopting the Shift Positive Method could be the key to boosting performance, improving communication, and fostering a culture of growth. This innovative approach not only promises to enhance our fundamental approaches to how feedback is given and received but also has the potential to drive sustainable success in our rapidly evolving professional landscape.

REFERENCE: Berridge, P., & Ostrich, J. (2023). Feedback Reimagined: Transform your organization through positive psychology and social support. Shift Positive 360.

Scott Deyo has nearly 30 years of experience as an ombuds, mediator, and trainer. He has retained his Certified Organizational Ombuds Practitioner (CO-OP)[®] credential since March 2010. Working as an ombuds in a handful of organizations, Scott helped 4,500 people explore resolution options for 18,000 workplace issues in a handful of organizations in academia, non-profit, and federal sectors. He serves as Chair of the CO-OP[®] Board's Professional Practices Committee, which upholds the highest levels of professional standards of certified ombuds.