

The Feedback Contract

A 1:1 Template for Engineering Managers

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Most feedback problems don't start in the feedback conversation.
They start with the assumptions you made before it.

You assumed they'd prefer direct. They needed time to process first.
You assumed public recognition would land well. They went red.
You assumed they'd tell you if something wasn't working. They didn't.

This template captures the conversation I have with every new team member in our first few 1:1s. It takes less than 15 minutes. It prevents most of the feedback missteps that follow.

Use it as-is, adapt it to your voice, or use it as a prompt list.
The goal is a genuine conversation - not an interview.

Part 1 - How You Like to Receive Feedback

These questions help me understand how to give you feedback in a way that actually works for you.

How would you like to receive feedback and support generally?

Space for notes:

If I think there is a problem with a proposed solution or technical approach, would you prefer I raise it in the room with the team, or come to you one-to-one afterward?

Space for notes:

When you're stuck on a problem, how and when should I - or others - step in to help? Do you prefer space to work it out yourself first?

Space for notes:

**Is there any type of feedback that lands better in writing before a conversation?
For example: performance observations, code review patterns, delivery concerns?**

Space for notes:

Part 2 - How You Like to Be Recognised

Recognition is a form of feedback too - and how people want to receive it varies more than most managers expect.

How do you prefer to be acknowledged when your work has gone well?

Space for notes:

Are you comfortable being recognised in front of the team, or do you prefer that to happen one-to-one first?

Space for notes:

Any settings where you'd specifically prefer NOT to be singled out?

For example: team meetings, all-hands, group Slack channels?

Space for notes:

Part 3 - Confidentiality and What I Can Act On

Being clear about this early prevents misunderstandings later. I want you to know exactly what I will and won't do with what you share.

How confidential is the content of our 1:1 meetings generally?

Space for notes:

If you tell me about a concern with a team member or colleague, can I act on it - or do you need to stay anonymous?

Space for notes:

If feedback about your work comes to me from another source, can I share where it came from when I bring it to you?

Space for notes:

Is there anything you share with me in our 1:1s that you would prefer not to carry to my manager without checking with you first?

Space for notes:

Part 4 - How I Give Feedback

This works both ways. Here is how I approach feedback, so you know what to expect from me.

I give feedback as close to the moment as I can - I won't save it for your annual review or the next 1:1 if I can help it.

I will always bring feedback to you privately before anywhere else, including praise. If I want to recognise you publicly, I will ask first.

I use observational language rather than labels: "I noticed..." or "I observed..." rather than "you always..." or "you never..."

I will tell you the impact on me or the team, not just what I observed. And I will ask what you need from me, not assume I already know.

If I ever miss the mark on any of this - please tell me.

Anything you'd like to add or adjust about how I give you feedback?

Space for notes:

A Note on This Conversation

This template is a starting point, not a contract you both sign and file.

The value is in having the conversation - and returning to it when things shift.

People's preferences change. What someone needs in their first month is often different from what they need six months in.

Check back in on this every few months. Keep it informal.

The goal is a working relationship where feedback flows both ways without either of you dreading it.

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