

How I give feedback to creative teams

by Olya Lakt

Play to ambition ☐

After feedback, it helps to know what drives a person: recognition from peers, a mention on social media, an industry award? This works in any field — creative, scientific, business. Each has its own benchmarks.

Run retrospectives ☐

After a big launch — many people involved, or a first-of-its-kind project — I run a retrospective. The team sees which decisions worked and which didn't, and turns that into a checklist for next time.

Critique the result, not the person ☐

I'm always for honest, direct feedback — as long as it doesn't touch personal qualities. Instead of "you're slow" or "you don't think strategically": "the strategy here is solid, but the result is weak — it lacked grounding and analysis." Criticism becomes a reason to grow, not a personal attack.

The "unveiling" technique ☐

When an idea clearly needs a serious rework, I don't point out the mistakes myself. I get the team to assess the work on their own, with questions:

- What went wrong in the project?
- What do you see as its weak point?
- What risks do you see in this solution?
- What needs to change?

The "sandwich" doesn't always work ☐

Praise, criticism, praise often backfires. It invites exaggeration: praise gets too emotional, while weak spots get too little attention, because talking about failure is uncomfortable. If I'm going to discuss a project's weak points, I'd rather start with them directly.

Notice good work right away ☐

Praise immediately — in chat, by email, in person — instead of saving it for a meeting. Rather than generic praise for an expected result, I name specifics: "this strategy is excellent," "these metaphors really work," "this moodboard is interesting." The person sees they were truly noticed.

"Feedback isn't a verdict — it's an outside view that helps you grow"

The balancing technique ☐

For people strongly attached to their idea, paired questions balance the evaluation. Scale the number of points to the size of the project.

- Name three things that will definitely land.
- What will you repeat next time?
- Now three weak spots that could sink it.
- What will you never do again?

Find the individual angle ☐

Everyone on a team has different values: some want competition and winning, others meaning and impact. I don't use a scientific method — I simply talk to people and learn what interests them beyond work, too.

