

Kellogg Insight Reveals Proactive Steps to Improve Relationships Among Colleagues

Maintaining healthy relationships with coworkers can translate to better efficiency as a team. However, in some cases, this is easier said than done. In Kellogg Insight's [podcast](#), "Our Most Popular Advice on Improving Relationships," experts reveal vital strategies to avoid conflict and maintain a positive atmosphere among your peers.

Speakers focused on three situations that may lead to a more negative relationship with coworkers: giving negative feedback, responding to negative feedback and addressing differences in viewpoints.

Giving Negative Feedback

This situation can be particularly unnerving for the person who has to initiate it. Ellen Taaffe, clinical assistant professor of leadership and director of women's leadership programming at the Kellogg School, advises knowing the person's career goals beforehand so you can frame your feedback in a way that sounds encouraging for them to reach those goals, and those of your organization.

"The more you can explain objectively what was happening and why it matters for the individual's development, for their career, for the business, the better off you are and they are in being able to understand it and to act upon the feedback," Taaffe said.

Responding to Negative Feedback

One reason why giving negative feedback can be unnerving is the potential to receive a defensive, reactionary response in return. That's why it's imperative to not react in moments you're receiving such criticism by allowing yourself to think it through.

"It may well be that you have compelling counterarguments—and that you really feel like they're important to share with your supervisor—on why you have the perception that the feedback wasn't well placed," said Eli Finkel, psychologist and Kellogg professor. "But the time to give that rebuttal is not sitting there in the room when you're first receiving the feedback. Process it. Think carefully about it. Try to see the validity in the feedback because more often than not there will be some validity; and if you have something you want to say in response, take some time and word it in a polite, respectful way, but not right then."

Addressing Differences in Viewpoints

Although companies often try to hire employees who fit their identity, no two individuals are going to think, feel, and process information the same way. This can lead to misunderstandings between coworkers that can snowball into conflict. Finkel advises using a strategy to defuse the conflict by conveying that you've understood what the other person said, and they feel very much heard.

"You can say, 'I understand how you got there, and I respect that point of view. Here are some concerns that I have, and here's why I disagree with you about your conclusion,'" Finkel said. "That general approach is going to be wise on average across almost all the circumstances you're going to face."