

# **COIN: An Easy Way to Give Great Feedback to Anyone**

**By Anna Carroll, MSSW**

The COIN Feedback Method is as an easy-to-remember template you can use for any feedback conversation, whether you're giving positive feedback or suggesting improvement. COIN takes the sting out of feedback because it links your feedback to what the other person wants and to what is needed in your shared endeavor. There is no room for personal attack or irrelevant comments.

## **COIN Feedback Method**

The COIN model covers the four essential topics you need for great feedback.

*Connection* to the person's goals & interests

*Observations* that are specific

*Impact* on the business

*Next steps:* Suggest, discuss, and agree upon

## **C is for Connection**

Connection means finding common ground with each individual and linking it to the feedback situation. First you should acknowledge something they want. Because personal wants vary widely among your team, you'll have to customize what you refer to.

Here are some examples:

- Becoming a leader
- More collaboration with co-workers
- Greater responsibilities with customers
- Mastering a new skill or responsibility
- Improvement on past performance

Then connect them to a situation where you observed their work and how it relates to their goal or interest: “We’ve talked about your goal to be a project leader and I wanted to go over your leadership of the meeting last week.” It can be very simple: “Let’s look at the brochure you just finished. I know you targeted it for new business.” Still another might be, “You’ve focused on improved response time with customers, and I noticed. . . .”

If you are discussing a feedback matter immediately after a meeting you both attended, connection probably already exists, as you’re both interested in reviewing how it went. The context is right there, as you two have shared the experience. Perhaps you’re even thinking similar thoughts as you leave the same meeting. However, if the feedback topic is something from the past or it’s about something that might be confusing in terms of where and when, you need to spend a little more time setting it up. Try saying something like, “Remember a few weeks ago how we handled these customers who wanted deep discounts. Now we are going to be dealing with them again so I wanted to share some feedback that may help you with them.”

When connection is missing, people become confused; they're not thinking about the topic you are talking about at that moment and they're not sure why they should care. So err on the side of providing more connection and context versus jumping into the topic cold.

### **O is for Observation**

Observations are your descriptions of their work behavior. Make sure that your observations are specific and accurate. Avoid vague generalizations that will make the person feel confused or, worse, accused. At the same time, keep it quick, accurate, and to the point. Here are some examples:

*"You delivered that report three days early."*

*"I noticed that you've not met with the group in the last two weeks and we're going live next Friday."*

*"You took extra time from your busy schedule to visit with the clients and show them around town."*

*"Our new people are asking for help on this process and you are sending them to Sandy."*

Notice how these statements are factual, rather than evaluative statements.

## **I is for Impact on business**

Impact comments are results-based, and be positive, negative, or a mixture of the two.

*“Those two customers you targeted are doubling their business with us.”*

*“No decisions have been made because the customers haven’t received the information.”*

*“The client signed on for another year because they especially like working with you.”*

*“This delay caused another group to fall behind, and we lost revenue in this quarter.”*

*“Your focus on time management in that meeting helped the team make every decision needed for the launch!”*

## **N is for Next steps**

Next steps follow logically from your observations and impact statements. You will need to discuss, suggest, and agree on the specific request you are making. Here you are partnering with the team member to come up with an effective action or behavior change that will increase the business impact or continue the current impact, if it is positive. Feel

free to begin the conversation with direct suggestions if you have helpful knowledge to share, but getting active involvement in this discussion is important because it increases the team member’s commitment to the goal. Keep the feedback future-focused to build even more buy-in and, finally, clarify your expectations for what and when.

*“At my management meeting next month I’d like you to present your fact-filled report so you can provide the details you’ve mastered so well.”*

*“It will be good to practice for you to slow down with new people. You mentioned George as a mentor. Can you work with him to come up with a special approach for them?”*

*“Spending 100% of your time on this over the next three days is a great idea in order to focus on getting the project caught up.”*

*“I like your idea of an online tool to help other agents. This will prevent the mistakes. When can this be ready?”*

When you link the next steps to solutions that will visibly improve results for the employee and for you, your feedback loops will move you forward. You have linked information about performance to current results and the two of you are proposing an adjustment that will reap improvements.

## **Pulling it all together**

### ***Example of Positive Feedback***

#### ***Connect***

*“We set a goal of cutting out 30 percent of the cost of sales support. I know you were committed to making it happen.”*

#### ***Observe***

*“I tracked the results and found that you and your team streamlined it even further—  
You’ve cut out more than 40 percent of the cost per customer!”*

#### ***Impact***

*“This freed up our budget to focus on sales rep compensation more in line with what you guys are contributing. That will improve morale.”*

#### ***Next Steps***

*“Please outline the key steps you took in leading the streamlining effort and present it at our regional meeting. I think you’d be a great mentor to help the other groups improve.”*

### ***Example of Corrective Feedback***

#### ***Connect***

*“I know your goal is to increase your impact with our customers by empathizing with their problems. You were concerned that seem so stressed when they call.”*

#### ***Observe***

*“I’ve noticed this week that you seemed rushed when you talked to the customers. When they approached your desk, you were looking at your screen and didn’t make eye contact. Yesterday Connie, a customer, called and said she felt you didn’t care about her issue.”*

#### ***Impact***

*“The impact of this is that when the customer doesn’t feel heard, we can’t easily diagnose or address their needs.”*

#### ***Next Steps***

*“How do you think you can get a different response from people like Connie? OK, let’s set up times to practice together your eye contact and mirroring of what the customer says. Then we’ll review how this is working for you in another week.”*

Creating COIN scripts for everyone in your team results in a huge win because it creates learning relationships and stimulates everyone's desire for more feedback in your organization. A COIN conversation begs for follow up, so you are opening up a long-term dialogue and relationship with each employee.

### **Speed it up**

When you are first broaching feedback conversations, you need to make sure to cover all four COIN topics thoroughly. Otherwise, people don't know where this sudden feedback is coming from. After that first few conversations, you can speed it up.

Especially if you're following up or fine tuning a particular feedback area—like time management or customer service, you will have already made the connection and much of the impact will be evident to the feedback receiver as well. The O and N sections will always be new and different, however, so t put emphasis there. Here are some examples of COIN used for conversation 3 or 4:

- *You've been getting high ratings in customer service and this is drawing repeat sales. Keep it up and let's share your new methods with the whole team!*
- *For the China launch, we still don't have data about why it hasn't picked up, so we still don't have a plan in place. Can you gather the data this week and call the group together?*

### **Create feedback scripts using the COIN template**

Now is a good time to create scripts for each person on your team. You will need:



- Your notes from the visioning you did in the last chapter
- A “COIN Planner” worksheet for each person on your team.

For the first person on your agenda, review what you envision for them and what feedback area would most impact your team’s result. (By the way, for your first script, choose someone on your team you find easy to talk to, rather than someone who resists feedback, so you have a positive experience.)

Now go through the four COIN topics, starting with Connection. Jot down some phrases you can use to offer effective feedback to that person. Go through Observations, Impact, and Next steps. You will notice that this flows easily and logically for most or all of your people. If you get bogged down, remember to prioritize the feedback items that, if improved, will have the greatest impact on the team’s goals.

If you think that filling out these forms is too time consuming, realize that this is just a learning exercise so you can kick-start feedback. Later, you will do these steps mentally and in real time, as you naturally offer feedback that people can use.

*COIN Planner Worksheet*

*Record below a script for how to give feedback to this person.*

**Name** \_\_\_\_\_

<p><b>Connection to the person's goals and interests</b></p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<p><b>Observations that are specific</b></p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<p><b>Impact on work results</b></p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<p><b>Next Steps: Suggest, discuss, and agree upon</b></p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

## About Anna Carroll MSSW



Anna Carroll, MSSW is an author, feedback coach, and speaker. She helps leaders and professionals speed up their cycles of feedback, improvement, and results on shared goals. She accomplishes this via training people on how to give and receive great feedback as well as facilitation and coaching.

She currently works with Austin Regional Clinic, Horseshoe Bay Resort, NES Global Talent, PayPal, and Zimmer-Biomet and other individual coaching clients.

Carroll wrote *The Feedback Imperative: How to Give Everyday Feedback to Speed Up Your Team's Success* (River Grove Press, 2013) and *The Everyday Feedback Workbook for Leaders* (Ingram Sparks, 2015). She is working on a book describing organizations who are successful using fast, frequent feedback, and the keys to their success.

Join the Everyday Feedback discussion at [everydayfeedback.com](http://everydayfeedback.com).