

Team Pulse by CoastZone — The Deep Dive

Base-building episode · Monday 29 June 2026

Feedback that actually moves people: it isn't *whether*, it's how often, how, and on what foundation

Companion read to the podcast. A single-topic masterclass written for consultants working in a Danish/Nordic context. Evergreen, anchored to current research — every claim links to its source so you can dig in.

The big picture

Feedback is the cheapest leadership act there is, and the one most leaders quietly skip. Before going further, one distinction worth nailing down, because people muddle the two: **recognition celebrates what has already been done; feedback is the information that steers the next step.** They are cousins, not twins — and both, as we'll see, only work on a bed of trust. (We devoted an earlier episode to recognition, and an earlier one still to the psychological-safety foundation; today is about feedback specifically.)

The thread of this deep dive is simple: it isn't *whether* you give feedback that decides the outcome — it's **how often** you give it, **how** you frame it, and **on what foundation** it rests. **Gallup** sets the stage with one striking figure: employees who received **meaningful feedback in the past week are 80% fully engaged** — and that holds whether they work on-site, hybrid or fully remote. Denmark's flat, trust-based workplaces make this less a foreign import and more an existing edge to sharpen. Three facets follow.

Facet 1 — The habit, not the ceremony

The usual mistake is to treat feedback as an *event* — the annual performance review — when the evidence says it's a frequency game.

The evidence. **Gallup** calls the combination of quality and frequency the "**coaching habit**," and describes it as among the best predictors of engagement it has ever studied. The numbers are hard to ignore: employees who **strongly agree** they receive valuable feedback from the people they work with are **5 times as likely to be engaged, 57% less likely to be burned out, and 48% less likely to be watching or looking for another job.** Employees who get **daily** feedback from their manager are **3.6 times more likely** to feel motivated to excel than those who only get it annually. And the headline figure: meaningful feedback in the past week correlates with **80% full engagement**, regardless of work location.

The catch. The same research finds that "meaningful feedback in the last week" is also the **lowest-rated manager behavior.** In other words, the single thing the data says works best is the thing managers do least — most simply don't give feedback often enough for it to become valuable.

The Danish angle. The fix is not a heavier annual appraisal; it's a lighter, more frequent rhythm. A standing weekly fifteen-minute 1:1 beats a thorough yearly conversation, because frequency is the mechanism. Denmark's short power distance makes those quick, candid check-ins easier than in command-and-control cultures — provided leaders actually put them in the calendar.

What to do Monday. Make feedback a rhythm, not a ceremony. Schedule a recurring weekly check-in and protect it. The polished annual review can stay for the record — but it is not where behavior changes.

Facet 2 — The form decides whether it lands

Once you're giving feedback often, the next question is *how* — and the form turns out to decide whether it helps or backfires. Two fresh findings: one about clarity, one about words versus numbers.

Clarity first. A [McLean & Co report, covered by HR Dive on 7 April 2026](#), found that employees who **understand what is expected of them are 8.6 times more likely to be engaged**. When performance criteria aren't clearly defined, employees are **1.27 times more likely to report high stress**, and organizations that fail to provide a positive employee experience see voluntary turnover **40% higher**. McLean also found HR teams that rate their performance management as effective are **4.7 times more likely** to report an effective engagement strategy. As McLean's **Leann Schneider** put it: *"Performance criteria should aim to make success clearer, not more complicated."* Her colleague **Justine Czencz** adds that when criteria are *"grounded in role realities and reinforced through communication, feedback, and coaching,"* organizations are better placed to support growth.

Words over numbers. A Cornell-led study — *"The Power of Words: Employee Responses to Numerical vs. Narrative Performance Feedback,"* by **Emily Zitek** (Cornell ILR) with **Joonyoung Kim** and **Caitlin Stroup**, published **22 December 2025** in *Academy of Management Discoveries* and [reported by the Cornell Chronicle](#) — ran **four experiments with 1,600 participants**, comparing numerical-only, narrative-only and combined feedback. **Narrative-only feedback — feedback in words — was generally perceived as the fairest**, and gave people a clearer understanding of how to improve, often increasing their motivation to do so.

The honest caveats. The same researchers found that **extremely positive feedback — including mentions of monetary bonuses — was well received regardless of format**. And they are **hesitant** to recommend going fully narrative, because without numbers it is harder to administer bonuses and promotions. The practical reading: lead with words, keep the numbers where decisions genuinely need them.

The Danish angle. This fits the Danish instinct for the candid, human conversation over the rigid scorecard — but only if expectations are made explicit first. Clarity up front, words over scores in the conversation, numbers reserved for the decisions that truly require them.

What to do Monday. Be clear about expectations *before* you measure against them — and deliver the feedback in words, not just a score. A number closes a conversation; a sentence opens one.

Facet 3 — The Danish lens: no trust, no feedback

Frequency and form both rest on a foundation: **trust**. Without it, even well-framed feedback curdles.

The evidence. A study by [Ni and colleagues \(2024, *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*\)](#) asked whether negative performance feedback always provokes a negative response. The answer hinges on **trust in the leader**. When employees have lower trust, negative feedback is perceived as **lower**

quality — and lower perceived quality is linked to employee **hostility and counterproductive behavior**. Put plainly: with trust, criticism becomes coaching; without it, the same words land as an attack and trigger defense.

The Danish frame. [Væksthus for Ledelse](#) (lederweb.dk), in "*4 principper for god feedback*," names the ability to give and receive feedback a **top challenge** in Danish workplaces — and is explicit that good feedback **requires psychological safety**: a culture where people dare to discuss uncertainty, ask questions and talk about mistakes without losing face or being seen as incompetent. Its companion piece on the [mental obstacles to a feedback culture](#) makes the same point from the other side. When feedback is regular and the culture is safe, it lifts wellbeing, innovation and engagement — because people dare to ask, share ideas and correct errors. (We covered the foundations of psychological safety in an earlier episode; here it is the precondition for feedback to work at all.)

Make it a designed habit, not a mood. Lean on [Morten Münster's](#) *adfærdsdesign* (behavioral design): change the environment so the desired behavior is easy. Build feedback into a rhythm — a standing prompt in your weekly review, a default question, a recurring 1:1 — so it doesn't depend on whether the leader happens to feel up to it that day. Behavioral design is what turns the "coaching habit" from good intention into an actual habit.

What to do Monday. Build trust first, then design feedback into a fixed rhythm. Put one recurring question in your own week — "*Who haven't I given something useful to this week?*" — so the habit survives a busy calendar.

The three things to remember

1. **Frequency beats formality.** Meaningful weekly feedback is one of the strongest engines of engagement Gallup has measured; the annual review is too little, too late.
2. **The form decides the effect.** Be clear about expectations, and deliver feedback in words, not just a number — narrative feedback is seen as fairer and more useful.
3. **Trust comes first.** Without it, criticism becomes defense. Build psychological safety, then design feedback into a steady rhythm.

Who haven't you given useful feedback to this week — and what would change if that became a habit instead of an annual duty?

Sources & dig deeper

International research & media - Gallup — [Organizations Can Redefine Feedback by Including Recognition](#) (coaching habit; feedback-frequency statistics) - McLean & Co, via HR Dive — [Clear feedback strengthens engagement, research finds](#) (7 April 2026) - Cornell Chronicle — [Narrative-based performance reviews deemed fairest by employees](#) (Zitek, Kim & Stroup, *Academy of Management Discoveries*, Dec 2025) - Ni et al. (2024) — [Does negative performance feedback always lead to negative responses? The role of trust in the leader](#) (*Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*)

Danish sources & voices - Væksthus for Ledelse / lederweb.dk — 4 principper for god feedback; Mentale forhindringer for en god feedback-kultur - Morten Münster — mortenmunster.com (adfærdsdesign / behavioral design)