

RADICAL CANDOR

**11 WAYS
FOR MANAGERS TO
GET FEEDBACK
FROM THEIR TEAMS**

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To be really great at building a culture of feedback you have to get it, give it, and encourage it. All of those things feel weird to do at first, but there are some easy things you can do to make them feel much more natural.

As a manager who wants to start introducing Radical Candor to your team, we suggest that you start by asking for feedback from your team before you give it. That's easier said than done.

IT'S HARD TO GET "REAL-TALK" AS THE BOSS

Being the boss doesn't mean you automatically get respect from people, but the authority does have an automatic impact on what people will say to you. Unfortunately, people are primed to mistrust you based on all the preconceived notions against bosses.

And while you may not think of yourself as an intimidating person, know that your role as "boss" is intimidating. You have the power to fire people and to hand out lousy, or great, assignments. This will make people hesitate to tell you what they really think.

As the boss, you'll tend to get more flattery, and it may be false flattery. You'll need to hone your BS meter to know when to dig deeper to get candid feedback.

But remember, it is crucially important for you to get feedback and find out what people really think. Getting people to Challenge you Directly can be the difference between success and failure, which means you need to make a concerted effort to get feedback.

We'll focus on criticism here because fishing for praise will just thicken the bank of BS flattery that's likely to come rolling at you as the boss, like a dangerous fog.

In general, we have two guidelines for how to get others to criticize you:

1. **Be persistent.** Convince your team you really do want to hear what they really think. Show them that your requests for criticism are genuine and that you sincerely appreciate it when they say what they think. Keep asking for criticism regularly. Try different approaches, venues, and situations. Whatever you do, don't accept an environment where you aren't getting the feedback you need to be successful.

2. **Reward the candor.** It's not enough to appreciate critique from your team, or not to get defensive. You have to reward the candor. People need to see and feel that there is a benefit to criticizing you.

Keeping those guidelines in mind, here are 11 tactical tips for finding out what people really think.

1 HAVE A GO-TO QUESTION

When you're the boss, it can feel awkward to ask your employees what they think of your performance. If you have a go-to question that you feel comfortable asking, it will flow more easily.

Fred Kofman, author of *Conscious Business*, has suggested a question like, "Is there anything I could do or stop doing that would make it easier to work with me?"

Andy Grove, former Intel CEO, would say, "I want to ask you a favor. It's a big one, and it is the most important thing you can do for me. I really need you to tell me what I am doing wrong, how I am screwing up."

Bill Berry of Tacoma Power says, "Give me some advice."

Here are a few more variations:

- "How can I support you on this project?"
- "What's bothering you?"
- "What's the one thing you've been wanting to tell me but have been holding back?"

If any of these examples feel natural to you, adopt them. If not, find one that does and keep it in the back of your mind at all times. You never know when you'll have the right moment to ask for criticism, and you want to be prepared when it comes.



📖 [The 3 Best Leadership Traits for Managing Through a Crisis](#)

📺 [How to Solicit Feedback](#)

🔊 [The Go-To Question](#)

2 EMBRACE THE DISCOMFORT



After asking for feedback, stop talking and embrace the discomfort. People will feel uncomfortable about answering your question and giving you feedback. Don't let them off the hook to try to make them feel better. Instead, count to 7 and commit to allowing the other person to speak first.

When it's clear you're not going to break the silence, the other person will speak up to fill the silence. It will be easier for them to say something than to say nothing.

If that doesn't work, try asking the person to come back to you the next day with some specific suggestions for you.

- 📖 [Feeling Safe to Speak Truth to Power](#)
- 📺 [Embrace the Discomfort](#)
- 🎧 [Kim Scott On Embracing Discomfort \(at 13:30\)](#)

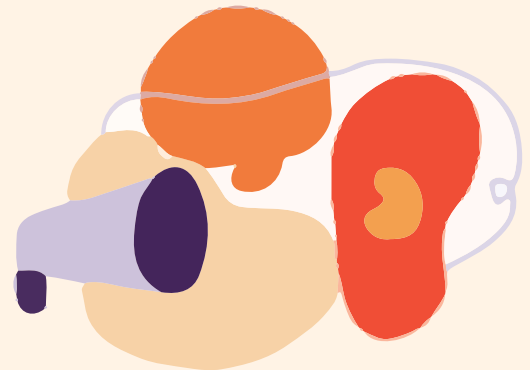
3 LISTEN WITH THE INTENT TO UNDERSTAND, NOT TO RESPOND

Don't interrupt or argue when someone gives you feedback. Just listen, focus on understanding what the person is telling you, and try to learn something from it. When they're finished speaking, check for understanding.

You can say something like, "So what I hear you saying is..." Repeat back to them the issues they have raised, as you understand them. Ask, "Do I have that right?" Make sure you truly understand their point of view.

Although when you give feedback we encourage you to provide context, we don't recommend that you ask the person giving you feedback for context. Asking, "Can you give me some examples?" will feel like a cross-examination. They'll feel like they have to prove their point, and they'll be less willing to volunteer their opinions next time.

And finally, it's imperative not to react defensively to the feedback. Keep your mindset on understanding and learning the person's point of view, regardless of how you feel about it. Resist the urge to interrupt with your point of view.



- 📖 [5 Things to Do When You Disagree With Feedback](#)
- 📖 [How Can Leaders Create a Culture of Listening?](#)
- 🎧 [Meet Like A Boss — The 411 On 1:1s](#)

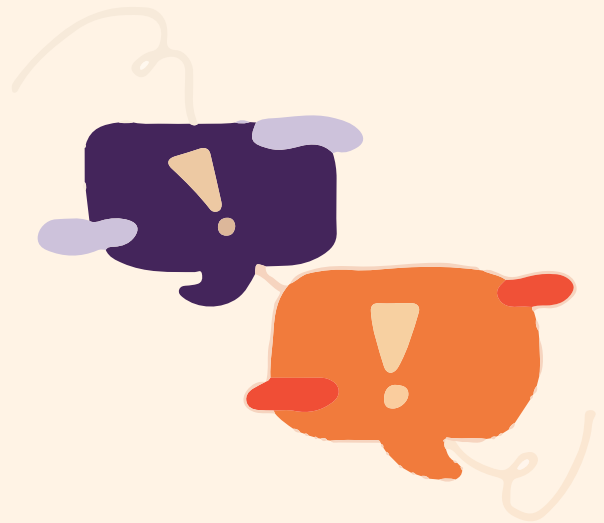
4 REWARD CRITICISM TO GET MORE OF IT

When someone provides feedback to you, treat it like a treasured gift. Prove to them that you are receptive to what you've heard and that you really do appreciate their thoughts. First, thank them sincerely for the criticism (even if it wasn't Radically Candid). Second, if you agree with the criticism, make visible changes based on the feedback. If the change is hard or will take some time, show them you're working toward it.

If you disagree with the criticism, try finding something they've said that you do agree with and point it out. Offer your full, respectful explanation of why you disagree with their other statements. If you're annoyed or angry with their feedback, don't explain your point of view immediately.

Instead, say you'll think about their feedback and get back to them. Then make sure to follow through to give them your full explanation. That respectful response is a way to reward their feedback and show that you've heard it, and it gives them an opportunity to either come around to your perspective or to argue their point in another way.

Bottom line: if people feel punished for their criticism or feel that it has been ignored, they will stop offering it, and so will others. If they see that their feedback is rewarded with action, it will feel worth the risk of saying what they think.



- 📖 [Radical Candor and the Candor Canary at Gem](#)
- 📺 [How to Encourage Feedback From Others](#)
- 🔊 [Gauge the Feedback You're Giving & Getting](#)

5 ASK FOR PUBLIC CRITICISM



Another way to show that you appreciate the criticism you receive is to ask those who are most comfortable criticizing you to give the same feedback in front of others. While the general rule is that criticism should be given in private, public criticism of the boss can be helpful.

When others see that good things happen to those who challenge the boss, more people open up. By showing that you react well to public criticism, you prove that you genuinely want and appreciate it. You also set a tone for everyone to embrace each other's criticism.

6 CRITICIZE YOURSELF IN PUBLIC



Criticizing yourself in public is a great way to show that you feel comfortable acknowledging that you aren't perfect, that you have room for improvement.

Michelle Peluso, former CEO of Gilt Groupe, explained the benefits of criticizing herself publicly. In an interview with *The New York Times* she said, "I've always taken a slightly different approach with 360 reviews. We'll share them with each other on the executive team, and I'll start with mine — here is where I'm good, and here is where I'm not doing so well. I'll even tell the whole company, and say, 'Here is where I want your help.' That makes it a bit safer for other people to do the same, and you can build trust."

- 📖 [Praise in Public, Criticize in Private](#)
- 📺 [How to Give Candid Feedback](#)
- 🎧 [Practicing Radical Candor In Remote Workplaces](#)

7 CALL OUT BODY LANGUAGE

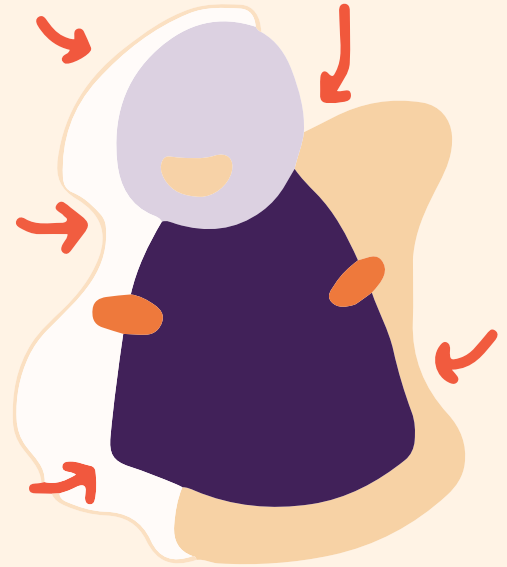
Even if people aren't telling you what they really think with their words, their body language may still be sending a more candid message. Bring attention to discrepancies you notice and push for candor.

Imagine a 1:1 meeting with "Edward." You've just shared with him your latest crazy idea, and you're sensing Edward disagrees with you. "What do you think?" you ask. "Oh! Great idea!" Edward says, crossing his arms and hunching down in his seat as though it suddenly got very cold in the room.

Don't ignore that sort of nonverbal cue. Ask, "Then why are you folding your arms and hunching down in your seat? Come on, tell me what you're really thinking!!"

Now, imagine a big debate raging. Nancy is not saying a word, but when Laurence disagrees with you, Nancy's eyes light up and she sits up straighter. Laurence makes the point again, and this time Nancy taps the table in agreement. "Nancy, you seem to feel strongly about what Laurence is saying. Tell me why Laurence is right and I am wrong!"

Nancy may feel awkward, but that's OK. Calling out the body language puts Nancy in an uncomfortable situation. But by embracing the discomfort, you can teach the whole team to criticize you.



- 📖 [Emotional Reactions At Work Are Awkward: Here's How To Deal](#)
- 📖 [Radical Candor: The "Um" Story](#)
- 🔊 [What's Your Body Language Telling Me?](#)

8 RELISH BEING WRONG

Show people that you are happy when they prove you wrong. If you openly and enthusiastically admit when you're wrong (even on a daily basis), people will feel more encouraged to debate with you.

Look for opportunities to make statements like: "Well, I disagreed with Olga about X, but then she convinced me I didn't know what I was talking about. Here are the five reasons why Olga was right and I was wrong."

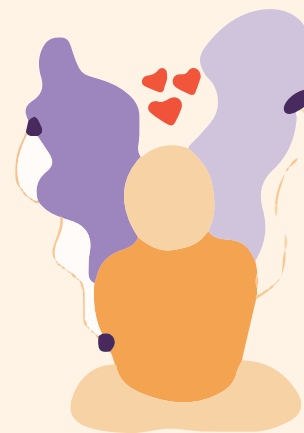


9 SHOW THAT YOU CARE

Because power corrupts, the little bit of power you get when you become the boss will make people look for the worst in you, even if you are diligent about not letting it bring out your worst.

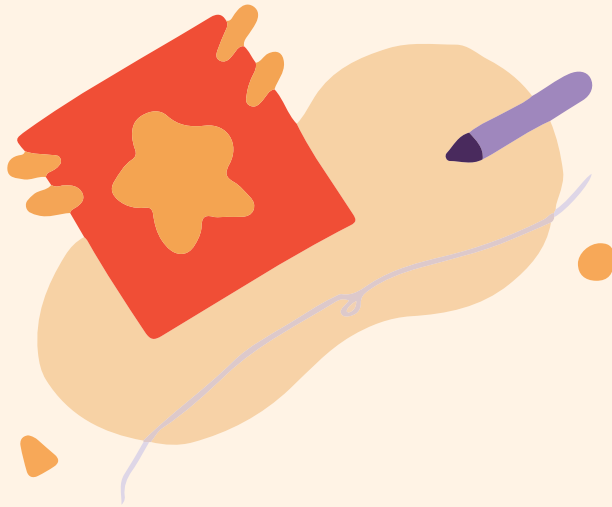
One way to get past the negative connotations of the position is to push yourself really high on the Care Personally axis. When you show you care, you build a relationship and you build trust. People will stop seeing you as the "jerk in charge" and assuming the worst. But you need to show that you care — it's not enough for you to feel it. Others need to see it in action.

Showing you care takes time, and it is your job.



- 📺 [6 Ways You're Getting Radical Candor Wrong and 5 Ways to Get It Right](#)
- 📺 [Care Personally, Challenge Directly](#)
- 🔊 [Context Matters — Share Your Radical Candor Stories](#)

10 DON'T TRY TO CHANGE YOUR STYLE



Too often, when a team is reluctant to criticize or praise a boss, the boss gets advice to become a different kind of person.

Needless to say, that's not helpful. Figure out how to use your personal style, be it very vocal or very quiet, tough or gentle, approachable or intimidating, to invite criticism of yourself, to remind people that you want to be challenged.

It may seem counterintuitive that an intimidating person could be good at soliciting criticism. But recall the story of Steve Jobs, who told an employee who backed down too soon in an argument, "It was your job to convince me I was wrong, and you failed!" Not everyone can get away with Steve Jobs' techniques, of course. Another approach is to regularly say, "Tell me why I'm wrong." Figure out what works for you.

11 GET THEATRICAL



Sometimes you have to be really over the top to get feedback. Try one of these theatrical techniques for making a big deal about feedback and turning it into a ritual at your company.

"You Were Right, I was Wrong" Prizes Box

Make a bigger show about loving to be wrong by giving out a trophy or prize to people who prove you wrong.

Red Box

Toyota wanted to encourage all employees to share feedback, especially criticism. The culture in Japan made it really unlikely that employees, especially new employees, would criticize management. So, the company's leaders painted a big red square on the assembly line floor.

New employees had to stand in it at the end of their first week and were not allowed to leave until they had criticized at least one thing on the line, or made one suggestion for an improvement.

Orange Box

The "orange box" technique was developed by Michael Dearing, who defined product marketing at eBay in 2002 and is now a seed-stage investor with a remarkable track record. Michael put an orange box with a slit on the top in a high traffic area so that people could drop questions or feedback into it.

At his all-hands meeting, he'd reach into the box and answer off the cuff. A good friend of mine, Ann Poletti, who used to work on Michael's team, said that no matter how banal the question, he was "always amazingly respectful and took on each question thoughtfully."

After proving to the team that he would fix problems when people pointed them out, rather than shooting the messenger, he eventually built a culture where people would challenge him directly. Over time the orange box emptied out. When people had an issue, they would stand up and ask direct questions or come talk to him individually.

11 GET THEATRICAL

Management “Fix-It” Weeks

Software engineering organizations often do the equivalent of spring cleaning on a regular cadence. Periodically, everyone on an engineering team will stop working on new things and fix/clean up old “bugs” — things that are broken.

You can organize similar regular management “fix-it” weeks. Have people log and prioritize annoying management things. For example, if it takes too long to get expense reports approved, file a management “bug.” If performance reviews take place at the worst possible time of year, file a management bug.

If the last employee survey took too long to fill out, file a management bug. If the promotion system seems unfair, file a management bug. If all hands meetings ran too long, file a management bug. If it’s impossible to get work done at work because there are too many meetings, file a management bug.

You can let people vote for other people’s bugs that also annoy them, and then during management fix-it week, assign “bugs” to managers to fix. Have them

cancel all regularly scheduled activities (or most of them) and focus on fixing the management issues that are most annoying to the organization.

Some of these more theatrical techniques may seem over the top to you, but if you’re struggling to create a great culture of feedback, they can go a long way towards showing that feedback is a priority.



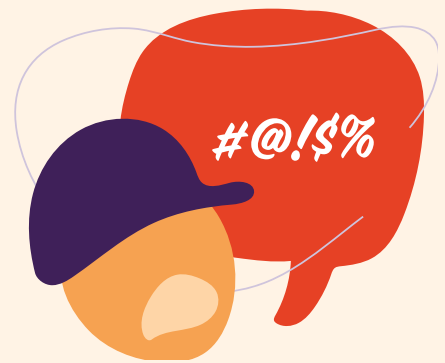
THOUGHTS ON EMPLOYEE SURVEYS AND ONLINE FORUMS

Employee engagement surveys and online forums can be good ways to gather additional feedback from people, but they are NOT substitutes for actually talking to people and getting feedback through in-person conversations.

A well-constructed employee engagement survey can tell you where to look for problems, but not what the problem is or why there is a problem. Surveys are for companies what smoke detectors are for homes: early warning systems. We recommend them. But, make sure you use them to identify areas for further conversation, not as a replacement for talking to people.

Online discussion forums, email aliases, Q&A forums, etc. can be a great way to give all employees a louder voice, and a way to say what they really think. However, they can also be an invitation for abuse. When a person is alone with their thoughts and emotions safe behind a computer screen, rather than talking face-to-face with another person, it's easier to launch into abstract, personal, angry, self-righteous criticism meant to sting rather than to help the person improve.

So tread carefully with these methods and make sure to set an example of Radical Candor in the forums. It can be helpful to turn the most active threads into in-person conversations, to humanize the discussion.



- 📖 [5 Ways to Combat Zoom Fatigue](#)
- 📖 [Radical Candor — The Surprising Secret to Being a Good Boss](#)
- 🎧 [Are You a Quiet or Loud Listener? Listening Lessons from Apple](#)

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