

THE SBI MODEL

How to Receive Better Feedback

Most feedback is too vague to act on. When someone tells you what they think but not what they observed, you can't change. The SBI Model gives you three questions to ask that turn an impression into something useful.

WHAT IS THE SBI MODEL?

The SBI Model was developed by the **Center for Creative Leadership**, a research organisation that has shaped leadership development for over 50 years. SBI stands for **Situation, Behaviour, and Impact**. It makes feedback specific by anchoring it to a real moment, a concrete action, and a measurable result.

S SITUATION	B BEHAVIOUR	I IMPACT
<p>"Where did this happen?"</p> <p>Pins the feedback to a real moment in time so you know what triggered the observation.</p>	<p>"What exactly did I do or say?"</p> <p>Moves from trait to action. "You were dismissive" becomes "you cut across two people before they finished."</p>	<p>"What was the specific result of that action?"</p> <p>Shows you why it matters. The same behaviour can have different impacts. This makes that visible.</p>

WHEN YOU RECEIVE FEEDBACK, ASK FOR ALL THREE

You're not pushing back. You're doing the work of turning an impression into something you can act on. Use these questions any time feedback lands without enough detail.

ASK THE PROVIDER TO FILL IN THE BLANKS

SITUATION

"Where did this happen?"

BEHAVIOUR

"What exactly did I do or say?"

IMPACT

"What was the specific result of that action?"

VAGUE VS SPECIFIC: WHAT THE DIFFERENCE LOOKS LIKE

Here's the same piece of feedback before and after the SBI questions are applied.

VAGUE (BEFORE)	SPECIFIC WITH SBI (AFTER)
"You need to work on your communication."	Situation In Tuesday's stakeholder meeting.
You don't know when. You don't know what. You can't change.	Behaviour You answered the client's question before they finished speaking, and didn't address what they actually asked.
	Impact The client looked frustrated and repeated the question. It slowed the meeting down and created an awkward pause.

THREE THINGS TO REMEMBER

- 1 Asking for more detail is not being defensive.**
You're helping the other person give feedback that will actually work. Most people give vague feedback because they haven't been asked for specifics before.
- 2 SBI works for positive feedback too.**
Knowing the specific behaviour that had a good impact helps you repeat it on purpose, not just hope it happens again.
- 3 If they can't answer, that's useful too.**
When someone can't point to a specific situation or behaviour, the feedback may be based on a general impression rather than observed evidence. You can ask them to come back when they have an example.

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

According to research by Zenger and Folkman published in Harvard Business Review, 72% of employees believe their performance would improve if their managers gave them more corrective feedback. The barrier is rarely willingness. It's specificity.

The Center for Creative Leadership developed SBI because behaviour-specific feedback is far more likely to result in changed behaviour than feedback framed around personality or intent. When feedback describes what someone did, not who they are, people hear it, accept it, and act on it.

***Vague feedback creates a vague sense something is wrong.
Specific feedback tells you exactly what to change.***