

Vernon Richards & Nicola Lindgren



# THE SOFTWARE TESTER'S JOURNEY:

Exploring Career  
Opportunities and  
Adventures

# The Software Tester's Journey

## Exploring Career Opportunities and Adventures

Nicola Lindgren and Vernon Richards

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# Introduction

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### Automate Where It Makes Sense

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### The Opportunity Cost of Test Automation

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## Managing Implicit Requirements

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## **Are Testers Even Needed?**

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## **Job Titles Vary**

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# Chapter 5: The Importance of Feedback

## Why You Should Learn This Skill

Feedback, done well, is helpful.

Feedback, done poorly, has the potential to damage work relationships.

By learning how to give and receive feedback effectively, you can have great working relationships with people in and outside your team.

Feedback has the power to build and destroy.

We're talking about anything, from personal and professional relationships to careers and self-esteem. And we're not just talking about "negative" feedback either! Learning how to give effective feedback hasn't just helped me become a better teammate. It's helped me become a better person all-round.

Still not convinced? Here are 5 reasons we should all learn to give good feedback.

- **Improves Communication:** Instead of giving vague or harmful feedback, you can provide actionable, insightful feedback.
- **Builds relationships:** Providing constructive feedback and avoiding nitpicking contributes to a psychologically safe environment.
- **Enhances learning:** A culture of effective feedback drives learning by helping people understand what they did, in what situation and what the impact was.

- **Drives success:** Environments where it's safe to fail, allow people to experiment because the consequence of something "not working" is learning.
- **Boosts morale:** Learning why/how something works increases people's sense of progress.

## Examples of When You May Need to Give Feedback at Work

- Finding a bug that will/could block a release
- Sharing feedback with someone who isn't positive
- Sharing a concern you have about how things are being run

"Seriously Nicola and Vernon, all I need to do is report bugs! That's the only time I give anyone any feedback."

Oh yeah? What about...

- When you're collaborating on a story, figuring out how to implement and test the feature, and someone says something discouraging?
  - ...or encouraging!
- During a "lessons learned" session after a major release?
- In a retrospective. Especially when discussing what the team could do better next time.
- When you're part of the on-call team in the middle of a serious production incident
- And... bugs of course!

As you can see, there are endless opportunities for you to give feedback as a Tester.

# How To Give Feedback

## Common Themes

There are LOTS of feedback frameworks and models.

Some have 3 steps, some have 5. Some focus on actions, and some focus on relationships. Regardless of the specifics of each one or what kind of structure they use, they all share some common themes.

- **They get specific:** Instead of a hypothetical scenario or talking around an issue, use an example of something that happened.
- **They describe the context or situation:** When did this happen, who was there, why were those people present, what was said, etc. Set the scene for where and when the event happened.
- **They focus on objectivity, not subjectivity:** It's the difference between "Bill shouted at Ijeoma" and "Bill was angry with Ijeoma". At first, stick to the facts and avoid interpretation. There'll be time for that later.
- **They share the impact of the behaviour:** What is it, and why do you believe it's so important?

In the next section, we'll share a few models we like to use to give feedback.

## Useful Models

There are a **bunch** of models and frameworks for giving feedback out there!

There are so many that if we listed them all, we'd be here all year! Instead we'll list our favourites and a wild card thrown in for good measure.

## **SBI (Situation - Behaviour - Impact)**

I learned this one from an excellent Dan North talk called “[How To Make a Sandwich](#)<sup>1</sup>”, which you should be able to find on YouTube (recommended viewing!).

- **Situation:** Describe the specific situation where the behaviour occurred.
- **Behaviour:** Detail the actual, observable behaviour without interpretation or judgement.
- **Impact:** Explain the impact of the behaviour and how it affected you, the team, or the project.

## **STAR (Situation - Task - Action - Result)**

I first heard about this method in the context of answering interview questions. However, it’s also great for feedback in general!

- **Situation:** Set the context for the story.
- **Task:** Describe the task and the challenge involved.
- **Action:** Explain the actions taken.
- **Result:** Share the outcomes of those actions.

## **COIN (Context - Observation - Impact - Next Steps)**

This one is great for keeping the conversation constructive.

- **Context:** Explain when and where the observed behaviour occurred.
- **Observation:** State factual observations, not interpretations.
- **Impact:** Share the effect of the behaviour.
- **Next Steps:** Discuss actions or changes needed for the future.

These models are great, but they aren’t a silver bullet. Next, we’ll share some things to consider whenever you’re giving feedback.

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<sup>1</sup><https://youtu.be/P8sNSNkWFpc>

## Things To Consider

We've explained the importance of feedback, given you some examples when you might give AND provided some models you can use.

So you're all set right? Well not quite!

There are still some factors to consider when it comes to giving feedback.

### **Here are 5 things to consider when you're giving feedback**

- **How's your state of mind?** Giving feedback can take a lot of energy and focus, especially when practising it. So make sure you're in calm and composed state of mind and not angry, frustrated or overly emotional (we aren't talking about being Mr Spock though!).
- **When is a good time?** Try not to ambush people on their way to lunch or an important meeting! Choose an appropriate time and setting so people don't feel caught off guard.
- **Where are you giving this feedback?** In our experience, people are more comfortable getting feedback in a 1 to 1 situation. And yes, that includes positive feedback more often than you might think!
- **How clear are your intentions?** People tend to judge others by their actions but themselves by their intentions. Try to avoid this mistake by making the intentions behind your feedback clear.
- **How could you be misinterpreted?** This is bigger than word choice. Many factors affect how you'll be understood (or not!). Cultural differences, non-verbal cues, and our own biases have a huge impact on how we communicate.

Now. We've talked a lot about giving feedback. But what about receiving it? That's what the next section is about!

## Why You Should Ask For Feedback

There are two main reasons why you should ask for feedback at work.

Firstly, it can help your working relationships to understand how you are perceived. You may have an idea of how you are perceived at work, but you won't know for sure until you take the time to ask people.

Secondly and more importantly, by asking people for feedback, you are making it safe for people to give you feedback.

Don't assume that if people had something to say, they would say it. Very, *very* few people will go out of their way to share constructive feedback with someone.

You may receive positive feedback from time to time, but assuming you have something to improve in your role, you may find you will benefit more from getting some insight as to how you could improve.

## How To Ask For Feedback

An important thing to highlight here is the way you phrase the question(s) will have a massive impact on the answer(s) you receive.

For example:

*Is there anything I can improve?*

This is a closed question, where the only options are yes or no.

The easy (default) answer to this is “no”, as it doesn’t require much thinking or effort from the person you asked.

If you are looking for ways to improve, then we suggest you try the following:

*How can I improve in XXX?*

By asking this question, you are implying that you know you have areas in which you can improve - it suggests humility and openness. Therefore, it’s not a state of asking *if* you can improve, but *what*.

By adding “in XXX” at the end, you are being specific in the area in which you are looking to improve. While you do want to ask open-ended questions, being too open means that you’re not giving the recipient any direction - you want to make it easy for someone to give you feedback.

Here are some more examples of questions and the impact of how these questions are phrased.

*Do you like XXX?*

Again, this is a closed question, where the only options are yes or no. The easy (default) answer to this is “yes”, as it doesn’t require much thinking or effort from the person you asked.

If you are seeking someone’s opinion on something, try:

*What do you think of XXX?*

This gives people more options as to what to say to you.

## **Give people options on how to give you feedback.**

Sometimes, people prefer to stay anonymous (in that case, you’d want to send the form/poll/questionnaire to multiple people).

## Give people a heads-up in advance

If you want to get someone's feedback, don't just spring it on them. Give people some time to reflect, this gives you a better chance of getting meaningful feedback. If you surprise someone with a request for feedback, you'll only get what first comes to someone's mind (if anything does), but this feedback might not be the most helpful for you.

## How to Receive Feedback

- Listen and give them your full attention; do not interrupt.
- Do not be defensive either through your words or how you act
- Understand the message - if you're not sure of anything, ask clarifying questions to make sure you are on the same page.

## After You Receive Feedback

Tell them how (and when) you will address the feedback given.

Bonus points if you follow up with the feedback giver later, to let them know how addressing their feedback helped you! It feels nice to know you helped someone and that they did something about it.

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## **Where Can You Network With People?**

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### **At Conferences**

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## Online

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## How to network?

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## Remember to Give and Take

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## Help Other People

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## Networking Tips

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### 1. Remember the Pac-man Rule

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## **2. Find Common Ground**

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## **3. To Be Interesting, Be Interested.**

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## **4. Be Aware of How Much Room You Take Up**

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## **5. Don't Try to One-Up People**

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## **6. Make An Effort To Include Everyone in the Conversation**

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## **7. No One Left Alone**

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## **8. You Choose How You Use Your Time**

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## **9. Branch out from the group you came to the event with.**

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## **10. Don't think of it as "networking"**

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## **Start with Delivering a Service**

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## **Who Is Your Customer?**

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## **What Problem Are You Solving for Them?**

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## **Focus on Building Social Proof**

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### **Working for Free vs. Working for Pay:**

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## **What They Don't Tell You About Going Independent**

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## **Sales and Marketing**

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## **Conclusion**

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# **Chapter 9: Leaving the Software Testing Field**

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## **Why Some People Leave Testing**

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## **Making the Transition**

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## **Skills From Testing People Took With Them**

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# **Bonus chapter: Public Speaking**

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## **General Public Speaking Tips**

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### **Be Clear on Your Talk's Purpose**

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### **Writing Your Talk**

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### **Respect the Audience's Time**

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## **Think “What Is In It For Them?”**

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## **Get Feedback From People**

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## **Record Yourself**

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## **Slow Down**

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## **Utilise Some Vocal Variety**

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## **Prioritise Practising Your Introduction and Conclusion**

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## More Advanced Public Speaking Tips

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### **Tailor Your Talk to the Audience**

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### **Do a Callback**

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### **Involve The Audience**

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### **Utilise Silence**

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## Online-Specific Presentation Tips

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### **Make Sure to Have Your Camera On**

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### **Be Prepared that Everyone Else Has Their Camera Off.**

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## In-Person Specific Presentation Tips

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### **Repeat Back the Question**

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### **Use Your Clicker to Turn the Screen Off**

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## **Walk Around the Room Amongst Your Audience**

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# **Useful Resources**

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## **Podcast Episodes**

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