



Giving, Requesting and Receiving Feedback

Feedback is a special gift to be cherished. How it is given and received can facilitate learning, change and development. Authentic, genuine feedback is difficult to give and requires thinking through and crafting before giving it. The following guidelines will help you as you think about giving and receiving feedback.

When giving face-to-face Feedback:

- Remember that feedback is a gift. It is meant to help someone further develop their learning and not as your personal judgment or criticism.
- Be clear: Give specific examples of what the person did or said that affected you negatively or positively.
- Focus on the positive actions/behaviors that you noticed and not what you heard from some one else. Avoid general terms like “never”, “always” and “everyone”.
- Be aware of your own projections and situations that get you to react in a certain way. Such things belong to you not the person to whom you are giving feedback. If you are making an interpretation of the other person’s behavior, own your interpretation and the impact on you and check it out with the other person.
- Avoid generalizing or using vague language. For example, rather than saying I like your presentation, say I like that part of the presentation when you said (or did) _____; but I felt confused when you said (or did) _____.
- Focus on the behavior not the person. For example, when you walked away from me I felt _____.
- Focus on behavior that s/he can do something about e.g., say, “When you walk away while I am talking to you it makes me feel like you don’t care about me.” That helps the person to know what she/he needs to do in order to show he/she cares about you. But if you say “you are impatient,” it does not help her/him to know how she/he is impatient and what behavior he/she needs to change.
- Describe the behavior and not evaluate. That is, state the effect the person’s behavior had on you rather than give a value (good or bad) judgment of the behavior.
- Use “I” statement to show that the feedback is from your own observations of the individual to whom you are giving feedback and not something you heard from another person.

Asking for Feedback:

One of the most difficult tasks, but necessary for personal growth, is soliciting feedback from others on our own behaviours and attitudes. We place a lot of weight on the opinions of those we care about, but generally do not actively seek to hear how our words and actions impact them. Remember, feedback is a gift.

When you approach a co-worker, supervisor, spouse, friend or child, make sure you are in a safe, uninterrupted space and let them know your intent: e.g., “I’m working on becoming a



better communicator. I'd like your honest opinion on how well or poorly I communicate with you.”

Once you've made your intent clear and given them time to reflect, listen to what is said—the words that are used (this is difficult) and stay with that, without going into explanations or qualifying the behaviour they are pointing out. Giving explanations might be perceived as defensiveness or reluctance to receiving feedback. Do not ask questions unless it is to ask for specific examples or deeper clarification.

Once you've received the feedback, thank the individual and let him/her know that you will reflect on their words.

When receiving Feedback:

- Take a deep breath and make yourself as comfortable as you can.
- Maintain an open mind (try not to be defensive).
- Take in what is said and let it sink in. You can think about it later.
- If the person giving feedback uses words like “never”, “always”, “every time”, etc, i.e. words that indicate that she/he is talking in general terms, ask him/her to be specific.