

# Feedback

The term "feedback" originated from the field of cybernetics and refers to the partial or complete return of a process to its source. In working relationships, it refers to the observed results of behavior relayed between Individuals for their use, learning and growth.

Feedback is helpful when:

- It is clearly understood by those receiving it.
- Something can be done about it by the receiver.
- It is relevant to current learning and professional development.

In other words, feedback is helpful whenever it serves the needs of those receiving it and not only those giving it.

## How to Give Feedback:

1. Describe your perceptions, reactions, opinions as clearly as you can and clarify that they are not facts.
2. Try to focus on relevant *behavior*, outcomes, or *performance* rather than the recipient as a person.
3. Focus on specific, observable behaviors rather than global generalities.
4. If your intent is to evaluate and not just describe your perceptions, refer to established *criteria*, *probable* outcomes or *possible improvements* rather than making judgments such as "good" or "bad".
5. *Offer* suggestions regarding possible improvements.
6. Avoid "loaded" terms, which increase defensiveness and make it harder for you to be listened to.
7. Focus on those things over which the recipient can exercise some *control*.
8. When the recipient shows emotional reactions or rising defenses, try to deal with these reactions rather than trying to convince, reason, or supply additional information.
9. Try to communicate your acceptance of the receiver as a worthwhile person and his/her right to be different.

## Components of Effective Feedback

- Stated in behavioral terms and based on learning objectives
- Based on data accessible to both student and field instructor
- Timely: ongoing, regular, and as close to the event as possible
- Clearly stated in a concise and direct manner
- Clearly stated in a respectful manner
- Feedback is specific, defined by examples.
- Feedback is balanced, including positive and critical comments.
- Clearly identify strengths.
- Clearly identify skills that need to be developed.
- Clearly identify ineffective behaviors.
- Clearly identify alternative helpful behaviors.
- Feedback is understood and invites discussion.
- Feedback is reciprocal and mutual.
- Follow up on use of feedback.

## 12 Guidelines for Giving Corrective Feedback

### Deciding whether to give corrective feedback

1. Assess your standing as a credible, trustworthy source before giving corrective feedback.
2. Give corrective feedback only if your underlying motive is to help by providing information. Do not attempt to disguise your feedback as corrective if your true intent is to control, to express aggression, or to justify your actions. Use a conflict-resolution method if your intent is to confront.
3. Give corrective feedback only if the receiver is likely to be able and willing to take appropriate action.
4. Consider whether the organizational system is likely to reward the desired behavior before you give corrective feedback.

### Deciding what to say

5. Describe the problem behavior. Avoid attributions.
6. Explain the consequences of the behavior and your feelings about it.
7. Provide sufficient specific information so the receiver may become self-correcting, but not so much information as to be redundant.
8. Emphasize desired, not undesired behaviors.

### Deciding how and when to give feedback

9. Give corrective feedback in a considerate tone of voice using "I" rather than "you" messages.
10. Give corrective feedback privately and immediately, rather than publicly and belatedly.

### **Deciding how to handle the receiver's response**

11. Ask for reactions; be willing to be influenced.
12. Seek agreement that a problem exists.

From: Kantambu Lotting, J. (1992). Giving Corrective Feedback: A Decisional Analysis. *Social Work*, Vol. 37, No.5, pp. 424-430.

### **How to Receive Feedback:**

1. Listen carefully.
2. Try not to let defenses build, but mentally note questions or disagreements.
3. Paraphrase occasionally what you think you hear to check out your perceptions.
4. Ask questions for clarification and ask for examples in those areas that seem unclear or in which disagreement exists. Paraphrase again.
5. Carefully evaluate the accuracy and potential value of what you have heard.
6. Gather additional information from other sources by observing your own behavior and reactions of others to it.
7. Try not to overreact to feedback but, when desired, try to modify your behavior in suggested directions and then evaluate outcomes.
8. Remember:
  - Feedback is always about past behavior, not current or future behavior.
  - Receiving feedback always offers the possibility of learning something valuable, which can serve as a basis for future improvement.
  - Bad news is good news when received soon enough.

### **Reflecting on Past Experiences:**

It is important to discuss past experiences with giving and receiving feedback in order to identify what was helpful and what was not. The following are possible questions that may be used to facilitate discussion between yourself and your supervisor /supervisee:

1. What has been your past experience with supervision (as supervisor or supervisee)? How were your expectations met?
2. What has been your past experience with giving feedback (e.g., fears regarding power differential, trust, communication skills)?
3. What has been your past experience in receiving feedback? Either positive or constructive (commonly called "negative")? What are your reactions, how sensitive are you, how open are you? How accurate do you think the feedback has been?

## Criteria for Effective Feedback

Effective	Ineffective
Specific	Global, general Focusing on the abstract
Balanced	Only positive or negative
Constructive	Feedback focused on what went wrong No strategies for improvement
Useful	Feedback focused on behavior that is not modifiable (e.g. focus on students' physical characteristics)
Supportive	Evaluative Right or Wrong
In private	In public Feedback is provided at inappropriate times (in front of clients or colleagues)
Fair	Not based on patterns – only one incident
Honest	Avoiding accurate feedback
Timely	After the fact/delayed
Focused on Behavior	Not focused on behavior Focused on personality
Reciprocal	Focused on giving advice

## **The Authority Theme and Feedback**

Power can function as a vehicle for support

- Supervisors who seek regular feedback from students use their power in a supportive way

Power can be misused

- Students can fear this (highly aware of evaluative nature of supervision)
- Giving only negative feedback is a way of misusing power

Power can be abdicated

- Supervisors can be too friendly and supportive with students (reluctant to give negative feedback)
- Students can keep all their concerns to themselves

## **Supportive Versus Constructive**

Feedback (Kantambu Latling, 1992)

- Supportive Feedback- reinforces a positive
- Constructive Feedback- given when there is a discrepancy between what has been done and what is expected.
- The 3: 1 ratio as one way of ensuring constructive feedback is received and accepted
- Students want constructive feedback but may find it hard to hear.
- Students fear receiving negative feedback. Thinking of this ratio may help.