

# Giving & Receiving Feedback

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**Giving feedback is a verbal or non-verbal process through which a person communicates his or her perceptions and feelings about another person's behavior.** As organizational or group leaders, we want to ensure that feedback is delivered in a helpful and supportive way so the recipient can act on the information without feeling demeaned or attacked. And effective feedback whether positive, negative or neutral, needs to be timely and sincere.

**Evaluative Feedback** - is based on a one-sided judgment about a person's behavior. It can be positive or negative. Positive may produce feelings of satisfaction but without specifics, it doesn't produce growth and understanding. It could raise concerns about the motives of the person sending the feedback. Whenever feedback is negative, the person receiving the feedback can get defensive or withdrawal. Evaluative feedback included labeling, blaming, psychoanalyzing or pontificating.

1. **Positive labeling** - includes praise and compliments. "You are such an outstanding member of the team." "You do such an excellent job." "You are so dedicated and professional."
2. **Negative labeling** - judges the person. Examples, "As a team member, you are very domineering, self-centered, pre-occupied, unprofessional, etc."
3. **Blaming** - assigns responsibility for why things did not go well. Examples, "You didn't follow through and now the whole team is suffering."
4. **Psychoanalyzing** - explains the cause and effect relationships that are not observable. Examples, "During the team meeting, you seemed preoccupied with other things. Maybe at times you don't have enough self-confidence and that keeps you from contributing as much as others. I think it may be a trust issue."

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5. **Pontificating** - pronounces the truth in the matter and offers a lot of free advice. Examples, "With my many years of experience with teams, I can see that you need to become a better listener. No one is going to listen to your concerns unless you show an interest in what they have to contribute."

**Descriptive feedback** - is a clear, nonjudgmental description of another person's behavior. It's observed effects, and the responses of others to this behavior including your own. The feedback is given in a manner that respects the other person's independence and competence. Descriptive feedback invites the other person to broaden his or her awareness, to become reflective, to discuss his or her behavior, and to consider other teamwork skills.

**Example**, "In the early part of the meeting when you were making suggestions, you were clear and concise. You gave good examples. I was right there with you and I could see from the others' eyes and head nodding that they were with you too. However, near the end of the meeting when we were trying to come to consensus, you interrupted several times and kept promoting your idea. At that point I noticed the other team members get quiet and they started to look down on their papers. The discussion stopped and the issue was left unresolved."

# Consider These Tips & Examples When Giving Feedback

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- ✓ **Consider the needs of others.** Feedback should be meant to help another grow personally and /or professionally.
  - **Destructive:** "That is a dumb idea. How am I supposed to pitch that to the boss?"
  - **Constructive:** "I feel uncomfortable with that proposal. My hope would be to include the latest statistics and show how it ties to our staffing patterns."
  
- ✓ **Describe the Behavior or Content.** People are less likely to become defensive if feedback is free of blame or interpretation of the motive. Separate the 'deed' from the 'doer' -reject the behavior while keeping intact the intrinsic value of the person.
  - **Interpreting:** "I suspect your anger comes from your lack of experience, would you agree?"
  - **Labeling:** "That's a very immature response. You'll see the issue more clearly when you are my age."
  - **Constructive:** "I notice that people shut-down or get emotional when you raise your voice and start blaming others."
  
- ✓ **Focus on behavior that can be changed or is pertinent to the concerns of the group. Do not focus on personal style, habits, or personal characteristics.**
  - **Ineffective:** "Your grasp of English is limited and I find I am having trouble paying attention to you."
  - **Effective:** "Could you please speak up a little and more slowly? I am having trouble hearing your comments from where you are seated."
  
- ✓ **Be specific.** To provide insight, the recipient must clearly understand what behavior is under discussion.

- **Generalized:** "I liked your input tonight."
  - **Specific:** "Your recommendations on social media were complete, well thought out and valuable to our deliberations."
- ✓ **Ask permission to give feedback.** Rather than drown someone in all the areas needed for improvement, select one or two specific items to address. Ask for their agreement before you share the feedback.
- "I'd like a chance to respond to that. May I tell you how that comment made me feel?"
  - "Your presentation has really angered me. May I tell you why?"
- ✓ **Give feedback as soon as possible after ineffective behavior is displayed.** When we 'store' feedback, it can become overwhelming resulting in ineffective communication thereby creating major communication barriers.
- Behaviors cannot change if feedback is withheld or comes months after the fact.
  - Don't nag or refer back to previously delivered feedback.
- ✓ **Express feelings directly.** Often people express their own opinion or give advice under the guise of describing their own feelings.
- "I feel you should stop feeling sorry for yourself." (An opinion masquerading as feelings. This comment does not help anyone change behavior.)
  - **Instead,** "I feel so frustrated when you don't return my phone calls. Am I not important to you?" Here frustration is the genuine feeling. You can see how the speaker interprets a failure to return phone calls.
- ✓ **Select an appropriate environment.** The setting may be as important as the message. When giving negative feedback, consider using the employee's own space as long as it's private. This levels the playing field instead of you exerting power over the employee. Or consider a neutral location where you are unlikely to be interrupted. If you call an employee into your office, consider sitting together at a table vs. sitting behind your desk.

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- ✓ **Assume your fair share of the responsibility.** Be open to the possibility that you didn't communicate clearly what you wanted or forgot to pass on a piece of information. "Maybe I didn't get the message across clearly" isn't a matter of being nice but it's a matter of being effective and not making a situation worse.
- ✓ **Provide choices, options, and opportunities.** If you've been clear, compelling (you gave good reasons) and empathetic in explaining how the employee has missed the mark, it's time to explore what he or she can do to perform better. First, ask the employee what he or she thinks should be the next action steps. If you have suggestions, offer them after discussing the employee's thoughts. Lay out a plan, put timelines to action steps and end the session when you are in exact agreement over what should happen next.
- ✓ **Apply a 'coach' approach.** You want your employee to listen to your feedback so create a positive vision of what things could be like if they improve - for the employee, for you, for their department, and for the organization. Help them see the benefits, what change will look and sound like and the impact of their actions.

# When Giving Feedback...

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- ( ) Am I leaving the other person the freedom to reject or accept what I am saying?
- ( ) Am I open to the other person's views and feelings?
- ( ) Am I being considerate of the other person's feelings?
- ( ) Is this the right time to give feedback?
- ( ) Is it possible the other person could get angry?
- ( ) Can I accept this anger?
- ( ) What is the climate in our relationship –warm or hostile? Is it helpful or hindering?
- ( ) What are my intentions? Am I honestly trying to be helpful to the other person?
- ( ) Do I have other motives?

## When Receiving Feedback...

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- ( ) Am I listening closely to feedback and not making excuses for the behavior in question?
- ( ) Am I giving hints that I am open to receive feedback?
- ( ) Am I ignoring the feedback, thus shutting off any other attempts to help me?
- ( ) Can I sort out the motives the other person may have and still be able to hear the positive contribution the person is making?
- ( ) Am I receiving non-verbal gestures, etc that may be feedback?
- ( ) Am I being honest with myself when judging feedback presented to me, even when it may be presented with hostility, or lack of tact, etc.?
- ( ) Am I resisting because I don't want to change my present behavior?
- ( ) Am I willing to consider that I cannot grow unless I am open to constructive feedback and can profit from it?

Adapted from an article by Hanson, P.G. "*Giving Feedback: An Interpersonal Skill*" in J.E Jones Pfeiffer, 1975 Annual Handbook for Group Facilitators.

Additional Resource: Mackenzie, M., Moore, G. *The Group Member's Handbook: Strategies for great groups, meaningful meetings and resounding results*. 1993. Heritage Arts Publishing: Downers Grove, Ill.