

Feedback

What is it?

- Feedback is a type of communication that we give or receive.
- Sometimes feedback is called "criticism," but this seriously limits its meaning.
- Feedback is a must for people who want to have honest relationships. A powerful and important means for communication, feedback connects us and our behaviour, to the world (profession, environment, organisation) around us.
- Feedback is a way to let people know how effective they are in what they are trying to accomplish, or how they affect you.
- It provides a way for people to learn how they affect the world around them, and it helps us to become more effective.

'If we know how other people see us, we can overcome problems in how we communicate and interact with them.'

Rich (1999) - The Healing Journey

Examples

WHAT? - Formal/informal

WHEN? - Planned, unplanned

HOW? - Verbal, written, both?

WHO? - Mentor, personal tutor, manager?

WHY? - Assessment, development formative/summative

Common issues regarding students and feedback

- "Good feedback is easier to give than bad feedback"
- "It's very easy to give feedback to good students, you know, you're doing well, you're great, we all feel happy about that"
- "You do feel a certain amount of empathy towards a person and a certain amount of awkwardness and embarrassment having to bring something up"
- "You want to be nice to them; you don't want to hurt their feelings"
- "It's more difficult with older students, they can be the same age or older than you and you expect them to have a certain standard behind them"
- "If the student thinks their performance is fine and I don't think it's fine there is going to be tension"
- "Once things are written down there is no taking it back and you have to be able to stand over it"
- "I might know that I don't feel she has met this criterion but I would say we talked about this and the student feels they have met the criteria. It's just my way of writing it"
- Each of us is accountable and if you let someone pass onto another ward without giving feedback, in a sense I would consider that negligent"

Taken from Clynes (2008)

Receiving feedback

- Some people experience feedback as pure criticism and don't want to hear it. Others see it as spiritually crushing; a confirmation of their worthlessness, others only want to hear praise and nothing that might suggest imperfection.
- That's not the case for everyone. Some people are willing to accept feedback and seek it out, even if it will be difficult for them because they believe they can grow from it.

Receiving feedback – Negative or Closed style

- **Defensive:** defends personal actions, often objects to feedback being given.
- **Attacking:** verbally attacks the mentor, and turns the table.
- **Denies:** refutes the accuracy or fairness of the feedback.
- **Disrespectful:** devalues the speaker, what the speaker is saying, or the speaker's right to give feedback.
- **Closed:** ignores the feedback, listening blankly without interest.
- **Inactive listening:** makes no attempt to "hear" or understand the meaning of the feedback.
- **Rationalising:** finds explanations for the feedback that dissolve any personal responsibility.
- **Patronising:** listens, but shows little interest.
- **Superficial:** listens and agrees, but gives the impression that the feedback will have little actual effect.

Receiving feedback – Positive or Open style

- **Open:** listens without frequent interruption or objections.
- **Responsive:** willing to hear what's being said without turning the table.
- **Accepting:** accepts the feedback, without denial.
- **Respectful:** recognizes the value of what is being said and the speaker's right to say it.
- **Engaged:** interacts appropriately with the speaker, asking for clarification when needed.
- **Active listening:** listens carefully and tries to understand the meaning of the feedback.
- **Thoughtful:** tries to understand the personal behaviour that has led to the feedback.
- **Interested:** is genuinely interested in getting feedback.
- **Sincere:** genuinely wants to make personal changes if appropriate.

Giving Feedback

- Some people deliver feedback with relish; after all, it's easier to give advice than take it.
- Some use feedback as a weapon, or offer it as tit-for-tat. For some, feedback is a great way to be critical.
- How you deliver feedback is as important as how you accept it, because it can be experienced in a very negative way.
- To be effective you must be tuned in, sensitive, and honest when giving feedback. Just as there are positive and negative approaches to accepting feedback, so too are there ineffective and effective ways to give it.

Giving feedback – Ineffective or negative styles

- **Attacking:** hard hitting and aggressive, focusing on the weaknesses of the other person.
- **Indirect:** feedback is vague and issues hinted at rather than addressed directly.
- **Insensitive:** little concern for the needs of the other person.
- **Disrespectful:** feedback is demeaning, bordering on insulting.
- **Judgmental:** feedback is evaluative, judging personality rather than behaviour.
- **General:** aimed at broad issues which cannot be easily defined.
- **Poor timing:** given long after the prompting event, or at the worst possible time.
- **Impulsive:** given thoughtlessly, with little regard for the consequences.
- **Selfish:** feedback meets the giver's needs, rather than the needs of the other person.

Giving feedback – Effective or Positive style

- **Supportive:** delivered in a non-threatening and encouraging manner.
- **Direct:** the focus of the feedback is clearly stated.
- **Sensitive:** delivered with sensitivity to the needs of the other person.
- **Considerate:** feedback is intended to not insult or demean.
- **Descriptive:** focuses on behaviour that can be changed, rather than personality.
- **Specific:** feedback is focused on specific behaviours or events.
- **Healthy timing:** given as close to the prompting event as possible and at an opportune time.
- **Thoughtful:** well considered rather than impulsive.

- **Helpful:** feedback is intended to be of value to the other person.

Things to consider when giving feedback

What type of feedback would student like/need?

- any particular areas to focus on?
- anything other evidence you need/testimonies?

You may wish to consider:

- Appropriateness of learner level/outcomes, skill acquisition etc.
- The learning environment, issues arising outside of students control
- Learning styles of the student
- Consistency in providing feedback

Tips for giving feedback

- Use the 'positive sandwich technique':
 - Start and conclude with positive aspects of performance
- Feedback on behaviour not the person!
- Offer positive/helpful suggestions- even when student achieving, ways they can improve
- Avoid making personal judgments
- Frame feedback questions to facilitate development/self-assessment- how do you think you did with that task?

(Rich, 1999)