**Receiving and Giving Effective Feedback**

We are continually receiving and giving feedback. Whether explicit through oral or written language, or implicit in gestures or tone of voice, feedback conveys information about behaviors and offers an evaluation of the quality of those behaviors. While it is easy to take feedback personally, strive to perceive it as a learning opportunity. Feedback can reinforce existing strengths, keep goal-directed behavior on course, clarify the effects of behavior, and increase recipients’ abilities to detect and remedy errors on their own. Use the tips below to receive and give feedback effectively.

**Receiving feedback effectively**

* **Listen to the feedback given**. This means not interrupting. Hear the person out, and listen to what they are really saying, not what you assume they will say. You can absorb more information if you are concentrating on listening and understanding rather than being defensive and focusing on your response.
* **Be aware of your responses**. Your body language and tone of voice often speak louder than words. Try to avoid putting up barriers. If you look distracted and bored, that sends a negative message as well. Attentiveness, on the other hand, indicates that you value what someone has to say and puts both of you at ease.
* **Be open**. This means being receptive to new ideas and different opinions. Often, there is more than one way of doing something and others may have a completely different viewpoint on a given topic. You may learn something worthwhile.
* **Understand the message**. Make sure you understand what is being said to you, especially before responding to the feedback. Ask questions for clarification if necessary. Listen actively by repeating key points so that you know you have interpreted the feedback correctly. In a group environment, ask for others’ feedback before responding. As well, when possible, be explicit as to what kind of feedback you are seeking beforehand so you are not taken by surprise.
* **Reflect and decide what to do.** Assess the value of the feedback, the consequences of using it or ignoring it, and then decide what to do because of it. Your response is your choice. If you disagree with the feedback, consider asking for a second opinion from someone else.
* **Follow up**. There are many ways to follow up on feedback. Sometimes, your follow-up will simply involve implementing the suggestions given to you. In other situations, you might want to set up another meeting to discuss the feedback or to re-submit the revised work.

**Giving effective feedback**

Prioritize your ideas. Limit your feedback to the most important issues. Consider the feedback’s potential value to the receiver and how you would respond – could you act on the feedback? As well, too much feedback provided at a single time can be overwhelming to the recipient.

* **Concentrate on the behavior, not the person**. One strategy is to open by stating the behavior in question, then describing how you feel about it, and ending with what you want. This model enables you to avoid sounding accusatory by using “I” and focusing on behaviors, instead of assumed interpretations. Example: “I haven’t seen you in class in for a week. I’m worried that you are missing important information. Can we meet soon to discuss it?” Instead of: “You obviously don’t care about this course!”
* **Balance the content**. Use the “sandwich approach.” Begin by providing comments on specific strengths. This provides reinforcement and identifies the things the recipient should keep doing. Then identify specific areas of improvement and ways to make changes. Conclude with a positive comment. This model helps to bolster confidence and keep the weak areas in perspective. Example: “Your presentation was great. You made good eye contact, and were well prepared. You were a little hard to hear at the back of the room, but with some practice you can overcome this. Keep up the good work!” Instead of: “You didn’t speak loudly enough. However, the presentation went well.”
* **Be specific**. Avoid general comments that may be of limited use to the receiver. Try to include examples to illustrate your statement. As well, offering alternatives rather than just giving advice allows the receiver to decide what to do with your feedback.
* **Be realistic**. Feedback should focus on what can be changed. It is useless and frustrating for recipients to get comments on something over which they have no control. Also, remember to avoid using the words “always” and “never.” People’s behavior is rarely that consistent.
* **Own the feedback**. When offering evaluative comments, use the pronoun “I” rather than “they” or “one,” which would imply that your opinion is universally agreed on. Remember that feedback is merely your opinion.
* **Be timely**. Seek an appropriate time to communicate your feedback. Being prompt is key since feedback loses its impact if delayed too long. Delayed feedback can also cause feelings of guilt and resentment in the recipient if the opportunity for improvement has passed. As well, if your feedback is primarily negative, take time to prepare what you will say or write.
* **Offer continuing support.** Feedback should be a continuous process, not a one-time event. After offering feedback, make a conscious effort to follow up. Let recipients know you are available if they have questions, and, if appropriate, ask for another opportunity to provide more feedback in the future.