



Giving and Receiving Feedback

Feedback is an important part of our communication process. Without feedback we don't know when we've done something well or could perhaps improve upon something. Many people find it much easier to give feedback when it is positive than when it is negative. Both positive and negative feedback is useful because it helps us become aware of ourselves, to determine the consequences of our actions and to change or modify our behavior.

Giving and receiving feedback are skills that can be learned and once practiced, can be extremely useful. This article focuses on individual feedback – suggestions on how to give it and how to receive it.

Giving Feedback

1. Be descriptive not prescriptive when giving feedback. It is helpful to describe as objectively as possible what you saw the person do or heard the person say.
2. It is important to stay away from labels that are unclear or ambiguous. Words such as “unprofessional” or “irresponsible” are not descriptive.
3. Be exact in the words you use to describe. Words such as “always,” “never,” or “sometimes” are not helpful because the receiver will end up defending the exaggeration instead of responding to the real issue.
4. Avoid words that express judgment and put the giver in the role of controlling parent. For example, words like “good,” “bad,” “should,” or “must” become prescriptive and not constructive.
5. Don't give someone feedback when you are angry.
6. Don't give some feedback when the other person is not ready for it.

7. Speak for yourself when giving feedback and don't defer to an absent or anonymous person.
8. Direct the feedback at modifiable behaviors, not at something which the receiver has little or no control over.

When expressing feedback use "I" statements in order to describe how the behavior is effecting you. For example:

"When you *(describe a behavior that you observe in the other person)* **I feel** *(one or two words that describes a feeling)* **because** *(explain as well as you can why you react this way)."*

Here is the example filled in:

"When you *show up late to the staff meetings* **I feel** *frustrated* **because** *it means you miss discussions about our services."*

Feedback is a two-way conversation. The person receiving the feedback needs an opportunity to reflect and respond to what is being shared. Some suggestions on how to receive feedback include:

1. Listen carefully to what the giver has to say and don't interrupt.
2. Make an effort not to be defensive. Evaluate what is being said with an open mind and try to understand it.
3. Seek examples of the behavior at issue to help you understand.
4. Summarize in your own words what you understand the giver of the feedback to be saying. This helps you check for misunderstandings.
5. It is okay to share your feelings about the feedback, being sure to avoid becoming defensive. This can be helpful for both the giver and receiver because it can lead to a better understanding of the issue or behavior at hand.

6. Don't forget to breathe. Receiving feedback can be stressful so remember to breathe. The more relaxed and alert you can be the more useful the feedback can be to you.
7. As the receiver you determine what you can take from the feedback and how you will modify or change your behavior. This may mean giving yourself some time to think about or sort out what you heard.

Feedback is an important communication tool that can improve the way we work with one another. Interacting with our colleagues throughout the Libraries is how we do business. Building the skills to give and receive feedback can help us become more effective in our daily lives.

This information is taken from several sources:

Better Communication Equals Better Reference Service. (A training program produced by the Division of Library Development and Services, Maryland State Department of Education.)

The Leader's Handbook by Peter R. Scholtes. McGraw Hill, 1998, pp 334-337.

The Team Handbook by Peter R. Scholtes, Brian L. Joiner, and Barbara J. Streibel. 2nd Edition, Oriell Incorporated, 1996, pp 6-23 - 6-32.

"Truth in Feedback," by Chris Clarke-Epstein. In Training and Development, November 2001, pp 78-80.

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