

Office of the Ombudsperson

The Gift of Feedback

Provide Constructive Feedback

1. Set clear, consistent expectations from the outset. Articulate/revisit them often.
2. Create a culture of open communication by regularly providing feedback.
3. Consider when, where, and with whom present to conduct conversations. Choose a neutral, private space to ensure no interruptions and set aside sufficient time.
4. Articulate goals/objectives for the meeting. Make feedback specific, sincere, and factual, not personal. Provide concrete examples to support the feedback. Plan for different personalities and the potential impact of your message.
5. Deliver a clear message. Focus on the facts: known expectations, what you observed, impact on others, and what changes are needed.
6. Frame feedback as an opportunity for growth and success. We all have the capacity to learn from our mistakes.
7. Encourage conversation when giving feedback. Do not lecture. Do actively listen, in order to learn and assist.
8. Focus on performance and development, rather than on mistakes made (errors can be illustrative, but not the main message). Avoid being judgmental or negative, rather, invite reflection and encourage dialogue.
9. Model an openness to receiving feedback and toward opportunities for growth and learning for all, importantly, yourself. Demonstrate accountability: acknowledge and own any problem [2].
10. Recognize others' motivations, contributions, and value. A comprehensive understanding will help establish the validity of the feedback offered. We can all benefit from feedback, delivered constructively with thoughtfulness and a positive approach [3].

Feedback can be difficult to give and at times, even harder to receive. Interestingly, managers and supervisors are rarely the recipients of feedback from those whom they supervise. It is not uncommon for ombuds to ask visitors with concerns related to their employment, what they wish their supervisor knew. Rarely have these supervisees shared what could be vital information for their supervisor, in the form of constructive feedback.

In power-differentiated relationships, those with less power, status, or clout can be hesitant to offer upward feedback. Some fear losing favor or worse, some fear retaliation. Similarly, managers and supervisors can be reluctant to offer helpful feedback. They cite being met with defensiveness and an unwillingness to accept the feedback as valid. This ultimately limits employee growth and success.

Well-constructed and delivered feedback can improve morale and productivity, whereas poorly constructed and delivered feedback can undermine the work environment. Studies show that organizations with communicative cultures, often feature bi-annual or quarterly reviews: in other words, there are regular, formalized feedback mechanisms. If good feedback is an essential element of organizational health, how can we deliver feedback – both positive and praising, as well as that where improvements can be made – in a way that the recipient is able to accept and appreciate it as the gift that it is: the gift of knowledge and of opportunity?

Feedback may refer to three distinct types of information sharing: appreciation, coaching, and evaluation. Each serves an important purpose. Each satisfies different needs. Each comes with unique challenges [1]. To maximize its effectiveness, differentiate between the types and get comfortable with giving each as necessary. Be clear about objectives when gifting feedback.

Additional Considerations

Feedback is commonly offered only in annual evaluations. This is often a time of high-stress and unspoken expectation. To increase the likelihood of generating change and achieving desired results, offer feedback in real-time, with greater regularity. Consider initiating constructive conversations by soliciting feedback. Cultivate self-awareness in order to be responsive to feedback received. Ask. Listen. Learn. And do.

[1]. Stone, D., & Heen, S. (2015). *Thanks for the feedback*. Portfolio Penguin.

[2]. FountainBlue's (June 14, 2019) When She Speaks: *Welcoming the Gift of Feedback*. <https://fountainblue.wordpress.com/2019/06/17/feedback-2/>

[3]. Id.