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Dartmouth



Mentor Exchange

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## Tips for Giving and Receiving Feedback

1. Know what to ask for; be specific in your request
2. Prepare your sources; to get more than “you did a nice job,” you need to alert your sources (your mentor and others) to the specific feedback you want
3. Place clear boundaries around the feedback
  - Let people know what you want and how much feedback you want to hear at one time. If you fail to define precisely what you want, you run the risk of hearing too much. Once that happens, it’s easy to get defensive. You might shut down and stop listening, or even lash out at someone trying to share the “truth” as they see it. Either way, it might be difficult for the person to be candid with you in the future
4. Make it as painless as possible for the other person
  - Just listen, don’t quibble. Don’t defend yourself. If you want feedback, you must accept that what someone tells you is “true” from their perspective. You don’t have to believe it or act on it, but you must listen openly. Ask questions to make sure you understand.
  - If you aren’t getting helpful feedback, ask specific behavioral questions that can be answered with simple facts or “yes” or “no”: Did I interrupt anyone? Whom did I interrupt the most? Did I get everyone’s input? Whom did I leave out?”
  - Keep asking “What else?” until they tell you “That’s all”
  - Assume good intentions, and that the person values and wants to improve your relationship, even if the feedback expresses temporary dissatisfaction
5. Be accepting
  - Accept the impact of your behavior as reality for the other person. You don’t have to agree with it
  - Don’t reject first impressions from new people. They are valid, important, and can provide some useful data you wouldn’t otherwise have
6. Focus on the future
  - Ask for specific advice on what to do differently and what to repeat going forward
  - Thank people. Keep them willing to give you more

- Try out some suggestions, and make it visible. Let people know how their feedback was helpful

## TIPS FOR GIVING FEEDBACK EFFECTIVELY:

The “gift” of objective, honest feedback is among the most valuable things that you and your mentoring partner can provide for one another. Effective feedback can do many things:

- Honor competence and reinforce behaviors you are looking for
- Help align expectations and priorities
- Fill gaps in knowledge
- Let people know where to take corrective action
- Alleviate fear of the unknown

As a mentor, sometimes you will be providing direct feedback yourself. You can also play an equally important role by motivating your partner to embark on his/her own search for additional feedback; it doesn't all have to come from you. You can provoke your partner's natural curiosity and launch him/her on a search for more first-hand unfiltered information priming the pump with questions such as:

- How good do you think your skills are? What have other people said about your skills?
- How much do you really know about what your peers or your internal customers think about you?
- What can you do to be sure that you have a current, objective gauge on your abilities?

When you provide feedback, keep in mind the following:

- Highlight the consequences of what you have observed or heard so your partner understands why your feedback is important. Try to create connections between their actions, how others reacted, and the likely consequences for them personally
- If your partner seems to be resisting your message, or starts defending him/herself, maybe you're trying too hard to convince them you're right. Try stepping back and framing your observations as an opinion to consider. *“This is my view of you. I want to make sure you have a good view of how I see you, then check with some other sources.”* Remember, your goal is to improve their understanding, not to provide them with “the truth.”

Material in this section has been adapted with permission from "Feedback Toolkit," Rick Maurer, Productivity Press, Portland OR, 1994, and "Development First," David B. Peterson and Mary Dee Hicks, Personnel Decisions International, Minneapolis, MN, 1995.