



Guidelines for Self Development & Feedback

Advice for continuous self development and crucially how to give and receive feedback

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1. Guidelines for Continuous Self Development & Feedback

Effective self development relies on a number of key issues

- Understanding who we are and being able to be self critical and self aware
- Being honest about what we enjoy and what we don't enjoy
- Being honest about what we do well and what we do less well
- Being honest about the level of commitment we can give to "off the job" learning and development
- Continually revisiting 2,3 & 4 as these change throughout our life
- Tailoring our career ambitions to that which most closely matches our personality, our natural abilities and our personal circumstances
- Constantly seeking to improve both in our areas of strength and areas of weakness
- Using the power of the resources and people around us to achieve our goals to the mutual advantage of ourselves, those we have contact with, and our employers and families

One of the most powerful tools in self development is **feedback** and the ability to give and receive constructive feedback. This is not always easy to do well. The following provides a guideline to assist in this valuable area.

2. Giving and Receiving Feedback

This document describes what is meant by feedback and will focus on situations where you will be given, and where you will give, feedback. It will also explain how you can 'use' the feedback you have been given for future purposes. We will focus on the feedback you will receive in all aspects of your role at work and may also be useful in your private life.

3. Definitions

Feedback is not disapproval, criticism or a personal attack. It is given so that you can improve your abilities. Furthermore, when feedback is constructive and consistent and is given by someone in an informed position it is very useful.

Feedback is a way to let people know how effective they are in what they are trying to accomplish: it provides a way for people to learn how they affect the world around them. Feedback can help us see where we can improve our written communications and in relation to presentations. Furthermore feedback can also inform us about how other people perceive us, and we can use this information to improve our personal impact, communication and interaction skills.

Although receiving fair and valid feedback that is presented in a constructive manner can be very instructive and helpful, most of us find critical feedback difficult to receive. It is hard to keep a non-defensive and open attitude, as the implication is that we are flawed or wrong in the way we are doing something. However, a defensive reaction to feedback may reflect a feeling that it may be partially accurate or simply misunderstood and requires further explanation; otherwise we would simply dismiss it.

4. Giving and Receiving

When you give a presentation be it in a one-to-one meeting or present to a group at a meeting, or if you produce a particular written document such as a business plan, it will be helpful for you to ask your manager or colleagues to give you feedback. However, when you are giving feedback to someone else you should be aware of the ten points below.

A. Giving Feedback

- The more immediate the feedback, the more helpful it will be.
- Be descriptive rather than judgmental: accurate, simple, clear, vivid and specific.
- Direct praise or criticism towards performance in behavioural terms, i.e. to what the person did or how they did it rather than who they are.
- Be supportive, not authoritarian or dogmatic – encourage participants to contribute their views.
- Be fair and reasonable, supporting judgments with evidence from observations.
- Be positive as well as negative and keep eye contact when you are doing both.
- Offer feedback only for actions/ behaviours which can be changed, and are related relevant assessment criteria.
- Don't compare the person's behaviour with that of others.
- Restrict feedback to what can be absorbed and understood at one time and discuss/agree alternative approaches.
- Do not apologise for your feedback when it is made in good faith and supported by evidence.

Using Questions

Giving and receiving feedback will be more effective in a situation characterised by rapport between the parties which encourages the expression of genuine views. Establishing such rapport is dependent upon the relationship which has been developed between the people, but it can be assisted by skill in selecting and phrasing appropriate statements and questions. So, using the right kind of questions is vitally important. Successful questioning necessitates the person being questioned to think and to talk openly without feeling under pressure. The most appropriate type of questions for this purpose are open questions. Some examples are given below.

Open Questions

- How do you think/feel that went and why...?
- What worked well/ not so well and why...?
- What do you anticipate...?
- What might you have done differently...?
- How do you think that....?
- How do you evaluate....?
- To what extent does this?
- Explain to me how?
- Tell me about?
- Describe to me how?
- Can you tell me why?
- To what do you attribute?
- What importance does this have in relation to?

B. Receiving Feedback

- Listen to the messages underlying the feedback.
- Try not to react by becoming defensive or launching a counter-attack.
- Avoid flippancy or attempts to change the subject.
- Do not caricature the criticism by over-reacting.
- Do not infer that the critic has some ulterior, hostile motive.
- Convey to the other person that you understand the point of the criticism, and indicate a willingness to work together towards a solution or improvement.
- Accept praise graciously - don't deny it.
- Ask for clarification if you need to.
- Ask for help in considering alternatives if you need to.
- Remember the feedback giver is only trying to help you!

5. Ways to Give and Receive Feedback

The information that follows covers four main areas: negative and positive ways to give feedback and negative and positive ways to receive feedback.

Negative Delivery of Feedback

- **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.

Positive Delivery of Feedback

- **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 not to insult or demean.
- **Descriptive:** Focuses on behaviour that can be changed, rather than personality.
- **Specific:** Feedback is focused on specific behaviours or events.
- **Good 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.

Negative Ways of Receiving Feedback

- Defensive: Defends personal actions, frequently objects to feedback given.
- Attacking: Verbally attacks the feedback giver, 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 effect.

Positive Ways of Receiving Feedback

- 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: Recognises 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.

6. Summary

Basic Guidelines for Giving and Receiving Feedback

- Offer feedback on observed behaviour, not on perceived attitudes
- Give information, not opinion.
- Offer descriptions of what you saw and how you felt, rather than judgments.
- Focus on behaviour that can be changed.
- Choose the aspects which are most important, and limit yourself to these.
- Keep the messages simple.
- Ask questions rather than make statements.
- Allow the receiver to reach his/her own conclusions.
- Set the ground rules in advance.
- Comment on things that an individual did well, as well as areas where they might improve.
- The receiver must be empowered by the process.
- Feelings of inadequacy or incompetence can lead to humiliation.
- Be specific - give concrete examples.
- Observe everyone's personal limits.
- Too much feedback can overload people.
- Before starting, consider the potential value to the receiver - If there isn't any then it may be best to reconsider giving it.
- Clarity - be clear about what you want to say.
- Make use of good eye contact when giving positive and negative feedback
- Be descriptive rather than evaluative.



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