

Kwantlen Counselling Services Present ...

An Introduction to Giving and Receiving Feedback

During your lifetime, and especially while you are in school, you will give and get plenty of feedback. Feedback takes different forms: criticisms and complaints, marks and grades. There are all kinds of opportunities for feedback (think beyond your courses and consider life in general) and it doesn't always have to be negative or evaluative. In fact, the term "feedback" is borrowed from rocket engineering: a rocket sent into space containing a mechanism sends signals back to Earth; on Earth, a steering apparatus receives these signals, and makes corrections if the rocket is off target, thus correcting its course. Whenever you are learning new skills or behaviours, feedback can tell you how you are coming across and how successful you are - it's like holding a mirror up for you. Here are some guidelines on feedback, a complex skill in and of itself.

How to Receive Feedback Well:

1. Manage yourself - stay non-defensive, monitor what's going on inside you, breathe slowly, remind yourself to calm down, tell yourself you can handle it.
2. Watch your body language and tone of voice - remain open and neutral.
3. Ask questions to find out more about what they are telling you; try to find the kernel of truth in what they are saying.
4. Acknowledge and appreciate the information so they will know you are open for feedback.
5. Request permission to clarify intentions: "Can I tell you what was going on for me then?"
6. Ask the other person for suggestions about how to improve the situation.
7. Carefully consider the feedback and whether you might do something differently. If it seems appropriate, make an agreement with the other person and commit to it.

Some Tips for Receiving Feedback:

- ✓ Put negative feedback into perspective. Try to remember that the purpose of it is to learn and to improve. Try not to identify with the criticism, e.g., "you screwed up" is not "you are a screw up". The difference is subtle but important.
- ✓ Choose your response to criticism. If you find some value in it, you can choose the next step; if not, then you can thank the person for their concern and let it go.
- ✓ Avoid retaliation - don't immediately turn the focus on to the other person.
- ✓ Validate their perception - if you can see why they might think the way they do, say so: "I can see how you'd think that." This defuses some of the anger and opens dialogue.
- ✓ Validate their emotions - if you can see the other person is upset, acknowledge it with comments like "You're really concerned about this" or "I can see this has upset you".
- ✓ Listen and wait - before you respond, let the person finish what they are saying. If you jump in too quickly, they will feel blocked and may escalate. Listening to criticism doesn't mean you have to agree with it. Take the criticism *in*, don't take the criticism *on*.
- ✓ Agree with any part of it that's true. If the other person is right, then admit it. Again, this will help defuse the situation and open the exchange for an honest discussion.
- ✓ Ask for clarification, especially with indirect or nonverbal criticism. For example, in

response to a dirty look, you could say, "I'm not sure what that look meant". With this, you show you won't respond to communication for which they won't take responsibility.

- ✓ Don't try to change their mind. You can't control what people think. They have a right to their opinions. Don't keep justifying and explaining, hoping they will agree with you.
- ✓ Ask for time, especially if the other person is upset and not ready to listen: "Thanks for telling me. I'd like to talk with you again tomorrow once I've had a chance to absorb it."

How to Give Feedback Well:

1. First of all, make sure it's your message. Don't deliver other people's messages for them.
2. Be clear on your intentions: what are your reasons for giving the feedback? Is it to help the other person or to hurt them (this may be the case if you are angry). The receiver will tend to reject angry feedback in order to protect their integrity.
3. Ask for permission to give the information.
4. Do it as soon as you can; don't carry it around and let it fester. Plus, to be most effective, feedback should be given soon after the event.
5. Give the information in "digestible chunks" (brief, clear, descriptive and specific).
6. Listen closely to what they say (to see if they are receiving what you are trying to send).
7. Be willing to ask for and receive feedback yourself.
8. Offer information, don't ram it at them. Don't keep trying to send the same message.
9. State a preference or make an agreement.

Managing the Defensive Response:

You can expect that when you give feedback to someone, you will probably get a reaction. People are not used to someone being clear about their reactions or needs. They may want to downplay a situation when you have pointed out something they are doing that affects you; they may respond with a justification or an excuse; or they may withdraw or attack you. You can expect this. Your job is to stay non-defensive. It may help to: stay quiet - the other person will have a chance to think about what you said; stay focused - don't let them get you off the subject; and finally, restate your positive intention to work things out with them.

Some Tips for Giving Feedback:

- ✓ Make sure you're talking to the right person.
- ✓ Think before talking - it's easy to get off-track when giving negative feedback.
- ✓ Talk to the individual privately - most people find it embarrassing to get negative feedback in front of others.
- ✓ Include the positive in the message - consider starting with something you like "Here's what I thought you did well ... And here's what I thought could use some improvement ..."
- ✓ Give information, not advice, as people will often resist advice, e.g., "Your shirt has come out" is better than "Tuck your shirt in" as it lets them decide what to do about it.
- ✓ Focus on the behaviour; don't make inferences. Your feedback should focus on what you don't like about their behaviour and not their imaginary, invisible personality traits.
- ✓ Be really clear that you are not judging or blaming them - you are simply trying to let them know what works for you. (When you give feedback, it's really about your preferences.)
- ✓ It's hard to do this. Remember, you don't have to do it perfectly. You can always go back to the person later and say "I didn't handle that very well yesterday" and revisit the issue.