

PRINCIPAL/VICE-PRINCIPAL
PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL

Receiving and Giving Effective Feedback

In working through the appraisal process, appraisers and appraisees are continually receiving and giving feedback. Whether communicated explicitly (through oral or written language) or implicitly (through gestures or tone of voice), feedback conveys information about behaviours and practices and offers an evaluation of their quality. Although it is easy to take feedback personally, participants in the process should strive to perceive all feedback as a learning opportunity. Feedback can reinforce existing strengths, keep goal-directed behaviour on course, clarify the effects of behaviour, and increase the recipient's ability to detect and remedy errors independently. Both appraisers and appraisees can use the tips below to learn to receive and give feedback more effectively.

Receiving Feedback Effectively

- **Listen to the feedback given.** This means not interrupting. Hear the person out, and listen to what they are really saying, not what you assume they are going to say. You can absorb more information if you are concentrating on listening and understanding than if you are being defensive and focusing on your response.
- **Be aware of your non-verbal responses.** Your body language and tone of voice can speak louder than words. Looking distracted and bored sends a negative message and can create unnecessary barriers. Attentiveness, on the other hand, indicates that you value what someone has to say, and puts both of you at ease.
- **Be open.** This means being receptive to new ideas and different opinions. Often, there is more than one way of doing something, and other people may have a completely different viewpoint on a topic. Remain open, and you may learn something worthwhile.
- **Understand the message.** Make sure you understand what is being said to you, especially before responding to the feedback. Ask questions for clarification, if necessary. Listen actively by repeating key points so that you know you have interpreted the feedback correctly. In a group environment, ask for others'

feedback before responding. As well, when possible, be explicit beforehand about the kind of feedback you are seeking, so you are not taken by surprise.

- **Reflect and decide what to do.** Assess the value of the feedback and the consequences of using it or ignoring it, and then decide what you want to do. Your response is your choice. If, after careful consideration, you decide that you disagree with the feedback, you might ask for a second opinion from someone else.
- **Follow up.** There are many ways to follow up on feedback. Sometimes, your follow-up will simply be to implement the suggestions you've been given. In other situations, you might want to set up another meeting to discuss the feedback or to submit revised work.

Giving Effective Feedback

- **Prioritize your ideas and understand their value.** Limit your feedback to the most important issues. Consider the potential value of the feedback to the receiver. Consider how you yourself would respond to such feedback (would you be able to act on it?). Remember also that receiving too much feedback at one time can be overwhelming for the recipient.
- **Concentrate on the behaviour, *not* the person.** One strategy is to open by stating the behaviour in question, then to describe how you feel about it, and to end by stating what you want. This model enables you to avoid sounding accusatory and to focus on behaviours rather than on your assumptions about or interpretations of the behaviours.

Example: "I haven't seen you at our superintendency meetings lately. I'm worried that you are missing important information. Can we meet soon to discuss it?" *Instead of:* "You obviously don't think our superintendency meetings are important!"

- **Balance the content.** Use the "sandwich approach". Begin by providing comments on specific strengths, to give reinforcement and identify things the recipient should keep doing. Then identify specific areas for improvement and ways to make changes. Conclude with a positive comment. This model helps to bolster the recipient's confidence and keeps weaker areas in perspective.

Example: "Your presentation was great. You made good eye contact and were well prepared. You were a little hard to hear at the back of the room, but with some practice you can overcome this. Keep up the good work!" *Instead of:* "You didn't speak loudly enough, but otherwise the presentation went well."

- **Be specific.** Avoid general comments that may be of limited use to the receiver. Try to include examples to illustrate your statements. Remember, too, that offering alternatives rather than just giving advice allows the receiver to decide what to do with your feedback.
- **Be realistic.** Feedback should focus on what can be changed. It is frustrating for recipients to get comments on things over which they have no control. Also, remember to avoid using the words “always” and “never”. People’s behaviour is rarely that consistent.
- **Own the feedback.** When offering evaluative comments, use the pronoun “I” rather than “they” or “one”, which would imply that your opinion is universally agreed on. Remember that the feedback you provide is merely *your* opinion.
- **Be timely.** Find an appropriate time to communicate your feedback. Being prompt is key because feedback loses its impact if it is delayed too long. Delayed feedback can also cause feelings of guilt and resentment in the recipient, if the opportunity for improvement has passed. Also, if your feedback is primarily negative, take time to prepare what you will say or write.
- **Offer continuing support.** Feedback should be a continuous process, not a one-time event. After offering feedback, make a conscious effort to follow up. Let recipients know you are available if they have questions and, if appropriate, ask for another opportunity to provide more feedback in the future.

Resources

Dempsey, J.V., and G.C. Sales (Eds.). (1993). *Interactive Instruction and Feedback*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Educational Technology Publications.

London, M. (1997). *Job Feedback: Giving, Seeking, and Using Feedback for Performance Improvement*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

McGill, I., and L. Beaty (1995). *Action Learning*. 2nd ed. London: Kogan Page.

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