

14 Guidelines for Giving Constructive Feedback

1. Allows for receiver readiness

Has the receiver indicated he is ready to listen and accept the feedback as it is intended? There is little point to giving feedback that won't be heard or will be misunderstood.

2. Is descriptive, not interpretive

Feedback is a description of your perceptions and reactions. Interpreting meanings of another's behavior is often a guessing game, which the other resents. Let him share his own meaning if he's so inclined. If you want to check your perception of his meaning, be very clear that is what you are doing.

3. Covers recent happenings

Generally, the closer the feedback is to the time the behavior occurred, the more helpful it is. When feedback is given immediately, all know exactly what it refers to and feelings about the situation are most valid.

4. Comes at appropriate times

Don't for example, share negative reactions when there are others present who would not understand the constructive intent of your remarks.

5. Includes things that are new

Consider whether the reactions you are sharing are new information to the other. If they are so obvious that he is already aware of them, they won't help much. Telling another what you saw him doing is often not news. Often, what is news is the sharing of how you reacted to what you saw.

6. Is on changeable things

The value of feedback to the other is in being able to modify his behavior if he wants to. Reactions to things that can't be changed are not usually helpful.

7. Is given to be helpful

Consider your own motivation in sharing the reactions. Are you really trying to help the other person gain a useful view of himself? If you are simply angry and wish to express it, say so, but don't present such feelings as feedback.

14 Guidelines for Giving Constructive Feedback (continued)

8. Does not demand a change

Feedback is sharing reactions. It's up to the receiver if he wishes to make a change in his behavior based on the feedback. If you want to ask the person to change, say so, but don't consider such a request as feedback.

9. Is not an overload

If you give another too much feedback or too many things all at once it may be more than he can deal with. He may lose track of all you are saying.

10. Shares something of the giver

Giving feedback can create a sense of imbalance in the relationship. It generally helps the receiver to feel more comfortable and be more active if the giver can share some of his own feelings and concerns as he gives his reactions.

11. Is specific, not general

Be specific by quoting and giving examples of what you are referring to.

12. Checks understanding

Use such behavior as paraphrasing to be sure you understand the meaning of the other's reactions. Watch out for becoming argumentative or taking a lot of time giving the rationale for your behavior, rather than working to understand the other's feedback to you.

13. Asks for feedback about specific things

You can help the giver provide useful reactions by asking for feedback about specific things. This indicates your areas of readiness to receive feedback and helps him be specific rather than general.

14. Shares reactions to feedback

Sharing your reactions to the feedback you have received can help the giver improve his skills at giving useful feedback. It also lets him know where he stands with you on a feeling basis so that the relationship can continue to grow. If he goes off uncertain about your reactions to this feedback, he may feel less inclined to risk sharing them with you in the future.