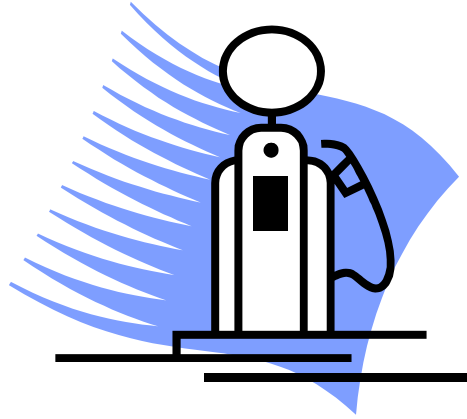


GIVING AND RECEIVING FEEDBACK

Feedback is the fuel that drives improved performance



Imagine you are an experienced pilot flying at night during a storm, but your instruments have failed. You are flying blind. Your radio is out so you can't call the control tower and determine where you are; you can't ask the air traffic controller to tell you your altitude, your direction or the conditions of the runway. The only information you receive is an occasional radio message that says you're doing OK. Are you feeling a bit anxious? We do this to our trainees who don't know where they are, how they're doing or whether or not they're doing the right thing. They certainly don't know if they are producing the results on time or at the correct level of quality, unless they're told.

Feedback is a term used to describe every kind of information returned or fed back into a system, so that the behaviour or performance of the system is adjusted. It provides our participants with information that they are on the right track.

The purpose of giving feedback is to improve performance in the future. How effective it can be, may be judged from some research based in the USA. In this experiment a sports psychologist, Bandura, assigned 80 cyclists to one of four different groups:

- 1) Set performance goals but had no feedback.
- 2) Received feedback but were not set any goals
- 3) Had both feedback and goal setting
- 4) The control group had neither

Results showed that a continuous process of setting goals and receiving feedback outscored the others by almost 3:1. No matter how good participants are, they can always get better.

From feedback we learn, compare what we do to some standard, adjust what we do and learn to do better. It motivates participants by telling them how far they are from a goal and how fast they are progressing towards that goal.

GIVING FEEDBACK

Often faculty and trainees concentrate on the 5% of performance that could be improved rather than good practice, which can leave trainees feeling demoralised and demotivated.

Encouragement is oxygen for the soul

One of the difficulties experienced by trainees is that they are often not used to receiving quality feedback at work. Those that do will often get it annually or before they move on to a new job. It may be worth introducing them to the concepts of feedback, carefully at the start of the course/ attachment.

Ideally the more immediate the feedback, the more effective it will be. By giving feedback as soon as possible after a practical or learning episode, both faculty and trainee will be able to recall the performance and the circumstances, and information will be more concrete on which to build.

There may be some exceptions to this:

- 1) There may not be the opportunity to discuss the feedback privately. Negative feedback in public is counter-productive, leaving the person feeling bad over losing face in front of others.
- 2) The atmosphere may not be right because feelings are running high. It will be difficult for you both to be objective if either of you is in an emotional state.

Guidelines for Effective Feedback

Balanced
Objective
Observed
Specific
Time bound

Balanced

There is something about human nature that makes it easier to find fault with others and more enjoyable to point out their mistakes, than to praise people's success and to value their achievements. Often participants only remember the negative comments they

receive because they somehow block off the positive feedback. It is important, therefore, to offer twice as much positive as negative feedback. Some people go further, emphasising the need for a 'praise sandwich' i.e. two pieces of positive feedback around a suggestion for what could be done differently next time.

Encourage self-appraisal. People are more willing to accept and use feedback when they have recognised their own strength and weaknesses. Start by encouraging them to review their own performance and then build on their own insights.

Objective

Subjective opinions are unhelpful to learning. Describe behaviour, not individual personality or attitudes. Focus on what is said or done and avoid your own personal judgments. Concentrate on areas that participants can do something about. It's frustrating to keep being reminded about something over which one has no control.

E.g. "It would be much better if you had not been doing the job for a while. You've developed some very bad habits"

Observed

There are a number of pitfalls to avoid when giving feedback.

- 1) Hearsay
- 2) Assumptions
- 3) Hidden agendas
- 4) Previous performance bias
- 5) Future expectations

It is important to focus on the here and now and on the observed performance.

Use "I" statements based on your observations of what happened such as "I noticed that.." Don't make statements of blame, such as "You didn't" or "You should have.."

Ask questions, don't make critical judgments e.g. "What did you have in mind?" not "That was stupid, what did you do that for?"

Specific

Detailed information is more likely to reinforce what happened, rather than vague or woolly statements. Be selective. Give as much information as they can use. Too many examples or issues raised will dilute feedback and could lead to complacency or defensiveness.

Time bound

Make sure the feedback is given as soon after a practical or learning episode as possible. The feedback should be relevant to the current learning situation. Constructive comments that offer alternatives on what could be done differently at the next opportunity, are helpful. Discuss it. Don't give the feedback and run. Stay to explore the area in more

detail. Have they taken it on board? Do they want to discuss a plan of action? Be responsive to the concerns of your participants. Don't minimise their feelings, as learning can be an emotional experience.

HOW TO DO IT

Use a simple format:

Ask the learner:

- What went well? (went well)
- What could be improved? (next time)

You then:

- Raise any other good points and areas for improvement
- Summarise

I call it the Went Well/Next Time framework and it can be used to reflect on how a team has managed the resuscitation of a patient with major injuries or the application of a bone plate.

It is helpful for you to establish with individual trainees, early on, that:

1. You expect feedback and want to know when you're helping them to learn and when you're not.
2. When you give feedback, you will expect participants to respond, ask questions and make sure they understand what feedback means.
3. Nobody will give negative feedback of any significance, to anyone, within the hearing of anyone else.
4. You want to know whenever your feedback is not helpful, whatever the reason.

The most helpful feedback defines what has happened and the results of what has happened. Feedback is not useful when it judges the rights and wrongs of performance. One of the problems with using feedback as a means to reinforce behaviour is that people recognise when they are being manipulated and often opt out of the game. An empty "Well done" or indiscriminate praise can be very harmful to the faculty member/participant relationship.

Successful feedback is two way. When you give feedback, either positive or negative, you must give the recipient the opportunity to respond. This is particularly important when giving difficult feedback. When people are put on the defensive, they will focus on

building a defense and justifying their behaviour, rather than concentrating on listening to the feedback and how they can use it.

By separating positive and negative feedback, we stand a better chance of having our feedback heard. Mixing negatives and positives, we risk recipients focusing on the negative feedback.

Remember that your trainees will learn most from how you are rather than what you say. Make sure you ask for feedback from them. It may not be comfortable for you. It is human nature to want to respond in a defensive or dismissive way, but it is essential that you LISTEN and respond in a balanced way. Also, remember that people learn best when they are teaching others.

“You cannot teach a man anything, you can only help him to find it within himself.”
Galileo

RECEIVING FEEDBACK

Asking for feedback from trainees and fellow faculty members is one of the most valuable ways of improving your future performance as a faculty member. It also equalises the relationship between you and the trainee. However, just like giving feedback, receiving it is also a skill. Remember to:

- a. Listen to the person who is giving the feedback
- b. Try to understand their feelings and to accept that what they say is genuine
- c. You don't need to modify your behaviour. Give the feedback serious consideration and weigh up the consequences of changing and not changing.
- d. Express your own feelings to the giver and communicate your decisions.
- e. Tell the giver what they can do that might help you change
- f. Thank the giver for their help.

Receiving feedback can feel uncomfortable, but is well worth the effort.

If encouragement is oxygen for the soul, then let's not make people wheeze and gasp for it.

SUMMARY

1. Feedback is the fuel that drives improved performance. This crucial aspect of training is frequently neglected or handled badly. If you look back at occasions you have given trainees feedback, you will often find that you concentrated on the 5% of performance that could be improved, rather than good practice, which can leave your learners feeling demoralised and demotivated.

1. You should take a structured approach to giving feedback. The **BOOST** framework can work well:

Balanced
Objective
Observed
Specific
Time bound.

2. Went well/next time approach

Ask the learner:

- What went well? (went well)
- What could be improved? (next time)

You then:

- Raise any other good points and areas for improvement
- Summarise learning points

3. Just like giving feedback, receiving it is also a skill. Remember to ask for it graciously and use it wisely.

ACTION POINTS

1. Plan to watch a programme of your choice on the television. During the programme make some notes to provide the director of the programme with some feedback. Use the Went well/Next time framework.
2. Plan to provide feedback for a junior who has recently completed a task or procedure. Use the BOOST approach:
Balanced
Objective
Observed
Specific
Timebound

And the Went Well/Next time framework.

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