

Giving Effective Feedback

CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK

- **Good feedback pinpoints a specific behavior.** To be told that one is “unprepared for work” is not as helpful as hearing, “I noticed that you didn’t have enough copies for all the participants, and the directions for the activity were unclear.”
- **It is focused on behavior rather than on the person.** It is important that we refer to what a person does rather than to what we think or imagine he/she is. “You are disorganized” is more difficult to hear than “You seemed disorganized yesterday.”
- **It takes into account the needs of the receiver of the feedback.** Feedback can be destructive when it serves only your own needs and fails to consider the needs of the person on the receiving end. It should be given to help, not to hurt. It is directed toward behavior that the receiver can do something about. “It really triggers me to see a disorganized workshop” is about you, whereas, if someone said, “With just five more minutes of preparation, I think the youth would have really gotten something special out of that session,” their statement is about the person’s achieving their potential and meeting the needs of the youth.
- **It is solicited, rather than imposed.** Feedback is most useful when the receiver has formulated the kind of question that those receiving feedback can respond to. “Can I give you some feedback?” is a great way to start.
- **It involves the sharing of information rather than the giving of advice.** By sharing information, we leave a person free to decide in accordance with their personal goals, needs, etc. When we give advice, we tell a person what to do and, to some degree, take away that person’s freedom to decide for him/herself. “Based on what I noticed, what do you think you could do differently?”
- **It is well-timed.** In general, immediate feedback is most useful (depending, of course, on the person’s readiness to hear it and the support available from others). The reception and use of feedback involves many possible emotional reactions. Excellent feedback presented at an inappropriate time may do more harm than good.