

Guidelines for Receiving Feedback

Sometimes you might receive feedback from someone who does not know feedback guidelines. In these cases, help them refashion their critique so that it conforms to constructive guidelines (e.g., "What did I say or do to make you feel that way?") When reacting to feedback..

Breathe. This seems simple but it is very effective. Our bodies are conditioned to react to stressful situations as though they were physical assaults. Our muscles tense. We start breathing rapidly and shallowly. Taking full, deep breaths allows your body to relax and your brain to maintain greater alertness.

Listen carefully. Be alert to messages. Don't interrupt. Don't discourage the feedback giver. Practice active listening.

Ask questions for clarity. It is important to understand the feedback. Don't pretend to get it if you do not. Ask for examples and specific data that will help you understand the person's reaction. ("Can you describe what I do or say that makes me appear aggressive to you?" Can you give me an example of a recent interaction?")

Watch for the tendency to give PLEs ("perfectly logical explanations) or to rationalize. There may be a need to clarify misunderstandings; however, watch for defensiveness here.

Respond non-verbally. Your non-verbals should reflect your willingness to hear the information. Make eye contact, have open body language, etc.

Acknowledge valid points. Don't deny, argue or negate their input. Agree with what is true or with what is possible. Acknowledge the other's point of view ("I can understand how you might get that

impression.") and try to understand their reaction. Agreeing with what is true or possible does not mean you are agreeing to change your behavior. Agreeing with what is true or possible also does not mean agreeing with any value judgment about you. For example, you can agree that your reports have been late without agreeing that you are irresponsible or a "slacker."

Make agreements, if you can commit to them. If the person is asking for a specific behavior in the future, consider if this is something you can do and want to do. If you are clear at this point, make an agreement. Or, you may not be able to do exactly what is requested but you can negotiate something that will get to the person's underlying need.

Take time to sort out what you heard if needed. Sometimes we put an undue burden on ourselves by thinking we must respond immediately. You may need time to sort out the information before responding. It is reasonable to ask the feedback giver for time to think about what was said and how you feel about it. Make a specific appointment for getting back to the person. Don't use this time as an excuse to avoid the issue. ("The work relationship is important to me and I want to think more about what you are saying. Let me think about it for a few days. Let's get back together _____.")

Thank the giver for the feedback.