

dismantling racism

2013



a
workbook
for
social
change
groups

dRworks

www.dismantlingracism.org

giving feedback

■ adapted from Arnold, Burke, James, Martin, and Thomas,
Educating for a Change, 1991, Toronto, Ontario: Between the Lines, pp. 130-131

Critical feedback is about taking and offering a shared responsibility for learning for the whole group – what worked, what didn't, how the problem could have been approached in other ways. Critical feedback is not about judging skills, knowledge, and understanding or about hurting feelings. Our habit is to say what we like publicly and what we dislike privately and to someone else. This makes it very difficult to learn from our experience and mistakes. It also creates a climate of distrust. Critical feedback is a tool, which should be used strategically. Because we work in organizations that must think critically, we sometimes have difficulty knowing when critical thinking should be used and when it becomes important to offer support, regardless of the circumstances. Approval and affirmation are as important as criticism; both should be offered at appropriate times.

To give constructive feedback:

- **talk in the first person and avoid generalizing** – “I felt . . .” or “When I heard you say . . . , I had this reaction” show that you are speaking for yourself and avoiding general or global conclusions.
- **be specific.** Focus on the particular action or statement. Avoid saying things like “You always . . .” or “You keep on . . .” and give a specific incident or example.
- **challenge the idea or action, not the person.** Stick to the actions or behaviors that a person can do something about.
- **combine recognition of what worked with a challenge to improve.** Be as specific as possible about what worked and speak to the reasons it worked.
- **ask questions to clarify or probe the reasons.** Assume that people have a reason for what they do, and ask them to explain it so you can give more credible feedback.