

## Tips for Receiving Feedback

Your powers of self-perception only go so far. People around you notice things, both good and bad, which you are unaware of, and you might learn from their input. There is a “virtuous circle” of feedback whereby the more you actively seek it out, the more improvements you make and the better your feedback gets. Here are some key points to receive feedback (particularly negative or unexpected feedback) graciously.

### **1. Have an open mind**

Don't anticipate what is going to be said, and try to suspend judgment. After all, in learning the views of the feedback provider, you learn about yourself and how your actions are interpreted in the world.

### **2. Listen actively**

Make eye contact with the speaker, and give them your full attention. Don't interrupt. Ask probing questions to clarify your understanding.

### **3. Don't get defensive or try to justify your actions**

Telling the person why their feedback is wrong will not work. Arguing, justifying your position and denial are all powerful negative emotions, making the conversation more challenging than it need be. The only way for the conversation to go is downhill, with tempers flaring and insults flying.

### **4. Focus on the facts**

Although the feedback might feel like a personal insult, challenging your whole identity, keep some perspective. The feedback relates to specific instances, in one part of your life AND now you know about it, you have the opportunity to do something about it.

### **5. Respect the other person**

It has probably taken a lot of courage for someone to give you feedback, even if you have requested it. Remember, we all have different perspectives, and just because theirs does not match yours, doesn't mean it is invalid. Seek clarification if you disagree with some aspects.

### **6. Don't over-react and get emotional**

Sulking, arguing or withdrawing from the person giving the feedback is childish. If need be, give yourself some space from the person, allowing you to calm down and deal with the feedback, and person, as a rational adult.

**7. Don't keep going over it**

Going over feedback again and again will not make it clearer or easier to understand, particularly if the feedback is less than glowing. Avoid the temptation to re-enact the conversation to a friend as this only makes you feel ten times worse. It's OK to talk about it with someone else, but make sure you're emotionally detached first.

**8. Put the feedback into context before responding**

Feedback sometimes tells you more about the person saying it than it does about you. For example, a person who says you never praise their work may be used to having daily feedback or might have difficulty evaluating their work themselves. Teaching this person to give themselves "marks out of ten" for their own work may be a better approach than simply praising them in an ad-hoc way. In the long run, you'll be giving them a more powerful boost to their self-esteem

**9. Thank the person for their feedback**

Even when you don't agree with everything that has been said, there will be some good ideas – accept them. This shows respect for the other person, and recognises the fact that they have been prepared to help you.

**10. Retain the right to use the feedback as you want to**

Feedback can be a gift allowing you to grow and develop as a person, in a job or in a relationship. But some feedback is downright useless and best ignored. It is ultimately your choice how to act, or not, upon feedback received.

## Other Tips

- Try to control your defensiveness. Fear of hurting you or having to deal with defensive or justifying behaviour make people hesitant to give feedback to another person.
- Listen to understand. Practice all the skills of an effective listener including using body language and facial expressions that encourage the other person to talk.
- Summarise and reflect what you hear. Your feedback provider will appreciate that you are really hearing what they are saying. You are ascertaining that you 'are' really hearing.
- Ask questions to clarify. Focus on questions to make sure you understand the feedback.
- Ask for examples and stories that illustrate the feedback, so you know you share meaning with the person providing feedback.
- Just because a person gives you feedback, doesn't mean their feedback is right. They see your actions but interpret them through their own perceptual screen and life experiences.
- Be approachable. People avoid giving feedback to those who will reject it. Your openness to feedback is obvious through your body language, facial expressions, and welcoming manner.
- Check with others to determine the reliability of the feedback. If only one person believes it about you, it may be just him or her, not you.
- Try to show your appreciation to the person providing the feedback. They'll feel encouraged and believe it or not, you do want to encourage feedback.
- Even your manager or supervisor finds providing feedback scary. They never know how the person receiving feedback is going to react.
- If you find yourself becoming defensive or hostile, practice stress management techniques such as taking a deep breath and letting it out slowly.
- Focusing on understanding the feedback by questioning and restating usually defuses any feelings you have of hostility or anger.
- If you really disagree, are angry or upset, and want to dissuade the other person of their opinion, wait until your emotions are under control to reopen the discussion.