

**"Believe in yourself -
at times you will be
the only person who will."**

A while back you asked me a question. Now is the time to respond with some of what I have learned about feedback and what my present thinking is.

"That was good." "That turned me on." "That wasn't so hot." "That turned me off." Each of the preceding is an example of a very general feedback statement. In teaching, feedback is an on-going process. Usually a person knows when his or her goals have been met and when they haven't.

Most of the time feedback serves you best when you ask for it. Let others know exactly what you want to know. Feedback is most helpful when it is specific. For example, "I like that," is too general. "I like the way you looked at each person in the room at least once during your talk." (Remember Mager? He can work here.) and "I liked the use of inflection; your voice kept me interested.," give more specific feedback.

Negative feedback has questionable positive outcomes. At ROP, a coach once explained the "90 second AC" to me. It is a feedback format. The first 30 seconds identify specific "good things (behaviors)" that the coach has RECENTLY seen in the student's work; the next 30 seconds identify "things to do" (These are more like short term goals that MUST be accomplished to improve.); the last 30 seconds again reinforces the strengths already working for the student. This use of negative feedback stresses specific, achievable, desirable outcomes. Used in this way, negative feedback can be helpful. Dr. Sidney B. Simon suggests that Negative Criticism (feedback) is never helpful in his book with the same title.

Most of the time, feedback gives you, the recipient, information about the needs and comfort zones of the giver. One tool to use when receiving negative feedback that stings in some way is to say, "You could be right, you could be wrong. I'll think about it." This is an assertive skill in action. You acknowledge an openness to growth that says, "Yes, I want to hear what you think.," but you do not permit unnecessary "dumping." Once Muriel James, author of Born to Win, received uncomfortable feedback from her advisors while she was growing through her internship to become a clinical psychologist. Her chief advisor gave her a question to ponder as she thought through the comments of her peers and "teachers." It was "I wonder if by any chance it might be true." This attitude allows the receiver of negative feedback to think through what "is true" and what "is not true."

When giving feedback, the following might be helpful:

- 1. Give feedback only on those things than can be changed/improved. To focus on a part of a person that is "natural" for them and to ask them to change it may not be helpful. For example, there is an "authority" on government grants and give-aways who is on many prestigious talk shows (CNN, CNBC, C-SPAN). He literally bounces. His energy level is three times that of the host. He speaks rapidly. His mind flies from one idea to another constantly searching his "computer" for the best information. To ask him to slow down to please the host would be to impede his genius. Those behaviors are simply part of who he is.**
- 2. Before giving feedback that might sting, ask yourself: "What is my intention? Do I want to hurt, get even, or pay this person back for a real or perceived sting I felt myself?" This caution is especially helpful in relationships. Words delivered in anger may not qualify as "feedback."**
- 3. If you see the need to give negative feedback, then, make sure there is time to talk it through. Give the other person a chance to respond; understand his/her perception. "Hit and run" is inappropriate for intelligent, sentient beings.**
- 4. Evaluations given to students by the teacher, you, can serve as feedback. The Dr. Susan Cummings (ASU) model was adapted by Paul Forgach, Victim Witness Director and trainer for the Tucson Police Department. It asks for the participant to evaluate his/her ideas of "What is a good teacher (cop, etc.)?" and "What are my responsibilities as a student (trainee, etc.)?" Students comment on their ideas of what behaviors/traits make up the "good". Then, they evaluate themselves and the teacher. They also suggest one thing they could do to be a more effective learner and one thing the teacher could do to be helpful to them. This gives the teacher information as s/he attempts to "personalize" for student variability.**
- 5. When asking for improvements/changes, be specific and brief. usually one thing at a time. When a house is built, the foundation comes first. The foundation for the teacher is the trust-respect issue. Without trust/respect, feedback goes in one ear and out the other. Only angry or "I don't care." feelings can result from feedback given without a mutual feeling of respect. Dr. Bill Cabianca, ASU Director of Counselor Education Program has said, "Trust means that I know (feel) you are not going to hurt me deliberately." As the frame of the house rises, it usually goes up one piece of wood at a time. "Would you consider an attempt to speak more loudly, please?," might serve as a piece of feedback for a beginning public speaker.* (See "Note" on lat plage, please.)**

Remember we are only human. Our condition has included many moments of experiencing negative feedback. Even if the feedback is given with "three things I liked" to one statement of "try this next time," the brain may focus on the "try this." If this happens, please remember this quote from the pearls tossed by my chief advisor, Dr. G.L. Moulton: "When your gut isn't churning, you aren't learning." No matter what feedback teaches. It teaches you about your own values, expectations, wants/needs, hopes, etc. It teaches you about others' values, expectations, wants/needs, hopes, etc. It helps to have a confidant to share "reality checks" with from time to time.

Now, what do you think about feedback? If you see "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner," you'll see/hear Spencer give sound advice on the issue of it matters what you feel. Sometimes you may have to stand alone and re-read the quote that began this essay written in response to the question you long ago placed in your journal. Thank you.

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