



There are many characteristics of worthwhile feedback but the most important is the way in which it is given. The tone, the style and the content should be consistent and provide the constant message: ‘I appreciate you and what you have done and whatever else I say should be taken in this context’. If you wish to give helpful feedback, you should:

### **AS THE GIVER:**

**Be realistic** • direct your comments towards matters on which the person can act. Don’t make suggestions which are entirely outside the scope of what the person can do. Constructive comments can be helpful so long as they respect the other persons individual way of doing things.

**Be specific** • generalizations are particularly unhelpful. Base your comments on concrete observable behavior or materials. Always check your general impressions or inferences against the particular and use the particular in your response. Focusing on behavior implies that it is something related to a specific situation that might be changed. The person should be given sufficient information to pinpoint the areas to which you are referring and have a clear idea of what is being said about those specific areas. Provide examples.

**Be sensitive to the goals of the person** • Just because the other person’s contributions have not met your goals doesn’t necessarily imply that something is wrong. The person produced the work for a specific purpose and you should be aware of that purpose and give your views accordingly. This is not to say that you can’t make comments from your own perspective but that you should be clear when you offer views in terms of your own goals and you should say that is what you are doing. Link your comments to their intentions; listen carefully to what they have to say. If there is a common task goal be careful to ensure that you have a shared interpretation of what that means.

**Be timely** • time your comments appropriately. It is no use offering feedback after the person receiving it has put the work aside and moved on to other things. Respond promptly when your feedback is requested: to be effective feedback must be well-timed.

**Be descriptive** • describe your views. Don’t be evaluative or say what you think the person should feel. Don’t be emotionally manipulative: you are offering your considered views which should have the characteristics described here; it is up to the other person to accept or reject them as he or she sees fit.

**Be consciously non-judgmental** • offer your personal view, do not act as an authority even if you may be one elsewhere. Give your personal reactions and feelings rather than value-laden statements. One way of doing this is to use comments of the type ‘I feel ... when you ...’. Don’t compare • treat each person’s work as their own, not part of some supposed competition with others. Be cautious about giving feedback in a context in which the comments which you give one person will be compared with those of another. Such comparisons undermine intrinsic motivation.



**Be diligent** • check your response. Is it an accurate reflection of what you want to express? Have you perceived the contribution accurately? There is nothing more annoying than to receive criticism from someone who clearly hasn't bothered to pay attention to what you have done.

**Be direct** • say what you mean. Don't wrap it up in circumlocution, fancy words or abstract language.

**Be positive** • say what you appreciate. Don't just focus on what you react negatively towards. Try to find something which is genuinely felt, rather than being positive because you feel it is required.



### **AS THE RECEIVER:**

There is no point in asking others to give you feedback unless you are prepared to be open to it and to consider comments which differ from your own perceptions.

**Be explicit** • make it clear what kind of feedback you are seeking. If necessary, indicate what kinds you do not want to receive. The feedback from others is entirely for your benefit and if you do not indicate what you want you are unlikely to get it.

**Be attentive** • concentrate fully on what is being said. Focus on what the person wants you to know, not on what you would like to hear.

**Be aware** • notice your own reactions, both intellectual and emotional. Particularly notice any reactions of rejection or censorship on your part. If the viewpoint from which the other is speaking is at variance with your own do not dismiss it: it can be important to realise the misapprehensions of others. Some people find it useful to partially dissociate or distance themselves in this situation and act as if they were witnessing feedback being given to someone else.

**Be silent** • refrain from making a response. Don't even begin to frame a response in your own mind until you have listened carefully to what has been said and have considered the implications. Don't use the excuse of correcting factual errors to avoid hearing and resonating with the substance of what has been said. Don't be distracted by the need to explain: if you continue to feel that you need to give an explanation do it later after the feedback session once you are sure you have attended to all that has been said.