

The Gifts of Feedback

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Effective transcultural feedback results from *commitment to our objective and to each other* and *pays attention to the relationship as well as the task*. If the relationship is pragmatic and compartmentalized (more loosely knit), we can place most of our attention on the task at hand. If the relationship is highly defined by factors of authority and harmony (more tightly woven), it will be important to emphasize harmony, respect protocol, use intermediaries, and so forth.

The *Gifts of Feedback* is a set of ten categories or ways of giving feedback that balances the concern with task that those from more loosely knit backgrounds have, with the emphasis on relationship, so important to more tightly woven groups. They are positioned as *gifts* because although the meaning and practices of gift giving may differ from culture to culture, it normally involves respect, reciprocity, and a number of other relationship-building qualities that can be used to reframe feedback as a positive and respectful activity. Here are the ten gifts.

1. Perception and Understanding

Tell the other person what you have seen or understand them to have said or done.

"Understanding" here means what you were aware of and comprehended in the other's words or actions. It does not refer to compassion, emotional acceptance, or empathy, though these may be presented.

Ways to Share Your Understanding

- In a sentence or two it seems to me that you are saying/what you have accomplished is...
- Your key accomplishments/concepts seem to be ...list or quote them]
- I understand that...
- You did/conducted/made/found... [summarize what you understood to have happened].
- This is my picture of what is taking place...
- When you did/said...here's what I heard/saw...
- What else are you saying/have you done?
- Would you anything...?

2. Appreciation or Excitement

Tell what stands out for you or excites you about what the person did or said.

Tell what grabs your attention, what struck you as graceful, elegant, particularly well done or said, or you perceived as effective or on target.

Ways to Express Your Appreciation or Excitement

- I appreciate the fact that you...
- I was excited by...
- I thought I did well to...
- I found... particularly...

Do *not* follow these statements with a "but" and negative evaluation.

3. Information

Share information, data, or facts that you have that pertain to what the other person has done.

In appraisals, contribute whatever data you have that could affect their work or behavior. Ask about the data on which the person based their thinking or performance. Explore whether your data collaborates or conflicts with theirs.

When assessing presentations, communications, written reports, etc., provide any *factual information* in your possession that could support, contradict, or add to what the speaker or writer is saying. Raise questions about the facts that he or she has presented. Cite your reasons for believing differently.

It cannot be said too strongly that the gift of information concerns the realm of *facts*, things that have happened or can be documented, pointed to, and corroborated be evidence you can show.

Ways to Say It

- Here's what I know about the situation ... how does that square with what you know?
- Do you know this (background) information...?
- Here are some facts that have come to my attention ...
- Are you aware of this information...?
- Here's the data I have...
- What are the sources of your information?

It is not your purpose here to bludgeon your listener with facts or make them wrong. If you do so, it is likely they will resist and defend at least interiorly. Offer facts just as you would share any other resource.

Many people in more loosely knit cultures don't give or receive what is called negative feedback because it leads to guilt or blame. In more tightly woven cultures it causes shame, dishonor, or loss of face. By creating a *neutral category* called "information," this gift opens a channel for giving critical information about what is missing or not working in a non-accusatory fashion.

4. Opinion

Openly and frankly share your opinions and preferences as your own.

In this gift you share what you think, feel, suspect, surmise, read between the lines, intuit, would prefer, or advise about what someone has done, is doing, or plans to do.

Preface this gift by asking the individual if they would like to hear your personal opinions.

Ways to Say Your Opinion

State your opinion in the first person to make it clear to the listener that you are the source of what you say.

- Would you like my advice about this?
- I've been thinking that...
- Here are some opinions of my own on the subject...
- I'm not, but if I were in your shoes...

5. Possibilities

Share ideas and suggestions you have for the other's work or performance

Tell them about suggestions, possibilities, and alternatives—anything that would contribute to their performance, task, problem, or communication. In what other way can it be done or said? What else could be done with what they have created? Offer the results of your own brainstorming and get the other person to brainstorm possibilities, opportunities, and alternatives with you. Point to new objectives that have shown up as a result of what the person has done.

Label this feedback clearly so that the other person knows you are *offering* possibilities, not insisting on them.

Ways to Open Possibilities

- When I heard what you said/were doing, the idea struck me that ...
- Here are possibilities that I see... What do you see?
- Have you thought of trying/saying it this way...?
- Would this be an alternative...? What do you see in it?
- That reminds me of... [range of possibilities]
- Would this work...?
- Here is something I/you/we could do with that ...

6. Experience

Tell about you experience with activities or work similar to the recipient's.

This is a gift of storytelling. Tell what you (or others) did and what happened as a result of being in similar projects, activities, or circumstances.

To avoid moralizing:

- Label what you say as simply your experiences. Tell it as factually as possible, separating specifics and details from your interpretation and judgement.
- Invite the recipient to construct their own questions and draw their own conclusions.
- Invite them to interview you and ask their own questions about your story.
- Tell third-party experiences only as an invitation to investigate for one's self. Anything else is gossip.

Ways to Introduce Telling Your Experiences

- "Let me tell you what happened to me when I did/said THAT (or was in the situation), and see what you think..."
- "I have some insights/conclusions/assessments about... Would you like to hear how I came to them?"
- "This is what happened to... You could probably get more and better information from him/her."

7. Clear Expectations

Be clear about what you mutually agreed upon in the past or are now asking other person to do.

In assessing past behavior or performance, review performance in light of objectives mutually agreed upon. When you are seeking to improve a person's performance or demanding or negotiating changes for the future, follow these steps:

1. (Re)state specifically what it is you propose(d) to achieved.
2. Show how the past behavior did and did not contribute to it.
3. Agree on both the (new) objective and the means and measures for accomplishing it.
4. Make sure you both understand the same thing. The skills of active listening and "Ask and Tell" are critical here, though they are useful for all forms of giving and getting feedback found in this chapter.

In more tightly woven cultures, contracts and agreements do not have the same finality. A person may agree with you without agreeing to what you ask. They will change agreements for what they think will please you or satisfy other important relationships. If you want such person to produce a specific outcome or use a specific approach, insist on a combination of benchmarks and spot checks. Break the objective into measurable stages with deadlines

Ways to State Expectations Clearly

- We agree that...
- Here's what I expect(ed)... Do (Did) you agree to...?
- Specifically, I am requesting you to...
- I ask that we now decide on how/what...
- Here's what I asked... Here's what you promised...
- Can you tell me how you understand what we agreed on...?

The more loosely knit the work culture or situation, the more likely it is that expectations will be seen as legitimate only on the basis of an explicit previous agreement. A request must be made, a promise given, and the standards must be spelled out in clear detail. Otherwise, saying, "I expected you to..." seems both foolish and unfair. Working together is mindsharing, not mindreading.

8. Creative Questions

Raise questions that clarify the content or direction of the recipient's performances.

Though good questions are often more valuable than answers, humans are more prone to giving opinions and answers even when asking questions. In addition to what you learned in "Ask and Tell", here are more useful lines of questioning:

How to Question Creatively

1. Ask questions that continue to *unfold the story*, ideas, and possibilities in the recipient's performance.
 - *And then what...? And then what...?*
 - *Do you have other ideas about that?*
2. Ask questions that reveal the logic, time sequence, order availability of resources, etc., in plans and projects.
 - *Which would you do first... or next or...?*
 - *How do you think you can accomplish that...?*
 - *What resources/help can you identify/count on for that...?*
3. Ask questions that highlight the kind of commitment that the recipient is making.
 - *Are you asserting...? (Declaring/proposing/promising/requesting, etc., restate what you believe they are saying.)*
 - *How does that fit with what your commitment to ... or, with what you said before about...?*

9. Support

Offer support, resources, and information, to enable the other person to fulfil their agreements and meet your expectations.

Ways to Offer Support

- How can I support you to do this?
- What resources can I provide you with?
- Are these obstacles I can help your get around?
- Here's what you can expect/look for from me.
- What do you see as my role in this?

10. Acknowledgement

Recognize what each of you have contributed during and after the feedback.

- Acknowledgement adds appreciation to the other gifts of feedback. It may be given both publicly and privately.
- Acknowledge the contribution or creativity of the person to whom we are giving feedback.
- Acknowledge those who have given us feedback.
- Acknowledge those who are the source of our ideas, or who have helped us develop them, or assisted in the creation of a project or product.

Use the other person's *name* or address the group directly with "you". Here are some ways to start an acknowledgement:

- Thank you, [name(s)/ group], for...
- [name(s)/group], I appreciate/am grateful for your ...
- [name(s)/group], You have helped me /us by ...

Be factual, and tell the *history* of what the group or individual has done.

Be *specific*. Acknowledgement is only as effective as it is specific. "I got some ideas from (you) Terry" is not as effective a, "*I am particularly grateful to (you) Terry for the information on how to synchronize the visual with the audio.*"