

THE FEEDBACK STAIRCASE

Principles for giving and taking feedback

RULES FOR GIVING AND TAKING FEEDBACK

There are certain requirements associated with feedback. The person giving the feedback describes his reactions to the other's behavior. The recipient decides if and how he/she wants to use this information.

Feedback is a way of helping others to become more effective. It is not something that you use for your own needs to put others in their place. Neither should it be given in the form of a reprimand. Feedback is a means of making a person or group aware of how the person's or the group's behavior affects you.

10 Rules

1. Give feedback directly to the person/group and not by some other indirect route.
2. The person giving the feedback should say "I", and not "We" or "One". Let others speak for themselves, don't do it for them.
3. Describe the behavior as experienced by you and its effect on you. Don't make judgements. Don't say; *"You are careless"* instead say *"You didn't post the letter I asked you to."*
4. Give specific rather than general feedback. Generalizations are not a basis for change. Not *"You should take more care over your appearance"*, but *"Your trousers could do with a pressing"*.
5. Feedback should be aimed only at behavior which the recipient can do something about. There is no point asking someone to stop stuttering or commenting on his/her accent.
6. If possible, ask the recipient to tell you how he experienced your feedback. Listen to what he has to say.
7. Give feedback when it's most effective. If feedback is given directly after the "event", it will have a much greater effect than if given several weeks later. Instead of saying *"Last week you were late every day"*, try: *"When you turn up late for work, as you are now, it makes things more difficult for me"*.
8. Give only as much feedback as is necessary. Too much feedback can make the person receiving it resentful and unreceptive and lead to a deadlock.
9. Feedback which is welcomed is received and accepted better than feedback forced on the recipient.
10. The recipient should have the opportunity to check the content of the feedback with others.

THE FEEDBACK STAIRCASE

Receiving feedback can be as difficult as giving it.

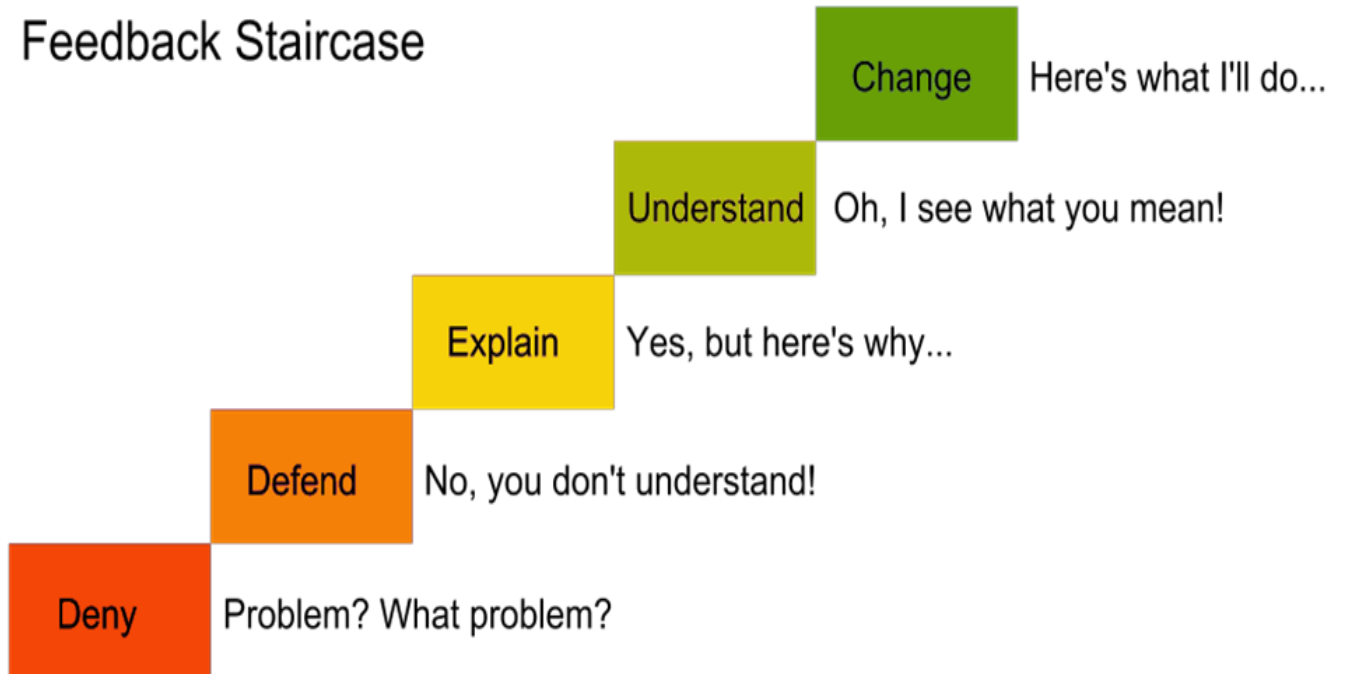
Positive feedback can embarrass us and can cause us to try to play down our own importance by waving aside commendatory words with expressions such as “it was nothing” etc.

Negative feedback often triggers a need to explain or defend oneself since your own understanding of the situation naturally differs from that of the sender of the feedback.

So that lines of communication are kept open and further feedback is encouraged, it is important to make an effort to listen to the feedback provided. If we do this, we can show that feedback is welcome, even if it can be uncomfortable, and we also show the sender that we respect his response faced with our behavior.

Here, listening means the same as being quiet, looking at the person and trying to understand what he wants to say. Once we have received the feedback, we can, through dialogue, clarify any misunderstandings.

The various ways of receiving feedback can be illustrated using the model to the right:



There is a good way of providing feedback which is called the “I” message. It is called this because the person who opens the discussion bases it on himself and gives feedback in the “I” form.

Imagine yourself in the situation where you have been made to wait half-an-hour for a man/woman with whom you want to be good friends. Unfortunately, it is not the first time you have been kept waiting. You are both disappointed and angry, and would perhaps prefer to pick an argument by accusing him/her of being “thoroughly inconsiderate”, etc.

Instead, you apply your knowledge of positive feedback and say something like:
“When you turn up this late, I feel concerned and worried. It makes me feel that you’re not particularly bothered about meeting me.”

You have first talked about a behavior, as you see it, in your partner. You have not assessed or criticized this behavior, only stated fact.

Then, using the “I” form, you have said what you felt, which is also a fact and cannot be contradicted.

Finally, you have made known the consequences of his/her action so that he/she has an opportunity to react.

Consequently:

BEHAVIOUR -> FEELINGS -> CONSEQUENCES

One of the best things about the “I” message is that it minimizes the risk of your partner adopting a defensive attitude and reacting with anger or passive aggressiveness, with a deadlock as a consequence. The opportunity for him/her to apologize for being late and to say that he/she meant no ill is greater than if you had replied aggressively. The result is a mutual exchange of feelings.

EXAMPLES OF FEEDBACK

If you now read through the following you will get further examples and an explanation for the “I” message.

If a person has a negative effect on me, should I let him know? If I don’t do so, the other person’s behavior will eventually become my problem. I should also tell a person when he/she has a positive effect on me since if I do so the chances are greater that he/she will continue with whatever it is since he/she knows how his/her behavior affects me.

Remember: “When you...I feel...that means...”

Stage 1

Describe the other’s behavior as clearly as possible:

“When you remained silent this morning throughout the meeting with the manager...”

Stage 2

Describe what you feel:

“...I felt disappointed ...”

Stage 3

Describe the consequences of this for you or the organization:

“...I didn’t have your support and our idea was not adopted.”

Tell the person exactly what you see or hear but don’t judge or assess his behavior.

For example.

“When you drive as fast as this...” (right)

“You’re driving like a maniac, because you are angry with me.” (wrong – judging and interpreting his intent)

For example:

“I didn’t enjoy our day out!” (right)

Not:

“I’ll never get in a car with you again” (wrong – threat)

A positive “I” message can be worth its weight in gold.

“I was really pleased to have your help this morning. I’ll enjoy working with you in the future.”

FEEDBACK AS A CHANCE TO LEARN SOMETHING NEW

One of the most difficult tasks in communication with other people is to be able to take feedback without reacting instinctively. **Feed – back** means being given a response to something one has said or done. Sometimes this is positive, however we are generally less inclined to give praise than to criticize, so most feedback is negatively expressed. This is what we expect and therefore we brace ourselves and incline to defend ourselves from what we feel is an attack.

The professional way to tackle feedback is to see it as a chance to learn something about the impression one makes. Irrespective of whether the criticism is justified or not one can always learn something by asking questions and trying to understand. The last step in the ladder, to change one's ways, is only relevant if you feel that the feedback you have received has taught you something about professional communication.

Giving feedback also requires some thought. General rules can be:

- It should be constructive
- Based on facts and not a personal attack
- Clearly expressed
- Not generalized but expressed in terms of *“I have experienced....”*
- Direct, not via someone else
- Preferably in direct association to the incident

