

12 TIPS FOR CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK

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The essence of feedback: what matters most isn't what you say, it's what they hear!

TIP	INSTEAD OF A SAY B	LISTENER LOGIC
What happened, not what you think it means	A: Tom, you're ignoring my emails. B: Tom, I don't think I got a response to my emails. Did you reply?	Facts are reliable. Interpretations are questionable. The meaning of not responding will be clear when you ask for it. It could be lack of time, not knowing what to say or something else. Unless you're a mind-reader, rely only on what actually happened and ask for what it means.
Specific, not general	A: You're often late. B: You were late four times last week.	Specific lowers resistance. General leads to "No!" . Mark Twain said it: "All generalizations are false, including this one." The more accurate your statements, the less resistance you get. Delete words such as always, never, every, often...
People, not things	A: Cultural differences separate us. B: We are distant because of...	Specify who is accountable. People are responsible for actions. Sentences with impersonal subjects distract attention from who is accountable for the action.
Active, not passive	A: We were not invited to meetings. B: The manager didn't invite us to...	Put the driver in her seat. In passive phrases, the subject (here: we) doesn't actually perform the action. This diverts the feedback from the person it is really intended for (here: the manager).
Positive separated from constructive	A: Honey I love you, but your feet stink. They're cute, it's just that... B: Honey, let's talk about your feet.	The constructive blurs the positive. Moving back and forth leads to mixed messages and confusion. Do positive and then move on to constructive. Otherwise, honey might only remember the constructive. Make it easy and separate the two.
"Have yet", not "have not"	A: John, you have not changed... B: John, you have yet to change...	Tell the mind it will happen. "Have yet" carries the power of change that will happen.
Future, not past	A: You were confusing. B: You could be clearer.	A solution sounds better than a problem. Focusing on the past does not help the mind look for alternatives. Focusing on the future opens the door for change.
"More", not "less"	A: You could be less nervous. B: You could be more confident.	It's hard to do a "don't". It's easier to do a positive action than it is to do less of something. Instead of saying do less, suggest they do more!
"To do", not "to be"	A: You could be more patient. B: You could show more patience.	It is easier to change what we do than who we are. "To be something" relates to our identity, our character, our personality, which can be tough to change. Instead of "to be", use verbs that indicate actions of doing: show, express, develop...
"Can / want", not "should"	A: We should work harder. B: We can/want to work harder.	Motivate. "Should, must, have/need to" are obligations. Obligations remove freedom of choice. This means the feedback will be received as an imposition. Instead, "can, could, want" are heard as possibilities that lead to advantages.
Transition with "because", not "but"	A: Ana, you did such a good job, but you could improve... B: Ana, because you did such good job, you could improve...	Because it's good, let's make it better. When moving from positive to constructive feedback, "but" puts them in opposition. It tells Ana that what is coming is the flipside of a good job, that is, something not good. "Because" keeps the feedback going in the same direction and stimulates improvement.
"How", not "why"	A: You fall behind because you... B: You could keep up by...	"Why" is pennies. "How" is priceless. Why is an interpretation. There are many and they change, which makes them less valuable. But specific ways to improve are harder to figure out and thus very valuable. Tell them how and they'll love you for it!

"A person convinced against her will is of the same opinion still." Dale Carnegie