**Guidance note no. 7 - Giving Constructive Feedback**

It is important to understand the difference between “constructive feedback” and “criticism”.

*Criticism* is negative feedback which often can leave the receivers feeling defensive. They may avoid seeking feedback from the giver, or being involved in the activity, again. It tends to be judgmental which may not help the receivers to improve their effectiveness.

*Constructive feedback* can either be positive or negative. It enables receivers to learn. It fosters growth and development. It tends to give the receiver information which is useful to the receiver for improvement.

Failure to give people negative feedback can result in:

* *No change*

**The skills of giving constructive feedback**

Before you offer any feedback, it is always good practice to ask the person to self-evaluate what he/she has done. Knowing how the receiver perceives his/her performance may be useful to the giver and can make the discomfort of giving negative feedback easier.

**1.** **BE CLEAR** in advance about ***WHAT*** you want to say

***WHY*** you are saying it

***WHEN*** it would be most appropriate to say it

***WHERE*** you are going to say it

**2. Start with the POSITIVE**

Feedback affects self-esteem positively and with a positive self-esteem the individual will be more likely to feel comfortable at looking at personal change. Negative feedback affects self-esteem negatively. With a less positive self-esteem individuals lack the basic confidence to view themselves positively and are more likely to be resistant to growth and change.

A positive self-concept is therefore important for the individual to be (more) open to learning opportunities. If positive feedback is given first, it will foster self-confidence and the receiver will be at his/her most confident to receive the negative feedback. In such a situation the receiver is more likely to be less defensive, more open to listen to negative feedback and perceive it as helpful and constructive leaving the receiver with a more positive self-perception than before.

If the negative feedback is given first, individuals will be left at their least positive and most defensive. Positive feedback given at this stage may not be as readily listened to or accepted and may leave the receiver feeling less positive than before.

Good practice starts with the positive feedback, followed by the negative feedback and then concludes by providing the receiver with a summary of the positive again.

Choosing only positives to give to the receiver or the wrong balance of positives and negatives it is not likely to be completely accurate or hopeful, and it can therefore deceive.

**3. Select PRIORITIES**

It is not always appropriate to share every possible piece of feedback with the receiver. It is appropriate to decide how much feedback the receiver can “take” so that the experience is helpful and useful to him/her. It is also appropriate to select priority areas (the appropriate number of the most important, useful points) and express these genuinely, positively and sensitively.

**4. Be SPECIFIC**

If the feedback is going to be helpful, then it is likely that the feedback needs to be linked with a concrete example or specific situation or event. Saying “That was great” or “It was dreadful” can only be of real use in helping the college to develop if you also explain what it was, which made you reach such conclusions and evaluations.

**5. Refer to practices/processes which can be CHANGED**

Feedback is likely to be of most use if the receiver can use it to improve its performance. Thus, it has to relate to some aspect of their performance about which they have some level of control/voice.

**6. DRAW OUT and OFFER alternatives**

This is particularly important when you are offering negative feedback. To ensure that such feedback is constructive it is usually appropriate to offer, discuss, or draw out alternative strategies which might have been more effective.

In this way the feedback is less likely to be perceived as merely criticism and you have made efforts to combine negative feedback with positive suggestions or alternatives. The receiver is left with something to consider and possibly with something concrete to improve or develop.

**7. OWN the feedback**

You can only speak on behalf of yourself or your team if you are appointed as spokesperson. Hence, any feedback you give can only be from YOUR or YOUR team’s experience, perception, beliefs and values. Other people may think differently to you and thus it is only proper to give YOUR feedback in such a way that the other person clearly understands that the feedback is based on YOUR or YOUR team’s observations, interpretations and conclusions. For example, it might be appropriate to use phrases such as:

It seemed to us that......

The impression we got was......

We would have interpreted that as......

In our experience......

We would have found it more helpful if...…

What we liked about...…

**8. Leave the receiver with CHOICES**

One important objective for all peer reviews is to enable the receiver to accept responsibility for its own actions. The reviewer can model this process by ensuring that providers are left with the opportunity to reflect on what they have just heard about and decide what, if anything, they are going to do as a result. The reviewer can help the colleagues to identify and explore the options that are open to them but for providers, if the experience is going to foster development, they must be left to decide whether or not they are going to attempt to do “things differently”.

Receiver can be encouraged to accept responsibility for the feedback they are to receive if the review gives the opportunity for them to identify the areas about which they would like feedback.

During the process of giving feedback you might ask yourself:

* How do I know that the recipient is receiving and interpreting this feedback as I intended?

It might be a useful check if you ask the receiver to summarise the main points of the feedback, as he/she understands them to be. This then gives the reviewer opportunity to clarify anything which has been misunderstood or misinterpreted

* How do we know that it is a development opportunity for the receiver?
* Is it a two-way process?
* Am I listening to what the receiver is saying?
* Am I encouraging the receiver to share its perceptions?
* Am I encouraging the receiver to give me feedback on my feedback?
* How is the receiver “taking” the feedback?
* How has the feedback left the receiver? Has it been helpful to the college?
* What does the feedback that I have just given on behalf of the team say about us … our beliefs, values, assumptions, prejudices?

The most helpful feedback that you can give someone is often not easy to say and it does need preparing. Giving constructive feedback conveys RESPECT to the individuals in as much as it conveys that you value them, regard them as important and worth spending time with. It also conveys EMPATHY if the feedback is given in such a way that attempts to show that the giver is understanding and sharing the receivers’ perception and “way of working things out”. It also conveys GENUINENESS in that the receivers appreciate the openness of their reviewers, gets to know the “person” behind the role, which enables the development of TRUST. Such qualities are important for the building of effective working relationships with others.

**Receiving feedback**

1. Listen to the feedback without comment. You will hear more if you concentrate on listening rather than explaining or justifying yourself.
2. Ask for clarification at the end. You need to be sure that you understand exactly what your colleague is saying and what evidence the comments are based on.
3. Devise action plans. Specify ways in which you want to change, new ideas you want to try etc.
4. Keep a written record. This can be used for later reflection and action planning.