

SKIDMORE

C O L L E G E

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Skill Building – Giving Feedback

Introduction

One of a leader's responsibilities is to create and utilize a forum for open, constructive feedback. Feedback is communicating to a member or group how their behavior has affected us or other people.

Effective feedback, both positive and negative, is helpful to others. When you give feedback you are offering valuable information that will be useful to another person making decisions about how to behave. Feedback is not criticism. *Criticism is evaluative; feedback is descriptive.* It also, allows us to build and maintain communication with others. Feedback provides the individual with information that can be used in performing personal evaluation.

Characteristics of Effective Feedback

1. It is specific rather than general. To be told that one is "dominating" will probably not be as useful as to be told that "You were not listening to what the others said, but I felt I had to agree with you or you would be angry with me."
2. It is focused on behavior rather than on the person. It is important that we refer to what a person does rather than to what we think or imagine.
3. It takes into account the needs of the receiver of the feedback. It should be given to help, not to hurt. It is directed toward behavior that the receiver can do something about.
4. It is solicited, rather than imposed. Unsolicited feedback is judgment.
5. It involves sharing of information rather than giving advice. By sharing information, we leave people free to decide their own goals, needs, etc.
6. It is well timed. In general, immediate feedback is most useful (depending of course, on the person's readiness to hear it, support available from others, etc.). The reception and use of feedback involves many possible emotional reactions. Excellent feedback presented at an inappropriate time may do more harm than good.
7. It involves the amount of information the receiver can use rather than the amount we would like to give. Too much feedback all at once can overload a person rather than helping.
8. It concerns what is said or done, or how it is said or done, not why. Don't make assumptions about a person's motivations or intentions; that tends

to alienate the person and contributes to resentment, suspicion and distrust. It is dangerous to assume that we know why a person says or does something.

9. It is checked to ensure clear communication. One way of doing this is to have the receiver try to rephrase the feedback received and ask questions.