

## CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK CHARACTERISTICS

### Constructive Feedback is:

1. **descriptive** rather than evaluative. By describing one's own reactions ("I" messages vs "you" messages), the individual receiving the feedback can freely choose to use it or not. Avoiding evaluative language reduces the need for the recipient to respond in a defensive manner.
2. **specific** rather than general. To be told that one is "domineering" will probably not be as useful as to be told that "in the conversation that just took place, you did not appear to be listening to what others were saying, and I felt forced to accept your arguments." Or "When you have something important to say, you sometimes use more words than you need. For example, just now...."
3. **focused on the behaviors** rather than on the person. It is important that we refer to what a person does rather than to what we think or imagine. Thus we might say that a person "talked more than anyone else in this meeting" rather than that the person is a "loud-mouth." The former allows for the possibility of change; the latter is judgemental, implies a fixed personality trait, and may be the perception of only one person.
4. **considers the needs of both** the receiver and giver of feedback. Feedback can be destructive when it serves only our own needs and fails to consider the needs of the person the receiving the feedback. Feedback should be given to help, not to hurt. We too often give feedback because it makes us feel better or gives us a psychological advantage.
5. **directed toward changeable behaviors** which the receiver can do something about. Frustration is only increased when a person is reminded of some shortcoming over which there is no control (e.g., a physical disability).
6. **solicited rather than imposed.** Feedback is most useful when the receiver has formulated the kind of question that those who are observing can answer or when the person actively seeks feedback. For example, "I would find it helpful to know what went well in that session and what would make it go even better next time."
7. **well timed.** In general, feedback is most useful at the earliest opportunity after the given behavior (depending, of course, on the person's readiness to hear it, support available from others, and so forth). The reception and use of feedback involves many possible emotional reactions. Excellent feedback presented at an inappropriate time may do more harm than good.
8. **given in limited amounts** of information the receiver can use rather than the amount we would like to give. To overload a person with feedback is to reduce the possibility that he or she may be able to use it effectively. When we give advice we tell the person what to do, and to some degree take away her/his freedom to decide.
9. **well thought out before being offered.** It is often useful to reflect on one's own "buttons" and their origins before deciding that "the other person" needs to hear your feedback. Getting clear about your own motivations for giving feedback is very useful.

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