E 1.2 Feedback rules

# Rules for giving feedback

Feedback is about is telling a person how you see them without hurting them. Feedback should where possible highlight options for the future. It should therefore only be given if it could be helpful. A number of basic principles need to be respected for useful feedback.

Feedback should always be

* **constructive**, i.e. offer options for the future. For example: "From my experience, it ought to be possible to do this or that here."
* **descriptive**, i.e. you should always avoid judgements and interpretations. Always express objectively anything that you do not like. "I noticed that you did x several times in a row. In my view, this is a little problematic because...."
* **specific**. Faced with generalisations and sweeping statements, the person concerned will not know how to eliminate the problem. Moreover, it is much easier for them to understand the feedback if the incident is described in as much practical detail as possible. In other words not "You don't respond to questions", but "When XY asked you X or Y, you didn't respond".
* worded **subjectively**. It is easier to accept someone's feedback if they are talking about their own observations and impressions and not of those of others. For example "I had the impression..."
* **not just negative**. Always remember that it is difficult to accept criticism. It is therefore easier for someone to accept suggestions for improvement if they realise that the other person has also seen the positive aspects and is not just seeking to criticise. "Sandwich theory" recommends placing any negative criticism between two "layers" of positive comments.

# Rules for accepting criticism

When receiving feedback, the recipient is in a passive role, exposed to what the other says. Even if this is unpleasant, it offers an opportunity to experience how you come across to others.

As a recipient of feedback, you should therefore

* always let the other person **finish what they are saying**. You cannot know what the other person is trying to say until they have finished.
* **not justify or defend yourself**. It is important to realise that the other person can never describe *what you are like*, but only ever *how you come across to them*, and that perception cannot be revised on the basis of any explanation or clarification. You should try to accept the other person's opinion and, if you so wish, learn from it. It is, however, important to understand what the other person means, so do not be afraid to ask questions.
* be **grateful** for feedback, even if it is not given in the right way. It helps you to get to know yourself and how you come across to others.