

Pearls for Giving Effective Feedback

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To anyone who boldly clicked on this link, **you're not alone!** Giving effective feedback may seem easy initially, but in practice it can be much harder. Constructive feedback could be seen as making negative comments which might not be well received, leading to unchanged or worsening behavior. And if we are on the receiving end, it can leave us with a bad taste in our mouths.

We desire feedback to be fruitful, for actions to change. I'm going to share something private with you. I experienced feedback gone wrong - stressful situations arising after giving feedback to employees. It made me nervous to do it again! Hence, I knew something had to change. I binged on books, talks, advice from dozens of seasoned professionals, and even sought input from HR. **What can we do to offer great feedback?**

Practice makes perfect

- Give frequent feedback, short and small amounts. This is an effective way to learn. Also, it helps feedback feel less daunting.
- Remember, there is positive and negative feedback. Give both.
- *Example: We have small weekly huddles now. But you can have them daily if needed. This takes the sting away from only having quarterly reviews or from hearing, "Let's talk tomorrow after clinic..."*

Focus on private feedback

- Some people view feedback as an attack. This can cause cognitive dissonance to what a person feels their actions or character reflects.
- Start respectfully, end respectfully. Allow the person to share their interpretation of the situation you are addressing.
- *Example: Negative feedback in a group setting causes public shaming or makes people think you're talking about someone else.*

Be direct, objective and specific

- Set clear professional boundaries with those you may need to give feedback to.
- Outline your desire in giving someone feedback. Avoid getting into generalities or personality traits. Be as specific as possible.
- *Example: "During our last surgery, you did XYZ. I would like you to do ABC. This is why. Are there any obstacles that may make this difficult to do?"*
- *Example: Instead of saying, "You're disruptive in clinic," consider saying, "you ask patients questions as I'm performing my medical exam interview. This interrupts my flow."*
- *Example: Instead of stating, "You exhibit unprofessional behavior," consider stating, "your attire does not comply with the dress code and you have clocked in 3 to 5 minutes late every day."*

Offer a positive

- Offer a positive point or praise if possible. But only if it doesn't cause avoidance of the issue at hand.
- If you truly value someone's overall growth or other achievements, it doesn't hurt to let them know. People appreciate feeling valued but do not do it at the cost of enabling bad behavior.
- *Example: "It's helpful you're taking the initiative to room the patients on time."*

Receive feedback, but only if it's productive

- Allow your employees to give feedback in return. They can do this in a few ways. For example, they can offer how they perceive the situation and your possible impact on it. Allow them to also synthesize solutions if that would be helpful.
- However, you may receive some unprofessional responses that are directed against your personality and not actions. In these circumstances, ask for a specific example. Then redirect if there is none.
- *Example: "What are some possible ways we can prevent this in the future?" "Do you anticipate any barriers to doing this?"*
- *Example: "Can you give me a specific example of this occurring?"*

Ensure the recipient is aware of the preferred or desired outcome

- This can be a picture of the preferred alternative behavior or a simple objective the employee or resident needs to meet.
- Follow up. Let them know when you will follow up to see if the change has occurred or if the outcome has been met. For example, it can be next week's huddle or a specified date.
- *Example: "In the future, label specimen containers and check the path log. I'll check in with you tomorrow about this."*

Documentation is key

- When significant, document your feedback. Include the date and action plan if needed. If changes are not made, then you have a reference.
- *Example: Keep a document in the employee or resident file that states what you spoke about and the desired outcome you reviewed.*

Have you personally experienced feedback successes or feedback gone awry? How did it effect you when giving feedback later? If you feel that feedback is not your strength, as I felt, then I recommend viewing this as an opportunity to grow. I do not think this skill always comes naturally, but rather grows with continued practice. Reflect on your best feedback sessions when you were on the receiving end of feedback. What did you like about those sessions? Consider reaching out to colleagues and mentors about this subject. It is encouraging and empowering to hear other physicians' experiences. Lastly, try to implement some of these changes the next time you have scheduled feedback. **Remember, you've got this!** ❤️