

1981 ✓  
R. V. Peavy  
September 18, 1981

Use of Feedback  
In Learning and Counselling

Within the format of pragmatic counselling<sup>1</sup>, an important principle of behaviour is self-regulation. A self-regulating individual, in principle, is one for whom things are going right. When one is uncertain or having troubles, this is an indication that one is self-regulating poorly. In other words, "things going wrong" suggest a break-down in self-regulation.

A critical factor in self-regulation is feedback. The term "feedback" refers to information which a self-regulating system [person, servo-mechanism, social order] seeks and requires in order to function without "going wrong". Feedback is also used to confirm "going right".

Feedback is crucial in the process of learning. An individual who learns well is one who is able to both receive and give feedback and is able as well to digest or assimilate feedback in a useable manner. Feedback may be thought of as a major nutrient in the learning (growth) process. Feedback can be used to "stay on the track" both conceptually and behaviourally.

The following feedback guidelines are designed for improving performance. Specifically, to aid trainees in counselling improve their own counselling skills as well as learning how to use feedback with clients.

---

<sup>1</sup>Pragmatic counselling is derived from the conceptual resources of Descriptive Psychology. It is essentially theory-free and utilizes the concept of status to bridge between the individual and participation in social life. A forthcoming book on Pragmatic Counselling will explain the details of this new approach.

GUIDELINES FOR GIVING FEEDBACK ON BEHAVIOUR AND CONCEPTS

1. Talk about behaviour which you can see or hear.
2. Make feedback specific to the behaviour in question.
3. Try to make sure that feedback is relevant to the specific situation and interaction which is at hand.
4. Feedback does not necessarily have to be given on the spot, but should be given as soon as possible.
5. It should be given directly to the behaving person by the person who observes the behaviour, not hinted at or filtered through a third party.
6. The feedback recipient should have an opportunity to react to the feedback information.
7. Give feedback in a respectful manner.
8. Feedback should be informative. Feedback is not feedback when it's meant to hurt, humiliate, or degrade.
9. Don't permit your feedback to degenerate into "hounding" or "nagging".
10. Avoid rendering judgments. (Watch for "good" or "bad")
11. Do not diagnose - leave the "why" of behaviour alone. Give feedback on what you see or hear.
12. The way we feel in response to another's behaviour is authentic and genuine. Tell how you feel following what another person says or does.
13. Be direct, don't apologize, beat around the bush, or justify.
14. Avoid sarcasm or condescending manner when giving feedback.
15. Give feedback on the positive as well as what seems to need correcting.
16. Do not use feedback as a subtle way to advise or interpret the other person. Restrict yourself to observations and felt reactions.

Working definitions of feedback: 'Feedback' is telling another person how his words and actions affect you with reference to some specific action or utterance that he or she does in your presence. In other words, informing others how their behaviours (or concepts) affect you.

Feedback helps a person realize what his words and actions 'mean' to other people and what effect they have. Feedback increases the range of options a person has for regulating his or her own behaviour.

GUIDELINES FOR RECEIVING FEEDBACK

1. Ask for feedback, don't passively wait for others to give you feedback.
2. Try to receive it with a willingness to listen.
3. Do not make excuses about the behaviour in question.
4. Acknowledge the value, real or potential, which you receive.
5. Don't just sit with a blank stare when getting feedback.
6. Express appreciation that another is interested enough in your learning to give you feedback.
7. Discuss it. Don't just say "Thank you", and let it drop.
8. View feedback as a continuing exploration and vehicle for learning to be self-regulatory.
9. Indicate what you intend to do with the feedback someone gives to you.
10. Watch out for becoming defensive (arguing, denying, explaining).
11. Try to avoid getting mad. Getting feedback from someone is not a signal for you to seek revenge against the person saying it.
12. Don't look for motives or hidden meanings in what the feedback giver says.
13. Seek clarification if you don't understand what the other person has said but don't play "stupid" as a way of defending yourself.
14. Think about feedback and try to build upon it.
15. If feedback seems clearly out of place or incorrect to you, remember that you have the choice of applying it or not applying it. However, don't jump at the chance to deny the appropriateness of feedback information as another method of defending yourself and refusing to change your ways.

Respectful Feedback Skills In Relation To  
Learning Process

The learner, in order to grow and change, requires help from other people. One form this help comes in is as feedback information about the effect and/or effectiveness of the individual's actions (including such things as attitudes, values, beliefs and perceptions). The learner's openness to feedback, the expectation of receiving useful information, is critical to the success of the learning process. Information given as feedback to the learner (by either the teacher, coach, or another learner) about the adequacy, appropriateness and effectiveness of the learner's actions, and the assimilation of this information, enables the learner to improve, grow and change in personal effectiveness and ability to work more effectively with others.

Feedback is the information a learner gathers about "how they are doing" while interacting with their environment. This information is used to guide further action and to help determine the nature of personal change. The value of giving feedback is in helping another person become aware of how you perceive their words and actions and how these affect you.

Not all feedback is conducive to growth. Different kinds of feedback may either nurture or deny (impedes) growth.

The potential of feedback to contribute to growth is dependent upon two functions:

1. affirmation of existing growth (state of learner)
2. introduction of new material (which may guide or direct further activity)

The skill of giving respectful feedback is important in both helping and learning processes. The way in which feedback is given will affect

the learner's ability to receive and use the feedback. Respectful feedback affirms and supplements the existing growth of the learner. This is accomplished by providing both support and challenge (in the form of new information). Nurturing or respectful feedback reduces possible defensiveness, avoids threatening or interfering with another's self-esteem and integrity, and strengthens or enhances the relationship.

The content of the feedback can relate to many areas. As a student learning counselling skills, feedback can be an especially useful tool to help you learn such counselling skills as empathy, specificity, immediacy, respect, confrontation and many others. It provides a way of assessing how you affect others and how you stand in relation to your goals and intentions. Nurturing feedback can assist you to alter your behaviour to better match your intentions.

In giving feedback within a learning context, you may want to simply give information you think a person would need to behave more effectively; you may want to point out discrepancies in a person's behaviour; you may want to comment upon another's strengths or weaknesses; or you may want to reinforce existing patterns of behaviour. No matter what the content, the important thing to remember is that feedback is your reaction to another person's behaviour.