



Ask an Ombudsman! Give feedback – positively

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Author: Ombudsman and Mediation Services

Recently, the Office of the United Nations Ombudsman and Mediation Services (UNOMS) launched a mini-series to give practical advice on how to deal with everyday conflicts in the work place.

While the last article focused on receiving feedback, this article aims to provide some guidelines for giving feedback to a colleague or a supervisor. Both are essential tools in building and maintaining an effective and collaborative working environment.

Help others grow. Give feedback – positively!

Working in a team can often be challenging: Different work styles, opinions and personalities can make this experience either very rewarding or very frustrating. While differences can enrich the teamwork, they can also lead to tensions among team members. If not channeled into a constructive and respectful way of communication, differences can lead to conflict and turn any teamwork into a strenuous exercise.

Giving constructive feedback is a skill that can be learned. Feedback should not drag the other person down but should encourage him/her to develop and engage in ways to correct the situation. Consequently, the following might be useful:

1. Reflect

Ask yourself: Why are you offering feedback? What is your motivation? Is it appropriate to the situation and will it help to change a specific behavior? Are you voicing criticism out of competition or momentary frustration? If latter is the case, reconsider: Do you really need to address it?

2. Agree on a time

Find a timely moment when your counterpart is not distracted from daily work exigencies and is receptive for feedback. Ask the other person, if you could have a confidential conversation to give him/her some feedback. If appropriate, step outside and meet in a calmer setting.

3. Describe and explain

Tell the person what you have observed. Describe a behavior or action in a concrete situation. Be specific and frank but sincere and respectful. Don't make assumptions about the intent or character of the person. Explain the direct impact that the other person's behavior or action had on you or the work of the team. Be specific and describe your thoughts and feelings. Use "I"

"I" statements give the other person more information about yourself rather than accusing him/her to be the cause of the problem. Use these three steps to formulate:

a. Observation

"I have noticed...", "I saw...", "When you do..."

b. Feeling

"I feel (explain feelings)..."

c. Connection

"...because..." (explain reason why behaviour causes these feelings).

Example:

"I" statement:

"Jake, in the last staff meeting you said that I was always late with my submissions. I felt embarrassed and hurt, because I always thought I was doing a good job".

statements and not "you" statements - this will prevent the conversation from developing into a ping-pong game of mutual accusations.

4. Pause

Give the other person time to think about what you said, to ask questions and to explain. Be prepared to also receive feedback. Ideally, your initiative will lead to a dialogue of mutual learning and understanding.

5. Include

Instead of suggesting your own solution, engage the other party in a joint search for mutually agreeable means to improve the situation. Don't expect the conversation to change the person but use it to start an ongoing discussion and to set the tone for a future-oriented, constructive working relationship.

We would like to hear from you! How do you give feedback? Contact Berkan Manaigo-Vekil at: manaigo-vekil@un.org.

The Ombudsman's office provides informal and impartial conflict resolution services and helps to resolve conflict through informal means. Find out more: www.un.org/ombudsman.