

KEYS TO EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK

Effective communication between two people is not easy. You really have to practice to make it work. Through the effective use of feedback skills, you can create a good communications climate. The following general guidelines will help you use your feedback skills more effectively.

- Give And Get Definitions.

The interpretation of words or phrases may vary from person to person, group to group, region to region, or society to society. When people believe or assume that words are used for one and only one meaning, they create situations in which they think they understand others but really do not. The words you use in everyday conversations almost inevitably have multiple meanings. In fact, the 500 most commonly used words in our language have more than 14,000 dictionary definitions. For instance, according to Webster, a person is considered 'fast' when she can run rather quickly. However, when one is tied down and cannot move at all, she is also considered 'fast.' 'Fast' also relates to periods of not eating, a ship's mooring line, a race track in good running condition, and a person who hangs around with the 'wrong' crowd of people. In addition, photographic film is 'fast' when it is sensitive to light. On the other hand, bacteria are 'fast' when they are insensitive to antiseptics. The abundance of meanings of even "simple" words makes it hazardous to assume to understand the intent of a message without verifying and clarifying that message.

- Don't Assume.

Do not assume anything in communications. If you do, you stand a good chance of being incorrect. Don't assume that you and the other person are talking about the same thing. Don't assume that the words and phrases you are both using are automatically being understood. The classic phrase of people who make assumptions is: "I know exactly what you mean." People who usually use that statement without ever using feedback techniques to determine exactly what the other person means are leaping into a communication quagmire. Use more feedback and fewer assumptions, and you'll be happier and more accurate in your interpersonal communications.

- Ask Questions.

A good rule of thumb is: "When in doubt, check it out." One of the best ways to check it out is through the effective use of questioning skills. Clarifying questions, expansion questions, direction questions, fact-finding questions, feeling-finding questions, and open questions can be used freely during conversation to test for feedback.

- Speak the Same Language.

Abstain from using words that can easily be misinterpreted or mistranslated, especially technical terms and company jargon. These terms, which are so familiar to you, may be totally foreign to the people with whom you talk. Simplify your language and your technical terms so that everyone can understand you, even when you think the other person knows what the terms mean.

- Stay Tuned In.

Constantly be on the lookout for and recognize those nonverbal signals that indicate that your line of approach is causing the other person to become uncomfortable and lose interest. When this happens, change your approach and your message accordingly. Observe the other person. Be sensitive to the feelings they are experiencing during your interaction; above all else, respond to those feelings appropriately.

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