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# Effective Feedback

Different aspects of communication are often referred to as the most important: listening effectively or building trust, for example. However, while these are important, the ability to give and receive feedback is critical to motivating and implementing change. And as such critical to the coaching process.

The great news is that the opportunity for feedback is around us all the time. Every time we speak or listen to another person we are giving feedback. It is in our tone of voice, word choice, posture, level of attention. And it can reveal how much we trust, respect, or love, like or even hate the person in front of us.

We cannot *not* give feedback and managing communication effectively. As coaches, we need to be comfortable with receiving and giving feedback and work to make it supportive and non-judgmental.

## Topic 1: Feedback Basics

There are four simple rules for giving effective feedback.

1. Be specific versus general.
2. Describe versus evaluate.
3. Focus on the behavior versus the person.
4. Maintain the relationship versus indulging in self-serving behavior.

## Key points of effective feedback

1. It's a good idea to ask for permission before giving feedback "May I give you some feedback?" A client will be more receptive to listen when they grant you permission. You too will be more alert in how you express yourself objectively. However, if you and the client are "dancing at the moment", as they say, you might find asking permission is not necessary and may even interfere with the flow or momentum of the session.

2. Fully own the power of your words. Be responsible for what and how you provide feedback. For instance, to declare how you feel about something, you may say: "When you said that, I felt sad because..."
3. Become aware of your opinions and judgments and then let them go. Your viewpoint will not always make the biggest difference to your client because their point of view may be different than yours.
4. Feedback is neither positive nor negative. It is simply feedback. By stating what is or what is not from your perspective, may just help your client get an insight that they may need.
5. Hearing critical feedback requires at least two skills: the ability to respond to the person in a way that doesn't make things worse, and listening for the kernel of truth in what they say and finding ways to check in with it objectively. These are also some of the most significant core competencies for coaches so the good news is you are already working on these!

Some believe there is always an element of truth in any kind of feedback, which offers us an opportunity for growth. If we can humbly and diligently scrutinize any feedback or perceived criticism for any elements of truth, regardless of how inconsequential then we can become wise and masterful coaches and a fully present and engaged individual.

## Discussion

Pick three of the following topics to contribute to a discussion on the Forum:

1. How do you feel about receiving feedback?
2. What kind of feedback has made a difference for you?
3. What kind of feedback has left you disempowered?
4. What is the difference between feedback and criticism?
5. What is the purpose of feedback in a coaching situation?

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## Reflection and Application

1. Choose three people who know you well and ask them for feedback on something in your life right now. (Choose something of low importance. This will help you stay objective. It could be the last dinner party you had or the state of your garden.)
2. Evaluate the feedback you were given. How did you respond? Was some feedback better than others? What made it so? What did you learn from this exercise?

### Topic 2: Role-plays

Role-play is a very effective technique in providing feedback to your clients. It will provide a different perspective and allow them to not only practice receiving feedback but also learn how to give it.

There are two ways in which to use role-play techniques:

- Role-play takes place when the client plays themselves.
- Reverse role-play takes place when you play the client and they play the other person in the situation.

This is a great technique when a client is unsure of how to have a conversation with someone or has some fear around what to say and how to proceed. In this case, role-play becomes essentially a practice for conversation. This is done so the client can find some powerful and clear way to communicate to resolve the situation. As a coach, you can provide them with effective feedback on how to make it even more powerful.

Another way you can also use role-play is when there is an opportunity for the client to face their worst fear. For instance, when a client fears someone's reaction about something. By doing some role-play, the client may come to realize that their worst fear may not be so bad! This helps the client greatly because they learn to manage the problem rather than run away from it.

## REVERSE ROLE-PLAY

This is also a wonderful tool to use in your coaching sessions. It's the same situation as role-playing but instead, the coach plays the role of the client, and the client plays the role of the person they want to have a conversation with to clarify an issue.

## Feedback vs. Active Listening

As a coach, we are providing the client with information that we have noticed, discerned, or are picking up from what they are saying. Feedback is non-judgmental. It is not based on opinion nor beliefs but rather on the moment of observation.

Active listening is a skill, which helps coaches "hear" the client's wishes, desires and possibilities. This kind of listening is different from daily, regular listening. In this case, the coach is listening for many things that are going on at the same time.

By carefully listening to the client, a coach is able to mirror back what is actually being said. The client may say something but really mean something else. This is what the ear of the coach is tuning in for, to listen to the client's real desires and wants. Therefore, listening requires the willingness to understand what is being said along with feeling the emotion that is being expressed by the client. When this takes place, listening is complete and real.

### **For example:**

Coach: "I don't hear a high level of commitment in your voice. Is there something missing here for you?"

Coach: "You sound really excited about that, tell me more."

## Sharing Observations and a Question

Very simply, the coach states what they notice, asks for the client's perspective and then listens for the response to follow up even further. By asking for the client's perspective with open-ended questions such as, "What do you see about that?" or "What do you think?" we are less likely to fall into judging the client or sharing an opinion vs. an observation.

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We want to avoid, “Am I right?” or “Do you agree?” as they can be leading be invalidating and close down communication, they are also more likely to sound like a statement of fact rather than a perspective.

Feedback is simply telling the client what has been observed. Active listening is a process of checking in with the client on what is being heard accurately or not. It is also about making sure, that as a coach, we are on the same level of understanding as the client is about a given situation. Active listening allows us to get the information we need in order to provide clear, effective, insightful feedback.

When we ask for feedback from the client, we can grow both as a person and as a coach and serve as a role model for the client to experience the power of feedback and active listening.

**Here are more examples of how a coach approaches their client to receive feedback:**

Coach says:

- “We have about five minutes left. What did you get from today’s session?”
- “How will you use what you understood from today’s session?”
- “Is this a good place for us to complete?”
- “Is there anything you need from me as your coach to feel complete?”
- “Is there anything you would have wanted more of, or less of, from today’s session?”

### Topic 3: The differences between feedback and criticism

When providing effective feedback to empower the client, it is important to remember the difference between being critical and communicating effectively.

The following is a list of some of the differences between criticism and feedback:

<b>Criticism</b>	<b>Feedback</b>
Personal	Not personal
Fault-finding	Opportunity finding
Opinion based	Fact-based
Unsolicited	Often welcomed
Subjective	Objective
Focused on the past	Focused on the future
Destructive	Constructive
Emotional	Not emotional, neutral

## Summary

Feedback is a statement offered by a coach to provide insight to the client. It is how a coach observes things. There is no judgment about it, it is stated, just as it is.

What we see as coaches come from our perspective. Which comes from “the outside” of someone’s life. It gives us an advantage because we can often see what our clients are not able to see. This is so because they are often too close to the subject matter.

To give feedback is to simply mirror it back to the client the way we see it. For example, a coach may say to a client, “I hear you are really angry about that, do you want to talk more about it?” There is no judgment here about the emotion being conveyed by the client. It is simply being noticed for the client to evaluate the feeling and move forward.

If a client shares a situation, the coach can offer to provide feedback by saying: “Would you like a different perspective?” Or perhaps say: “Can I share with you what I am getting from that?” Again, feedback is simply about sharing an observation without judgment or opinion.

An opinion sounds more like this:

“Have you considered this solution?”

“Sounds to me like you need to end this relationship right now.”

”Well let me tell you what I think about that!”

Be aware that when we share feedback with a client, we may be totally off in our remark. If it happens, this is fine. Sometimes when we are off, we can help get the client back on the right track. They may say something like: “Well, I don’t really see it that way. Instead, I think it is more like this...” This helps them get back on the right track. Also, be sure not to hold back for fear of being wrong. Sometimes, we need to share what we notice, so the client can think about it, and then formulate an action.

In another instance, you may experience a client ignoring your feedback. This is fine. As a coach, it is still important to share it with them. Often times, we are planting seeds that may sprout later. It takes courage to give feedback, and be willing to patiently wait and see how your observation can have a positive effect on the client’s thinking and life.

Remember, clients really want feedback from coaches. They expect feedback to move them into action, so give it freely and generously. Of course, the timing is important. So be sure to listen and know when to ask for permission.

Clients need coaches to point out things that they may be missing out on, overlooking, or no one else is willing to point it out to them. Feedback is about sharing what we notice with a neutral and objective voice of observation. In other words, as a coach, simply communicate back to the client what you are really hearing and noticing. Your client will be grateful for the insight and the “organic push” you offer.

## Reflection and Application

1. What are three situations you might encounter as a coach in which role-play could be useful? Post your answer on the Forum.
2. Find one friend or a peer client who is willing to be coached on an issue. Help them identify one conversation they are hesitant about. For example, asking for a raise; correcting an employee's behavior; how to communicate something sensitive to a partner; how to handle a complaint they have with someone, or how to apologize for something they did wrong. Do at least two role-plays with them.
3. BONUS: Practice with at least two more people. Do both, the standard role-plays and reverses role-play.

## Resource

<http://www.tnt.com/2012/04/24/the-four-rules-of-effective-feedback/>

<https://books.google.com/books?id=6dat20ZP->

[QIC&pg=PA152&lpg=PA152&dq=examples+of+opinionated+coaching+questions&source=bl&ots=4kD30M0Zyz&sig=m3bi7k\\_QrqTNIYVWFdMpl-ZUWQM&hl=en&sa=X&ei=b-JIVaqrH4PIsATVq4HgAQ&ved=0CDcQ6AEwBA](https://books.google.com/books?id=6dat20ZP-QIC&pg=PA152&lpg=PA152&dq=examples+of+opinionated+coaching+questions&source=bl&ots=4kD30M0Zyz&sig=m3bi7k_QrqTNIYVWFdMpl-ZUWQM&hl=en&sa=X&ei=b-JIVaqrH4PIsATVq4HgAQ&ved=0CDcQ6AEwBA)

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