



Tips for Giving and Receiving Feedback

The late Madeline Hunter once said “Teaching is more complex than brain surgery.” When asked how this could be so she said, “Teachers operate on 30 patients at once and they are all fully awake!” I tend to agree. Teaching is complex.

As a teacher seeks to improve his craft, it is helpful to be able to see more of the complexity. Another set of eyes could come in handy. This is why feedback is essential for the improvement of teaching. It is practically impossible for a teacher to simultaneously teach a lesson and watch the teaching-learning from another vantage point. He would have to be to be two places at one time, or have an out of body experience. So feedback, seeing through another set of eyes, necessarily involves another person. And this is where the process often breaks down.

As I work with teachers, I often ask “How often do you have the opportunity to either give or receive feedback on your teaching?” The most common answer is “rarely.” When I ask “Would you find it valuable to receive some feedback on your teaching?”, the most common answer is “absolutely!” To be fair, most teachers do report a fair amount of classroom visitation, but 90% of this is for the purpose of evaluation, not feedback.

Teacher evaluation is important and it is required by law. But, there is little evidence that teacher evaluation produces much in the way of improved performance. By its very nature, evaluation is heavy on judgment and light on feedback. Ideally, this should be reversed. Valuable, craft improving insights should be light on judgment and heavy on feedback. This parallels what we know about providing feedback to students. More successful classrooms are light on grading so they can be heavy on feedback. Feedback produces more learning than grading.

The key is to have opportunities to give and receive **growth-evoking, non-evaluative performance feedback**. Here are some tips that make this more likely.

Tips for Giving Feedback...

1. **Don't give feedback unless you are asked.** This is a valuable rule at school, at home, and with your friends. Just trust me.

...Tips continued on the next page



Tips for Giving Feedback, cont'd...

- 2. Be Gentle.** We all like to say “Just give it to me straight. I can handle it.” Don’t believe it for a moment. You’re being invited onto sacred ground. Go easy, be respectful, err on the side of kindness.
- 3. Be Skillful.** Choose your words carefully. Use cushion statements, positive pre-supposition, and positive non-verbal cues. Practice delivering the feedback before you talk with the teacher.
- 4. Be Positive.** Show genuine enthusiasm for teaching and a keen interest in the teacher’s lesson. Thank the teacher for opening up his classroom.

Tips for Receiving Feedback...

- 1. Ask for feedback.** Be courageous and go beyond “accepting feedback.” Seek it out, promise you’ll reciprocate, make it a habit. “Feedback is the Breakfast of Champions.” Besides, if everyone abides by rule #1, above, you’ll never receive any feedback unless you ask for it.
- 2. Don’t deny, defend, or minimize.** These are standard coping skills. To deny is to think “I didn’t do that.” To defend is to think “Well, here’s why I had to do that.” To minimize is to think “Picky, picky, picky.” If we allow our brains to run with denying, defending, and minimizing, we’ll have little brain power left over for learning from the feedback.
- 3. Seek clarification and deeper insight.** Ask follow-up questions. Invite the person to go deeper and provide more information. This honors the input, provides more learning opportunities, and makes it likely that the provider will engage again, if asked.
- 4. Say “Thank you.”** No one has extra time at school. When someone takes the time to observe and provide feedback- be grateful.

