Giving Good Feedback

Good feedback is a form of *constructive criticism* – detailed analysis and assessment – it is not merely "finding fault." Offering feedback provides us a chance to recognize achievement, and to improve our ability to analyze others' – and our own – work.

There's *nice* feedback, the sort that is affirmative and makes us *feel* better:

> *"It's wonderful, it's beautiful, it's perfect, I wouldn't change a thing, you're so clever, you always do so well, you never make mistakes, you make me so proud, aren't you the smartest thing ever!"*

and there's *good* feedback, the sort that is constructive and helps us *do* better.

When we offer good feedback we:
- Show we understand what we've seen or heard
- Recognize the strengths of the work
- Speculate on its weaknesses or limitations
- Help others – and their work – become stronger

We offer good feedback by:
- Being honest and kind – to make the message genuine and likely to be well received
- Offering examples that are concrete and specific – so we're talking about real stuff
- Suggesting improvements that are actionable – offering ideas that can actually be done

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A General Approach for Giving Good Feedback

Say what you like, and *why*
- don't just say you like it, specify what's good and *why*
- (don't just praise; analyze)

Consider what could be better, and *how*
- don't simply say it's bad, specify what could be better and *how*
- (don't just diagnose; suggest)

Ask questions to make a *difference*
- questions for *clarification*, and questions to *foster exploration*
- (what if…? why was…? who might…? could it…?)

Beginners need *encouragement* that they are doing a *good* job.
Practitioners want *information* about how they could be doing a *better* job.
- Praise the effort, not the outcome.
- Criticize the product, not the producer.
- Offer improvements, not imperatives.

– Finkelstein, Stacey R., and Fishbach, Ayelet. "Tell me what I did wrong: experts seek and respond to negative feedback." *Journal of Consumer Research* 39.1 (2012): 22-38.

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Receiving Feedback Well

Feedback gives us an opportunity to see our work through others' eyes, to help us recognize our achievement, and see past our own blindspots. Feedback helps us improve our future work and ourselves.

Sometimes people see providing feedback as a way to "toughen us up," so that criticism doesn't affect us negatively. Others, unfortunately, see critique as an opportunity to score points against us. Both views can make us unwilling (and perhaps unable) to find any value in the feedback.

Similarly, when we seek feedback, we're sometimes looking for *affirmation* rather than *information*. That can make feedback hard to receive, particularly if we have trouble separating the value of our work from how we value ourselves.

To best be able to benefit from feedback – positive, negative, or nasty – we must be able to separate ourselves from our work. We must learn from the past, to prepare for the future.

Receiving feedback is most effective when we can join our reviewers in looking at our work critically rather than defensively. When everyone involved can share honest viewpoints about the work, we can see the value in what *has* been done, and potential for what *could* be done.

A General Approach for Receiving Feedback Well

It's not *who I am*, it's *what I did*
- emotionally step away from your work: find the distance between *you* and *yours*.
- be ready to objectively find the *good* and the *could-be-better* in your own work

It's in the *past*
- recognize that the work is the best you could do with your time, knowledge, ability
- understand that you're a different person now for having done the work
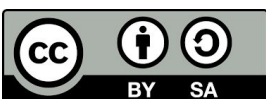
It's for the *future*
- extract the useful information from the feedback, whatever form it may take
- focus on receiving feedback as suggestions for how you can do better in the future

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"You can't avoid criticism, but you can control your response to it. And if you stubbornly ignore all outside input, you miss out on perspectives and windows of opportunity that help you grow. Sometimes, negative feedback holds a key to open your next door."

– Maria Molfino | Fast Company Design | https://twitter.com/FastCoDesign/status/753240974990647296

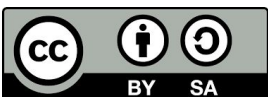"The key to remain[ing] objective about your ideas is to put your proverbial pen down."

– Hamza Khan |

https://www.ryerson.ca/studentaffairs/storytelling/2015/03/put-your-pen-down--being-objective-with-your-own-ideas