Effective Critical Listening and Providing Feedback

Inquire: Advice and Feedback

Overview
As you present in your life, people will have advice and feedback for you. Knowing how to receive feedback, and how to listen to provide feedback, are important interpersonal skills to learn. This lesson will explain active listening, constructive feedback, how to provide sensitive feedback, and how to incorporate feedback you receive into future presentations. From there, you will learn how to know what feedback to listen to, and what feedback you can ignore.

Big Question: Who is someone you always listen to when they give you feedback or advice?

Watch: Receiving Feedback

Listening is a skill we take for granted. However, effective listening is more involved. Active listening is when the receiver of a message pays full attention to the message, responds to the original message, and is able to repeat the message back to the person. When you actively listen to others as they present, you can listen critically and provide feedback. Constructive feedback is the process of providing a person with suggestions or information to help them perform a certain task better. We give this feedback to others so they can properly learn and improve as they go forward. This lesson will focus on teaching you what active listening is, how to give constructive feedback, how to be sensitive when giving feedback, and how to use feedback you receive to better your presentations.

Shawna gives a presentation to her committee at work. When she is done, several members of the committee give her feedback. Her boss explains that she should try to make the information more accessible. Shawna has been in her position for several years, but the newer people in her committee are struggling to keep up. Her boss suggests using less jargon so her new co-workers can more easily follow along. One of her good friends suggests that Shawna consider using visual aids so people can see the information she’s presenting. Finally, the newest member of the committee suggests that Shawna not talk about so many subjects at once. Shawna decides that her boss has a point, and so she follows her advice. Shawna also realizes that her boss’s advice isn’t really a request, but a gentle reminder to be mindful of the new people. Shawna decides she can follow her friend’s advice as well, but the new member of the committee doesn’t know enough about the material for Shawna to listen to her. This is an example of working through different advice to decide what to follow and what to ignore.
Read: Listening and Offering Feedback

Overview
When you are in an audience, it is important to be a good audience member. Two important obligations as a good audience member are to actively listen and to provide feedback. This lesson will explain active listening, constructive feedback, how to be sensitive when presenting feedback, and how to incorporate feedback you receive into future presentations.

What is Active Listening?
Active listening requires the receiver of a message to pay full attention to the message, respond to the original message, and be able to repeat the message back to the person. It often manifests when a listener nods his or her head and provides small amounts of verbal feedback when appropriate. Active listening is a skill used in several professions, including medicine and counseling. In your everyday life, active listening is useful when providing support or advice to a friend or coworker when they have a tough situation ahead of them. Active listening skills show your commitment of support to the person you are listening to. They also help you remember and understand the messages you hear in a day. Practicing active listening in your daily life will make you a better team player and friend.

What is Constructive Feedback?
It is important to understand the purpose of feedback. Giving constructive feedback is the process of providing a person with suggestions or information to help them perform a certain task better. It isn’t used to tear someone down or make them feel bad for the job they did. Feedback is meant to help someone learn and grow. There are a few ways you can keep it centered on helping the recipient learn.

Suggestions should be actionable, so a person can take the advice and work it in without much effort. You don’t want to say, “Work on this thing.” Instead, say, “Here’s how you can improve this thing.”

Suggestions should have a reason. Don’t say, “I didn’t like that,” but rather, say, “The presentation will make more sense if you do this.” Feedback isn’t a time to share your pet peeves, but to offer significant advice on how the person can do something better.

Finally, write down your feedback or type it into an email. Making your feedback available in ways that are convenient is a thoughtful thing to do to help a person improve. Because he or she is able to remember and implement feedback, you’re more likely to see follow up on your suggestions.

Sensitivity in Presenting Feedback
When providing feedback, it is important to be sensitive about how you do it. Feedback isn’t meant to be mean or to tear people down. You should use it as an opportunity to build people up. Here are three things to keep in mind to make sure that your feedback is sensitive and appropriate.

First, try a compliment sandwich. A compliment sandwich is when you mention something a person did well that they should keep doing. Then, you mention something they need to improve — not something they were bad at — followed by another thing they did well. Keeping it positive will help everyone feel good walking away from the situation.
Second, don’t be negative. Again, it is about growth, not blame. Avoid statements such as, “You did this very poorly,” or “You were pretty bad.” Instead, focus on language that encourages the person to do better: “You should try to improve at this,” or “I know you can do better at that.” Keep your statements positively focused so everyone comes away from the experience better.

Finally, don’t list problems; offer solutions. Feedback should be constructive, so offer ways that a person can fix the problems you noticed. It is very defeating to hear a list of things you did poorly. If instead, you provide a list of things that can fix a problem, someone is much more likely to improve and do better in the future.

**How to Incorporate Feedback into Future Presentations**

Sometimes, you will be the one receiving feedback. It can be hard if you don’t know how to receive feedback constructively. This section will provide some tips on doing so.

First, don’t take it personally. Feedback isn’t a personal attack; it’s an opportunity to grow. Don’t get mad when someone explains how you could do better. Take it as an opportunity to learn.

Second, ask questions to clarify. If you don’t understand what a person means with a suggestion, or you thought you did something the proper way, ask them to explain how you didn’t. If you don’t understand how you messed up, you can’t fix it.

Finally, follow through. You won’t get feedback just for the fun of it. Listen to what the person has to say, and try to implement some of the things pointed out to you. Feedback is meant to help you improve, but you never will if you don’t follow through on the given advice.

**Reflect Poll: Can I Get Some Feedback, Please?**

What kind of feedback works best for you?
- Compliment sandwich
- Positive messages
- Actionable messages

**Expand: Knowing What Feedback to Listen To**

**Overview**

You will receive feedback from many places throughout your life. This section will help you determine whose advice to listen to and what to do with advice, even if it’s something you ultimately don’t follow up on.

**Knowing What Feedback to Listen To**

Throughout your life, you will receive feedback on presenting from many sources. However, this feedback isn’t always relevant. When you do, there are a few things you can do to know if it is feedback worth incorporating.
First, if the person that gives you feedback is your boss, listen to them. They are telling you to do something that they think will better your performance. So, even if you disagree, you need to follow through with what they think you should change.

Second, if the person is more experienced than you in the field you are speaking about, you should seriously consider their advice. If they have been successful in the field and recommend you change something, there has to be a reason for it.

Advice is not always worth considering. If the person offering advice has no experience in the field or can’t explain why they think their advice will make something better, you might not want to take their advice. That doesn’t mean you should be rude or ignore it without thought. You should always consider the advice others give you, even if they aren’t an expert on your topic.

No matter who offers you advice, you should not dismiss it on face. Instead, think about what their advice is and why they might recommend it. It is one thing to make a change just because someone recommends it. It is another to understand why they want you to change something. It will help you grow in unexpected ways if you can not only change something when told, but rather figure out why you should be making that change.

Lesson Toolbox

Additional Resources and Readings
A short video providing you with ways to improve your listening skills
   ● Link to resource: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iWPkHHlchIE

A video providing you with ways to handle receiving negative feedback
   ● Link to resource: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZyEgwhS2P08

A video providing you with ways to deal with criticism
   ● Link to resource: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=58NFbRTb6sk

Lesson Glossary
active listening: when the receiver of a message pays full attention to the message, responds to the original message, and is able to repeat the message back to the person

constructive feedback: provides a person with suggestions or information to help them perform a certain task better

compliment sandwich: when you mention something a person did well, followed by something needing improvement, concluded with another thing they did well

Check Your Knowledge

1. Active listening requires your undivided attention.
   a. True
   b. False

2. Not all feedback should be followed.
   a. True
   b. False
3. Critical feedback must be mean.
   a. True
   b. False

Answer Key:

Citations

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