

# CORE COMMUNICATION & FEEDBACK SKILLS

## Communication Skills

**Paraphrase** - saying back to the speaker what you heard them say. The goal is to accurately grasp the content of their idea. You may either repeat exactly what was said or you may summarize, restate the essence of what the speaker said.

- A useful method is to begin your response with *“I hear you saying ...”*

**Itemized Response** - this involves giving a full response to a person’s idea by telling them what you like/appreciate/can use in their idea and what concerns you about the idea. The assumption here is that it helps the group’s work when we enable participation and seek what may be of value in each idea. Itemized Response helps: keep unformed but possibly useful ideas alive, establish a supportive group climate, and helps us see the fullness of an idea.

- A useful method is to frame your responses using the following:  
*“What I like about it is ....”*      *“What concerns me is ...”*

**Active Listening** - trying to state the feelings and underlying message that the speaker is communicating. Stating this as something you are “testing” rather than as a “truth”. Allowing yourself to be corrected as the person restates their message.

**Making Statements Rather than Asking Questions or Sharing Opinions** - this is to enable the group to stay with the issue being worked on. Frequently questions are really hidden statements, e.g., “don’t you think it would be better if ...”. Opinion sharing may better fit after work with beer or coffee.

The use of core communication skills:

- Tends to help focus the group’s discussion. It reduces repetition and explaining “what I really meant to say ...”
- Important in de-escalating conflict; also in preventing misunderstandings. It provides everyone with a way to build agreements, clarify misunderstandings, negotiate.
- Helps the group build on each other’s ideas. Builds trust and strengthens relationships.
- Requires “group discipline” - using the skill even when it feels awkward; giving energy to it; putting aside your own judgements for the moment; being congruent in the body language and tone of voice.
- You are working to respect others and yourself in a manner that is responsive and assertive rather than evasive, passive or aggressive. The skills assume that you are ready to give positive attention to the other person rather than only appearing to be engaged and listening.

## FEEDBACK SKILLS

Feedback may have several purposes – it may be information that expands a person’s information about themselves and the effect they have on others; it may expand the person’s range of choices; and it may be intended to support or discourage certain behavior.

Feedback is likely to be more effective if:

- The person receiving it acknowledges the need for it; especially if the person requests it
- It is timely; given near the time the behavior has occurred
- It is skillful

### **Skillful Feedback**

- Be descriptive, provide information that describes the behavior and its impact on you; restrict the feedback to what you know (e.g., behavior you have seen and how it has impacted you).
- It is about the giver of the feedback, not the person receiving the feedback. It is an exploration of the effect the person’s behavior has had on you. (note – the same behavior may not have that effect on others).
- Avoid exaggeration (“you always get this wrong”), labeling (“you are stupid”), and judgement
- Speak for yourself (“what I feel/experience when you ....”) not for others (“Everyone gets upset when you ....”)
- Don’t press the person for any immediate response
- Face to face – not by e-mail

## **Skillfully Receiving Feedback**

- Listen – if something helps you to listen do that, e.g., take notes, ask someone else to make notes on the feedback so you can focus on the speaker
- Ask questions to clarify – “could you give an example of that?”, “when did that happen?”, “who else was there?”
- If others were present during the behavior the feedback is about; ask them to offer feedback, what was the effect on them
- Acknowledge valid points
- Open yourself. Do not get defensive (you may feel it, don’t act it). Stay focused on hearing what is being said.
- Take time to think about what has been said; if a response is necessary tell those offering the feedback that you will think about it and offer some response on a specific date.

## **A formula for giving feedback**

1. “When you .....”            Note the behavior; describe it as specifically as possible.
2. “I felt ....”                Tell how the behavior affects you. This is just one or two words – frustrated, angry, pleased, etc.
3. “Because I ...”            Share why you are affected that way.

## **From Feedback to Negotiation of the Relationship**

4. “I would like ...”            What would you like the person to consider doing.
5. “Because ...”                Why you believe it will help
6. “What do you think?”       Invite and hear the response; explore options

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