Facing Criticism

Giving and Receiving Criticism

Criticism can sometimes feel like an attack, making people defensive and damaging the relationship. Managing how you give and receive feedback can reduce stress and help you get your point across.

Reflection 1

Think of a time you gave someone feedback and they became defensive or angry and a time when your feedback was well recieved. Did you prepare for the conversations? How did your words and your approach differ between the two experiences?

When You Give Feedback

- **Focus on the behavior and/or subject rather than the person**. When someone feels personally attacked, they will get angry and not hear what you are communicating.

- **Consider the setting for the conversation.** Is this a conversation that should be had in private vs. in front of other people? If you are remote, is it better over a video call vs. chat or email?

- **Choose what's important.** If someone receives constant feedback day after day, they may become overwhelmed or start to tune out the feedback they receive. Focus only on what's essential unless you are asked for more information.

- **Manage your emotions.** If you are angry or upset, and it's not an emergency, wait until you calm down. Your goal is to express yourself in a non-combative manner.

- **Give people time to absorb and process your feedback.** Don't expect immediate agreement or an apology. People need time to consider new information and ideas.

Reflection 2

Think of a time you received feedback that you reacted negatively to - but you wish you had not.

1. Revise the experience in your mind. Picture yourself listening thoughtfully but not saying anything.

2. Allow yourself to experience the frustration or anger, acknowledge the experience, then let it go.

3. Picture your face as you listen to the other person. Imagine how you look while you are listening.

4. Imagine yourself saying "I'd like to take the time to consider your feedback before I respond". Can we meet again later today or tomorrow?

When You Receive Feedback:

- **Be mindful of your emotions**. Allow yourself the opportunity to feel your emotions, but also the chance to return back to normal before you respond. Say, "I'd like to take the time to consider your feedback before I respond".

- **Keep an open mind.** Give yourself the opportunity to learn something new or be exposed to a new idea. Sometimes feedback is hard to hear, or we are tempted to immediately disagree, but that doesn't help us move forward.

- **Intent versus Impact:**

  - Intent meaning: Simply put, intent is what we mean to do–the motivation or purpose of our actions or conversations.

  - Impact meaning: Impact is what we achieve — the results of what we do or what we say, how our actions or words are perceived.

  - Understanding the difference regarding inclusive language will help inform how you successfully navigate interactions or manage a mistake. Regardless of your intent, it's important to keep focus on the impact of your words.

- **Ask questions** to help clarify or better understand:

  - "Can you explain what you mean by that?"

  - "Can you point me to additional resources that I can review?"

  - "Can you help me understand why this is important?"

  - By keeping the focus of your questions on improving your own understanding, you show the other person that you are genuinely interested in their feedback or point of view.

- Use "I" statements to express how you feel. It's okay to disagree but avoid sweeping generalizations or remarks that devalue the other person's feelings.

- Take time to process what the other person has said — it's okay not to have an immediate response.

- Offer an authentic apology, even if in a follow-up conversation without defensiveness and deeper explanation.

  - Example: "I am sorry I caused you harm in this space. I am going to work on doing better. What do you need?" Instead of, "I am sorry you were offended by what I said."

- Thank the other person if you want to. Sharing feedback can be a sign of trust.

  - You can say "Thank you for caring enough to offer feedback. I'm going to take some time to think about what you've said and figure out how I can do better."