

Delivering Feedback to Optimize the Mentor-Mentee Relationship

Feedback is specific information about observed performance, given with the intent to improve performance by modifying the action of participants^{6,7}. Feedback is an important part of optimizing the mentor-mentee relationship.

The mentee needs feedback on strengths, areas for growth or development, and progress toward goals. The mentor needs feedback on communication frequency, communication style, and how well the mentor is meeting the needs of the mentee.

The Ask-Tell-Ask Feedback Model

Various feedback models exist to structure an optimal feedback session. The Ask-Tell-Ask model was first described in 2001 as a method for communicating with families and has since been adapted as a feedback model. This model consists of three steps:

1. **Ask** the mentee for their self-assessment. Advance completion of the previous reflective audits may be used to promote this self-reflection.
2. **Tell** the mentee your concerns and observations. Provide feedback on what is going well. Address one or two areas of improvement. These observations should be:
 - a) **Descriptive** (not judgmental or evaluative) –Describe “what” was said or done and not “why” you think it was done.
 - b) **Specific** -- The feedback provides a specific example of the behavior you are describing
 - c) **Timely** --Feedback should be given as close to the observed event as possible.
 - d) **Well-timed**—Feedback should be done when both the person giving feedback and the recipient are not rushed for time, distracted, or emotional.
 - e) **Limited**—Resist the inclination to provide a list of feedback points. Limit the feedback to 2-3 points. Too much feedback can overwhelm the recipient and therefore none of it may be incorporated.
 - f) **Compassionate** – Delivering constructive feedback should be done compassionately. Feedback that is delivered in an insensitive way is likely to be disregarded.
 - g) **Balanced** -- Feedback should describe the things the individual excels at, as well as those that could be improved. If you are the mentor or mentee to an exceptionally enthusiastic, competent, and focused person who is highly productive, most of your feedback should be positive. To only provide constructive feedback to a person who is clearly excelling negates all of their successes.
3. **Ask** the mentee their understanding. Discuss a plan for improvement with the relationship moving forward.

Adapted from Turner, et al, Barnett and French et al