Developing a Culture of Feedback and When Feedback Fails

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Why is a Feedback Culture Important?

Only 14% of employees in a recent Gallup poll strongly agree that the performance reviews they receive inspire them to improve (Hickman, 2020). Recent employee surveys also suggest engagement through feedback is even more important to younger generations of workers like Millennials.

Feedback

- engages employees,
- aids retention, and
- improves performance quickly.

Barriers to a Feedback Culture

- "Sugar coating" to the point that the employee doesn't understand the problem or how to correct the behavior

- Being a jerk (e.g., public shaming, "it's not personal"—but it is, etc.)

- Complaining to everyone but the person making the mistake

- Fear that feedback will diminish motivation

Reflect and Share

Reflect on a time when someone gave you a piece of criticism that you were grateful for. What made their delivery successful? What would have happened if you had not received that feedback?

Create a Culture Where Feedback is the Norm

Simon Sinek, [Giving Critical Feedback](#)

Care personally, challenge directly (Scott, 2019).

Fast, frequent, and meaningful (Mclain & Nelson, 2022).

Consider whether you want to approach the feedback as informative, corrective, investigative, or collaborative.

Collaborative: Let's work on this together, teaching and coaching

Investigative: Asking questions, dialogue

New leadership example: *How do you think your new director role is going? How do you think your direct reports are responding to your leadership? What did you notice during your last divisional meeting from the attendees?*

Informative: Straightforward, still solution-oriented if recurring

Corrective: How can we make sure this doesn't happen again? Still should include solutions, empathy

Beyond Coaching and Feedback— Difficult Conversations

What are the characteristics of a difficult?

- High Stakes
- Strong emotions
- Differing opinions
- Unsuccessful strategies to "fix"

Why is it so hard?

- It matters
- Emotions often get engaged: anger and frustration
- Inability to make decisions
- Taking sides
- Supporting your people

This is not your answer!

- Ignoring it will not make it go away.
- Is there a consequence to no action?
- If you avoid the conversation, what will it cost you?

Difficult Conversations

What Happened?

- Perspectives
- Differing opinions
- Blame game vs understanding

Feeling

- Based on perceptions
- Strong emotions – real or imagined

Identity

- Loss
- Gain
- Consequences
- Credibility

Ground Rules – Importance of Relationships: Knowing Yourself

Do they know who you are and what you stand for?

What is your moral compass?

Are your decisions student-centered or self-centered?

How does this situation impact your team?

How does your decision impact your team?

What seat do you occupy?

- What is your role?
- What authority do you have?
- Does your seat influence how you handle the situation?
- How does your perspective change as you change seats?

Steps for Handling a Difficult Conversation:
Preparation

Ask yourself…

- How do I feel? How do the parties involved feel?
- Does this impact my sense of identity? Boss? Competitor? Loyal? Show of authority, prove a point, change the other person, or try to facilitate a positive outcome?
- Do I decide whether to raise the issue? And if I don't, can I (or other parties) let it go?

- What Happened? Understand the situation – talk to all parties (versions)
  - What's **their** story?
  - What's **your** story?
  - How can our stories be different with the same situation?
  - Third person perspective; share purpose of conversation (problem-solve, resolution)

- Research policies and procedures beforehand
  - Syllabus
  - Program Handbook
  - Student Code of Conduct
  - Employee Handbook
  - HR input, if applicable

Steps for Handling a Difficult Conversation:
Preparation continued

Evaluate…

- Evaluate your setting.
    - Is there potential to get heated? Do you need security close by?
    - Do you need a witness?
        - If so, explain why the person is there. *I've asked my assistant to join us to take notes so that I can focus on our conversation.*
    - Is my office conducive to having the conversation? Across the desk? Table? Door?

Personal Preparation

- Rehearse.
- Be calm. **Manage/Control your emotions.** Be respectful. Breathe.
- **Listen.**
- It's ok to be empathetic.
- Share something positive about the person, if appropriate.
- Does the conversation's outcome support student learning, sharing, and problem-solving?
- Remind yourself it needs to be a productive conversation.

Steps for Handling a Difficult Conversation:
The Conversation

- Start the conversation in a non-confrontational manner. Be genuine. Personal touch!

- Clearly identify the issue.
  - If someone is asking you for something (grade appeal), be clear about what is being asked of you. Don't make assumptions.
  - If you are initiating this conversation (personnel issue), be clear about point of discussion.

- Ask the person to explain – "help me understand…" **And actively listen to understand!**

- Ask questions to clarify. Recap the conversation. (ten seconds of silence)

- Remember - Be calm. Control your emotions. Be respectful.

- Take a break if needed!

- If actionable items, explain next steps and any related timeline.

- Ask yourself what impact your decision will have. Weigh your options.

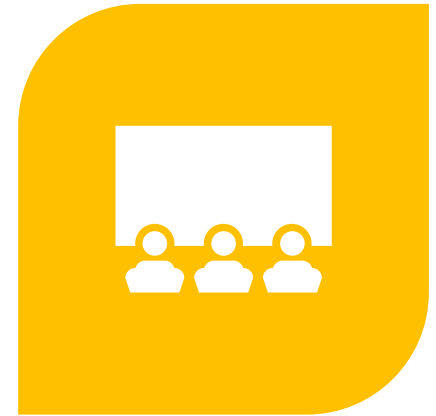- Is this decision student-centered? What is your compass?
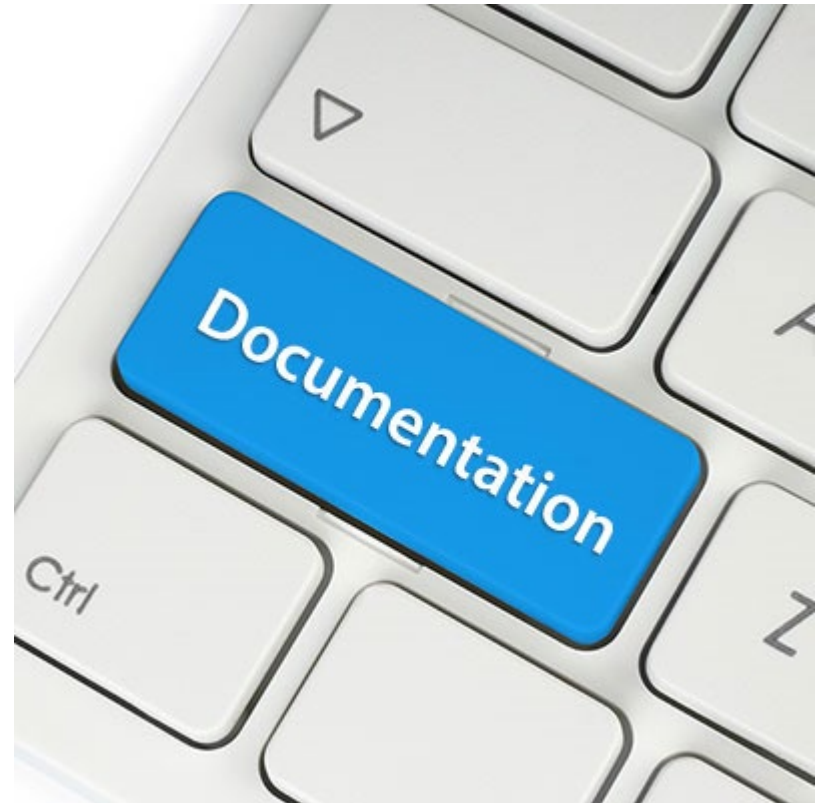
- 24-hour rule.

Reminders

LISTEN

PAUSE AND REFLECT

ACT

Documentation

- Did you take notes?

- Did someone take notes for you?

- Don't assume you will remember the details if follow up is required or is asked for later.

- Consider sending a follow-up email highlighting key points from the conversation—also serves as documentation.

Examples (Tell me about your experiences)

- Student issues
  - Grade appeal
  - Classroom behavior
  - Dismissal from a class or program
  - Difficult parents or interested parties ("dream crusher")
- Personnel Issues
  - Employee – another faculty member
  - Employee – situation with another dept
  - Coworkers

Turn to your neighbor and discuss one of these scenarios. Change "seats" and determine if your approach is the same. Differences?

References

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