



## Tips for Giving and Receiving Feedback

**The late Madeline Hunter once said “Teaching is more complex than brain surgery.”** When asked how this could be so she said, “Teachers operate on 30 patients at once and they are all fully awake!” I tend to agree. **Teaching is complex.**

As a teacher seeks to improve his craft, it is helpful to be able to see more of the complexity. Another set of eyes could come in handy. This is why feedback is essential for the improvement of teaching. It is practically impossible for a teacher to simultaneously teach a lesson and watch the teaching-learning from another vantage point. She would have to be in two places at one time, or have an out of body experience. So feedback, seeing through another set of eyes, necessarily involves another person. And this is where the process often breaks down.

As I work with teachers, I often ask “How often do you have the opportunity to either give or receive feedback on your teaching?” The most common answer is “rarely.” When I ask “Would you find it valuable to receive some feedback on your teaching?” the most common answer is “Yes, if it was helpful and not too critical or judgmental.” To be fair, most teachers do report a fair amount of classroom visitation, but 90% of this is for the purpose of evaluation, not feedback.

Teacher evaluation is important and it is required by law. But, there is little evidence that teacher evaluation produces much in the way of improved performance. By its very nature, evaluation is heavy on judgment and light on feedback. Ideally, this should be reversed. **Valuable, craft improving insights should be light on judgment and heavy on feedback.** This parallels what we know about providing feedback to students. More successful classrooms are light on grading so they can be heavy on feedback. Feedback produces more learning than grading. The key is to have opportunities to give and receive **growth-evoking, non-evaluative, performance feedback.**

For administrators, instructional coaches, colleagues and anyone interested in the development of teachers and teaching- Here are a few simple tips that will help with both the giving and the receiving of feedback.

## Tips for Giving Feedback...

-Be gentle. We all like to say "Just give it to me straight. I can handle it." Don't believe that for a moment. Each of us takes our work personally. To speak about a person's work is to speak about the person himself. When offering feedback, go easy; be respectful; err on the side of kindness and positivity. To be asked for feedback is to be invited onto sacred ground. Be humble and tread lightly.

-Be Skillful. Often, it's not what we say, but the skill with which we say it, that makes the difference. Choose your words carefully. Use cushion statements, positive presupposition, and positive non-verbal cues. Practice delivering the feedback before you provide it.

-Be Positive. Show genuine enthusiasm for the teaching and a keen interest in the teacher's lesson. Thank the teacher for opening up her classroom.

## Tips for Receiving Feedback...

-Ask for feedback. Be courageous and go beyond "accepting feedback." Be proactive. Seek it out. Promise you'll reciprocate. Make it a habit. It's been said "Feedback is the breakfast of champions."

-Don't deny, defend, or minimize. These are standard coping skills. To deny is to let your brain be preoccupied with the thought "I didn't do that." To defend is let your brain run with "Well, here's why I had to do that." To minimize is to discount the feedback as being trivial, as in "Picky, picky."

-Seek clarification and deeper insight. Ask follow-up questions. Invite the observer to go deeper and provide more information. This honors the input, provides more learning opportunities, and makes it likely that the provider will engage again, if asked.

-Say "Thank you." No one has extra time at school. When someone takes the time to observe and provide feedback- be grateful. A nice touch is to follow-up with the person who provided feedback and let him know how you've incorporated their feedback into your teaching.

-Extra credit. The most effect feedback receivers can discern valuable insights even from poorly provided or insincere feedback. Remember that even poor feedback often contains a kernel of truth in it.