

# Workplace Communication

Presentation notes:

Team Concepts

Assertiveness in Communication

Giving and Receiving Feedback

References

# Stages of Team Development

One of the most influential models of teamwork was developed in 1965 by Bruce Tuckman. It identified four stages that all groups move through as they develop. In 1977 he added a fifth stage:

## 1) Forming

- *Team members meet*
- *Learn about the tasks they will need to perform*
- *Try to see how they fit in with each other and understand what is expected of them*

## 2) Storming

- *Characterized by conflict and polarization*
- *Team members may challenge each other*
- *Members question what they are doing and how it is being done*

## 3) Norming

- *Members begin to understand and accept each other*
- *The group begins to focus more effectively on the project tasks and objectives*

## 4) Performing

- *Team members are comfortable with each other*
- *Group norms have been accepted*
- *Interpersonal and structural issues have been settled and support task performance*
- *Team synergy is high during this stage which results in high performance*

## 5) Adjourning

- *The project nears completion*
- *The team has become very close*
- *Many members feel a sense of loss*
- *For this reason, this stage is also known as the Mourning stage.*

# Types of Teams

**Permanent teams** perform on a permanent basis and are not dissolved once the task is accomplished. Most department groups are expected to always function effectively throughout the year and hence are permanent teams.

**Temporary teams** lose their importance once the task is accomplished. Such teams are usually formed for a shorter duration either to assist the permanent team or work when the members of the permanent team are busy in some other project.

**Task Forces** are formed for a special purpose of working on any specific project or finding a solution to a very critical problem. The task force explores all the possible reasons which led to a severe problem and tries to resolve it within a given deadline.

**Committees** are generally formed to work on a particular assignment either permanently or on a temporary basis. Individuals with common interests, more or less from the same background and attitude come together on a common platform to form a committee and work on any matter.

**Organization/Work Force** groups are formed in organizations where team members work together under the expert guidance of a leader. A leader or a supervisor is generally appointed among the members itself and he along with his team works hard to achieve a common goal. The leader all through must stand by his team and extract the best out of each team member. He must not underestimate any of his team members and take his team along to avoid conflicts.

**Self-Managed Teams** consist of individuals who work together again for a common purpose but without the supervision of any leader. Here as the name suggests every individual is accountable for his individual performance. The team members of self-managed teams must respect each other and should never lose focus on their target. No leader is appointed and the team members have to take their own responsibility. Individuals take the initiative on their own and are their own guides and mentors.

**Cross Functional Teams** are comprised of individuals from different areas working together for a common objective. In such teams, people from different areas, interests and likings join hands to come out with a unique idea to successfully complete a task.

**Virtual Teams** consist of individuals who are separated by distances and connected through computer. Here individuals communicate with each other online through internet. Such teams are helpful when employees need to connect with each other and are located at different places.

# Characteristics of Successful Teams

- **Clear Expectations:** Has executive leadership clearly communicated its expectations for the team's performance and expected outcomes? Do team members understand why the team was created? Is the organization demonstrating constancy of purpose in supporting the team with resources of people, time and money? Does the work of the team receive sufficient emphasis as a priority in terms of the time, discussion, attention and interest directed its way by executive leaders?
- **Context:** Do team members understand why they are participating on the team? Do they understand how the strategy of using teams will help the organization attain its communicated business goals? Can team members define their team's importance to the accomplishment of corporate goals? Does the team understand where its work fits in the total context of the organization's goals, principles, vision and values?
- **Commitment:** Do team members want to participate on the team? Do team members feel the team mission is important? Are members committed to accomplishing the team mission and expected outcomes? Do team members perceive their service as valuable to the organization and to their own careers? Do team members anticipate recognition for their contributions? Do team members expect their skills to grow and develop on the team? Are team members excited and challenged by the team opportunity?
- **Competence:** Does the team feel that it has the appropriate people participating? (As an example, in a process improvement, is each step of the process represented on the team?) Does the team feel that its members have the knowledge, skill and capability to address the issues for which the team was formed? If not, does the team have access to the help it needs? Does the team feel it has the resources, strategies and support needed to accomplish its mission?
- **Charter:** Has the team taken its assigned area of responsibility and designed its own mission, vision and strategies to accomplish the mission. Has the team defined and communicated its goals; its anticipated outcomes and contributions; its timelines; and how it will measure both the outcomes of its work and the process the team followed to accomplish their task? Does the leadership team or other coordinating group support what the team has designed?
- **Control:** Does the team have enough freedom and empowerment to feel the ownership necessary to accomplish its charter? At the same time, do team members clearly understand their boundaries? How far may members go in pursuit of solutions? Are limitations (i.e. monetary and time resources) defined at

the beginning of the project before the team experiences barriers and rework? Is the team's reporting relationship and accountability understood by all members of the organization? Has the organization defined the team's authority? To make recommendations? To implement its plan? Is there a defined review process so both the team and the organization are consistently aligned in direction and purpose? Do team members hold each other accountable for project timelines, commitments and results? Does the organization have a plan to increase opportunities for self-management among organization members?

- **Collaboration:** Does the team understand team and group process? Do members understand the stages of group development? Are team members working together effectively interpersonally? Do all team members understand the roles and responsibilities of team members? team leaders? team recorders? Can the team approach problem solving, process improvement, goal setting and measurement jointly? Do team members cooperate to accomplish the team charter? Has the team established group norms or rules of conduct in areas such as conflict resolution, consensus decision making and meeting management? Is the team using an appropriate strategy to accomplish its action plan?
- **Communication:** Are team members clear about the priority of their tasks? Is there an established method for the teams to give feedback and receive honest performance feedback? Does the organization provide important business information regularly? Do the teams understand the complete context for their existence? Do team members communicate clearly and honestly with each other? Do team members bring diverse opinions to the table? Are necessary conflicts raised and addressed?
- **Creative Innovation:** Is the organization really interested in change? Does it value creative thinking, unique solutions, and new ideas? Does it reward people who take reasonable risks to make improvements? Or does it reward the people who fit in and maintain the status quo? Does it provide the training, education, access to books and films, and field trips necessary to stimulate new thinking?
- **Consequences:** Do team members feel responsible and accountable for team achievements? Are rewards and recognition supplied when teams are successful? Is reasonable risk respected and encouraged in the organization? Do team members fear reprisal? Do team members spend their time finger pointing rather than resolving problems? Is the organization designing reward systems that recognize both team and individual performance? Is the organization planning to share gains and increased profitability with team and individual contributors? Can contributors see their impact on increased organization success?
- **Coordination:** Are teams coordinated by a central leadership team that assists the groups to obtain what they need for success? Have priorities and resource allocation been planned across departments? Do teams understand the concept

of the internal customer—the next process, anyone to whom they provide a product or a service? Are cross-functional and multi-department teams common and working together effectively? Is the organization developing a customer-focused process-focused orientation and moving away from traditional departmental thinking?

- **Cultural Change:** Does the organization recognize that the team-based, collaborative, empowering, enabling organizational culture of the future is different than the traditional, hierarchical organization it may currently be? Is the organization planning to or in the process of changing how it rewards, recognizes, appraises, hires, develops, plans with, motivates and manages the people it employs?

Does the organization plan to use failures for learning and support reasonable risk? Does the organization recognize that the more it can change its climate to support teams, the more it will receive in pay back from the work of the teams? Read more about culture change.

## Common Barriers To Successful Teams

- Poor Planning
- Poor Leadership
- Poor Training
- Poor Attitude
- Poor Rapport Among Team Members
- Poor Recognition and Rewards
- A Team in Name Only.
- Ineffective, Unnecessary Meetings
- Lack of Empowerment
- Poorly Linked Skills
- Lack of Management Commitment
- No Strategic or Policy Connection
- Lack of Belief in Teams

# Assertiveness in Communication

The goal of assertive communication is to solve problems positively and productively.

What does assertive communication involve? Fundamentally, communication assertively means being prepared to:

- Express your thoughts, feelings and ideas
- Request what you want directly and specifically
- Refuse someone without feeling guilty

As the primary goal of assertive communication is to solve problems, it also leads to stronger working relationships and more productive teams. Often, if all members of a team practice assertive communication, the balance of power within the team feels more equal.

Every person has the right to decide how he or she wishes to be treated by others. But this entitlement also depends on a willingness to accept the consequences of your own actions. These two concepts lie at the heart of assertive communication.

Assertiveness is based on the principle that people have the right to decide what treatment they will, or won't, accept from others. Individuals are entitled to stand up for their rights, but not at the expense of the rights of others.

There are three interpersonal communication styles: passive, aggressive, and assertive. These styles become more pronounced during stressful situations. The aggressive and passive styles are most common, whereas people find it harder to be assertive.

## Three Interpersonal Communication Styles

Of the three interpersonal communication styles – passive, aggressive, and assertive – passive and aggressive styles are the most common, whereas people find it harder to be assertive. These styles become more pronounced during stressful situations.

Behavior and communication can range from totally submissive (passive) at one extreme to overtly threatening (aggressive) at the other. Assertiveness is in the middle.

### The passive communication style

When people behave passively, they hope they'll get what they need without having to ask for it outright. They're afraid that if they ask outright, people won't like them. They only hint at what they want and then hold others responsible for not giving it to them.

Passive people often adopt defensive postures, to make it appear that they are taking up less space. They keep eye contact to a minimum and are often soft-spoken, hesitant, and cautious. They also can behave passive aggressively and resort to sabotage in retaliation for not getting what they want.

People act passively because they fear conflict or confrontation. Since passive people go out of their way to be liked, they think that they are building good relationships with co-workers. In fact, the opposite is often true. Work relationships become unstable, because colleagues tire of "second guessing" what passive people really want, and hearing about the "sacrifices" that passive people claim to have made.

### **The aggressive communication style**

When someone is adopting an aggressive communication style, being liked is not a priority. Being feared is more important. Aggressive people will say what they think, not caring about the impact on the receiver. Aggressive people demand what they want, and the only rights and feelings that concern them are their own.

Aggressive people adopt a threatening stance, taking up as much space as possible by standing with legs apart and hands on hips. They act aggressively because it works – those around them take the easy route, and give in when faced with their offensive behavior. However, any gains are short term. Working relationships can't flourish in an atmosphere of resentment, and co-workers may even retaliate with sabotage or insubordination.

### **The assertive communication style**

If you are being assertive, you care about other people's feelings, but don't feel totally responsible for them. You believe that you should take care of your own needs, and you trust others with theirs. You don't want to be feared, but you're not desperate to be liked, either. You are prepared to let others decide what they think of you.

To behave assertively, stand straight, and maintain eye contact with the other person. Ask for what you need, and say what you think. You also should use "I" statements. Consider the following examples of assertive statements:

"I feel very uncomfortable when you use bad language, and I'd like you to stop."

"Well, I'm moving offices now. I can't stand this language."

By acting assertively, you guide others to your desired outcome by enabling them to see the connection between their action and your response. Acting assertively will help

you to build more stable and effective relationships, both inside and outside of the workplace – although you won't necessarily be liked all of the time.

Assertive communication is not always received well, so it takes courage to stand up for yourself. This is particularly true for passive people, who find it difficult to be direct. At first it can be hard to maintain your assertiveness. Initially, people may react negatively while they are getting used to the "new you."

You need to judge when to speak assertively, and to whom, but it's worth the effort. The long-term results of assertiveness are all positive, including greater self-esteem and more successful negotiations. Sometimes it may feel uncomfortable, but people will soon be giving you the respect that you show them, which can only improve your work relationships.

## ***THE BODY AND VOCAL BEHAVIORS OF DIFFERING COMMUNICATION STYLES***

<b><i>Passive</i></b>	<b><i>Aggressive</i></b>	<b><i>Assertive</i></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shoulders hunched</li> <li>• Often leans on objects or walls</li> <li>• Slumps while sitting in chairs</li> <li>• Blank facial expression</li> <li>• Eyes downcast</li> <li>• Pouting</li> <li>• Inappropriate use of smiles</li> <li>• Constantly handling objects like coins, pens, paperclips, etc.</li> <li>• Often chews on pens and pencils Hands are at or over the mouth</li> <li>• Nodding of head in agreement</li> <li>• Excessive blinking</li> <li>• Difficult to hear</li> <li>• Whiny tone of voice</li> <li>• Fearful look</li> <li>• Minimal eye contact</li> <li>• Looks to see how others are responding while someone is speaking to him/her</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appears rigid</li> <li>• Hands placed on hips</li> <li>• Moves quickly from place to place</li> <li>• Walks ahead of others</li> <li>• Ready to lurch forward at any moment</li> <li>• Lowers eyebrows</li> <li>• Rolls eyes upward to show displeasure</li> <li>• Mouth turned down at corners</li> <li>• Turns head quickly for emphasis</li> <li>• Throws items</li> <li>• Slams doors</li> <li>• Uses a pencil or pen to direct people</li> <li>• Stares</li> <li>• Moves quickly</li> <li>• Looks at clock or watch frequently</li> <li>• Deliberate tone of voice</li> <li>• Yells and screams for sustained periods of time</li> <li>• Facial contortions</li> <li>• Critical tone of voice</li> <li>• Pounding on table for emphasis</li> <li>• Violation of other people's space</li> <li>• Jabs index finger into air at people</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At ease</li> <li>• Shoulders are back and straight</li> <li>• Open</li> <li>• Interested facial expressions</li> <li>• Arms and hands invite closeness</li> <li>• Index finger is directed to oneself</li> <li>• Periodically looks away</li> <li>• Makes direct eye contact</li> <li>• Reasonable, comfortable tone of voice</li> <li>• Facial expressions reflect the appropriate tone of the conversation</li> <li>• Pleasant expressions and tone of voice</li> <li>• When hands are used for emphasis, fingers are slightly apart</li> <li>• Clear tone of voice</li> <li>• Appropriate vocal volume for the setting</li> <li>• No suggestion of fear</li> <li>• Good vocal modulation for emphasis</li> </ul>

## Basic Assertiveness Tips:

- Repeat quietly but firmly the point you're trying to make.
- Don't be shouted down.
- Be prepared to say no – firmly and clearly – if you feel someone is trying to pressure you into doing something that you don't want to do.
- Be clear about what you mean, feel or want. Don't be vague as this can lead to misunderstandings and may place you in an awkward position.
- Don't be drawn into arguments or discussion that may lead you into confusing the issue – keep to your main points.
- Don't allow people to make you feel guilty if you can't do something.
- You have a right to decide what you feel able to do or not to do.
- Be aware that body language gives off clear messages. People will take account of how you look, the way you're standing, sitting, and any eye contact, as well as your tone of voice and the words you actually use.
- When you're being assertive, you need to keep eye contact, use a firm tone of voice, be positive and don't go over the top with apologies.
- The "I" Statement:
  1. "I feel\_\_\_\_" (taking responsibility for your own feelings)
  2. "when you\_\_\_\_" (stating the behavior that is a problem)
  3. "because\_\_\_\_" (what it is about the behavior or its consequences that you object to)
  - 4a. "I'd appreciate it if you would\_\_\_\_" (offer a preferred alternative to the behavior)Or
  - 4b. "Can we work this out together?" (be open to working on the problem together)
    - Example 1:

"I feel frustrated when you do not return items that you have borrowed from my desk because it slows me down when I need them. I'd appreciate it if you would request the purchase of the items you need so we can both get our work done efficiently."
    - Example 2:

"I feel used when you send me document drafts full of typographical errors because I end up spending more time correcting them than actually reviewing the substance of the writing. What are your thoughts on how we can continue proofing each other's work while also respecting each other's' time?"

# Feedback

Effectively given, feedback contributes to the workplace in these ways:

- Essential workplace communication
- Increases self-awareness
- Encourages appropriate changes
- Promotes honesty, truth and openness
- Fosters better working relationships

## Barriers to giving feedback:

- Giving praise is usually a lot easier than giving “criticism.” This can lead to situations where instructive or corrective feedback is withheld and only praise is given, artificially inflating the self-image of others and negatively impacting work unit performance.
- How often have you concluded a feedback session after which you felt uncertain that any improvements would be forthcoming? Sometimes the receiver remains uncommitted to change because the expectations were unclear or not understood.
- Have you ever had to give feedback at a particular time that it was just about the last thing you wanted to do? Stressful day, not feeling well, pressures outside of work? Entering a discussion of this type when in the wrong frame of mind is not generally beneficial to either party.
- Do you dread giving feedback to some people vs. others? Why?
- Do assumptions or premature judgments sometimes cloud the facts? That is, are there occasions when your comments are based more on your impression of the person than on verifiable facts?

## Giving Feedback:

Feedback in the workplace is essential. Effective feedback increases the recipient's awareness of his actions on others. It also encourages them to commit themselves to changes in behavior.

Providing feedback to your colleagues also helps promote honesty, trust and openness. Over time, it can foster better working relationships.

**Destructive feedback** focuses on the recipient's personal traits and character, rather than being based on behavior and facts. It is often perceived as a personal attack by the receiver.

Destructive feedback seldom benefits anyone. Although givers may feel better from airing their views, receiver will be focusing on their feelings toward the givers, rather than the actual feedback.

**Constructive feedback** is the most effective kind of feedback. Giving feedback constructively promotes the improvement and development of the person to whom you are providing feedback. For it to be constructive, you must give recipients information – be it good or bad – in a way that means that they remain positive about themselves and their work. When you give constructive feedback, you help people learn more about themselves.

**Effective feedback** is that which is appropriate, accepted and acted upon. The following issues must be considered:

- Set realistic goals
  - The most important step. Ask yourself, "What am I trying to achieve by giving this feedback?" Establish what outcome you would like for yourself and for the recipient.
- Establish the facts
  - Before giving feedback, do your homework. Part of the feedback process is to review a person's actions or behavior. You must be able to support this with factual information. You also need to understand what the standards should be.
- Get the timing right
  - Once you have determined goals and carefully considered the facts, you are in a position to give feedback. Positive feedback should be given as soon as

possible. Where feedback is negative, you need to decide exactly when and where to give it so that it has the most impact.

- Be specific
  - Feedback involves giving information to people about their performances or behavior. Keep to the facts – don't focus on personalities. At this step, you are physically giving the feedback. How you do it can make the difference between a poor or favorable outcome.

### The DASR Technique

The DASR technique helps to make your feedback more effective. DASR stands for describe, acknowledge, specify and reaffirm. Each step is shown below.

The Stages	Descriptions
Describe	At this stage, describe what you have observed about the person's behavior or performance. Avoid using "you" statements--these can sound as though they blame the recipient of the feedback. Instead try to describe what you have observed. Say: "I noticed..." or "I saw..."
Acknowledge	Acknowledge the impact that the recipient's behavior or performance has on you or on others. Say: "I felt angry when you..." Do not use sweeping statements such as "You always..." or "You never..." as this encourages conflict and disagreement. Be specific about what you say, and do not let sarcasm and emotion creep into your feedback.
Specify	At this stage, be direct, and actively give suggestions about how the recipient can make improvements. An example is: "How about if I reminded you to do the reports the day before they are due--how does that sound?" Encourage the recipient to make suggestions.
Reaffirm	Confirm that you have faith in the person to make the changes in behavior or performance. End your feedback by confirming what you have both agreed to. Say: "Thanks for agreeing to get your work in on time. I'm sure that this will help you to get on top of your work more easily."

## Handling Challenging Feedback Situations

CHALLENGING SITUATIONS	REASONS	STRATEGIES FOR DEALING WITH THIS SITUATION
people who disagree with your feedback	Disagreements often occur when there is a mismatch in perception between the giver and receiver of the feedback. This is often about the agreed standards of behavior.	Ask them why they disagree. Do they disagree with the facts, or whether their behavior is a problem? Explain the consequences of their behavior. Be prepared to go back and do more research. You might find that your facts are incorrect. Take your time--the disagreement needs to be resolved before you can go on to the next stage of your feedback.
people who become emotional or upset	People can become emotional on hearing negative feedback, especially if it is a surprise.	If you look for signs that recipients are overloaded with feedback, this situation will not occur. However, if it does happen, you need to acknowledge their rights to be emotional, and ask them why they are upset. Try to continue with the session, but at a slower pace. If you abandon the feedback, it is difficult to resurrect it in the future.
people who become angry	In this situation, anger is usually used as a form of protection. People react to the pressure that they are suffering as a result of hearing negative feedback. Anger can also veil other emotions. Tread carefully, as anger can turn into tears.	The best course of action is to acknowledge the reaction. Don't let anger intimidate you, however. Try to get recipients to agree that there is mutual benefit for both of you. Acknowledge what they are trying to achieve, and your own goals.
people who are disinterested	Recipients who are disinterested in what you have to say may not be motivated, or simply do not care	Make sure that your feedback is linked to standards, and that recipients can be shown a clear gap between their performances and the standards. Reinforce your feedback by explaining the

	<p>about their performances. This can be the most difficult type to deal with, since the hurt or angry person at least cares about what you have said.</p>	<p>consequences and impact of not meeting the standards. Follow up progress frequently.</p>
<p>people who deny your right to give them feedback</p>	<p>This reaction is most common when upward feedback is being given. Denial often occurs when people feel threatened, undermined, or that their status is being threatened or challenged.</p>	<p>The best way to deal with this is to remind recipients why you are in a good position to give them feedback. Show them what the mutual benefits would be. Explain that you appreciate what they are trying to achieve, but that you also have your own objectives.</p>

## Tackling Recurring Problems

The Steps	Descriptions
1. Raise the issue.	Raise the issue again with the recipient. Introduce the subject by saying: "Can you help me with...?" or "I need to discuss..."
2. Describe specifics.	Describe what is happening, and remember to be specific. Say: "I noticed that this has happened..." or "This has meant that..." At this stage, you also need to open up a dialogue, and ask how the recipient sees the situation.
3. Request changes.	Use this discussion to generate alternative ways of handling the problem. Encourage the recipient to contribute ideas and suggestions, by saying: "How does this sound?" or "How can we resolve this more effectively?"
4. Agree on actions with the recipients.	Recount what you have discussed, and recap what you both agreed to do. Allow the recipient to contribute to the discussion at all times. You are unlikely to get commitment if this does not occur. Arrange another meeting to discuss progress.
5. Follow up.	The most important step of the process is to monitor the situation, and follow it up. As you have had to raise this issue again, you cannot guarantee that it is dealt with. You may need to keep records if necessary.

## Receiving Feedback:

Receiving feedback arouses emotions, and it can make you feel uncomfortable. It is important to be able to recognize these emotions and to deal with them effectively if you are to accept feedback effectively.

Hearing criticism about yourself implies that you may be wrong – it can challenge and threaten you. It can also have a negative effect on your self-image because the way you feel about yourself is largely based on your perception of how others see you.

For feedback from any source to be valuable to you, you need to analyze it and then take action. There are two aspects of getting feedback:

- Being proactive – actively seeking feedback
- Being reactive – dealing with feedback and criticism that is offered to you

## Analyzing Feedback

Requested –or proactive – feedback is that which you actively solicit from others.

Reactive feedback is that which comes to you without requesting it. In either case, you need to maintain your assertiveness and assess the feedback based on these points.

With proactive feedback, begin by thinking about what you really want to achieve from the feedback session. What specific issues are you trying to address?

Always assess the person giving the feedback. Is the person actually qualified to provide honest, useful feedback?

Particularly with proactive feedback, think about your own ability to receive. How much feedback can you handle? With reactive feedback, you may not have much control over this.

When receiving feedback, let the giver know what it is you need to know. Ask questions like, “What do I do well?” and “What could I do differently?”

Finally, feedback is a two-way communication. Sometimes when you’ve been given feedback, you may not understand the point that’s being made. Discuss and clarify issues as needed to ensure both parties understand what is expected or what will transpire in the future. Summarizing the conversation is a good idea as well.

Some of these points are more easily accomplished with an effective giver of feedback, of course, but even then the receiver has an active role to play.

## Deciding Whether to Accept Feedback

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Not all feedback you are given will be useful or even valid, so it's important to make sure that you do not take all feedback at face value. You need to understand what has been said, and then decide whether you should accept or reject the feedback. This decision should be based on whether you feel that you are able to act on the feedback that has been given.

So, how do you go about accepting or rejecting the pieces of feedback you are given? There are three simple steps to take when you are given feedback about an action. When trying to decide whether to accept or reject feedback, it is important to think carefully about each of the three steps of the process, which are explained below.

- **Find out what actually happened.** Ask the giver of the feedback to be specific—whether he or she is reinforcing your own views, or giving you new information. Ask questions such as, "What did I do?" or "How did I behave?" or "Give me an example of..."
- **Discover when it happened.** Next, ask when the examples occurred. Use questions such as, "When did I do this?" or "Did you see me doing this?" or "When did it last happen?" This information will help you to decide whether or not you have already addressed the issues raised.
- **Find out why the action was correct or incorrect.** Find out why the feedback giver feels that your performance is good or bad. Do this by asking questions such as, "Why did you think I did a good job?" or "What would have been acceptable?"

If you do not get the facts behind the feedback, you will not be able to act. Furthermore, you will find that the feedback may confuse and bewilder you, hindering you from improving your performance.

It is impossible to be objective about the feedback you receive unless you have all the facts at hand. Using the three-step process helps you to gather this information, so that you can make an informed analysis of the validity of the feedback you have received.

If you receive fairly vague feedback, you can use open questions to determine whether you should act upon it. Open questions include words like what, where, when, why, how, and who. These questions cannot be answered with a simple "yes" or "no," so the feedback giver has to provide more information.

You also should encourage the feedback giver to give you examples of when the error or errors occurred, so you can decide whether or not the problem is current. Finally, ask for an indication of how to deal with the problem appropriately, so that you can improve your performance.

Feedback is useful only if it improves your performance. It is important to remember that you must get to the bottom of the feedback if you don't immediately have sufficient information to act upon. By using the three-step process described above, you can effectively determine whether or not you should accept the feedback you are given.

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