

## NVC at WORK: GIVING AND RECEIVING FEEDBACK

Opening discussion: What is feedback?

Why is feedback often one of the most problematic pieces of communication in the workplace?

- Implicates our core needs for safety and security.
- What we call "feedback" is often loaded with judgements about the other person and ourselves.
- Reinforces the use of labels that "limit the full scope of humanity."
- Often ends with unclear requests full of assumptions.

### GIVING FEEDBACK

#### Step 1: preliminary acknowledgments

- We are giving feedback *all the time*.
- We all share an acute sensitivity to perceived criticism.
- Perceived criticism will likely be met with defensiveness, dismissiveness, or counter-criticism.
- Positive feedback, if vague, does not by itself contain any useful information and potentially does a disservice by failing to indicate a basis for improvement/continued positive performance.
- People crave specific feedback that informs them of the specific actions they can take to meet the needs of the person sharing the evaluation.
- Using the distinctions of NVC to give observation- and needs-based feedback in close proximity to the triggering event helps prevent the calcification of enemy images (static judgements).

#### 2. prepare for giving feedback

- Self-empathy:
  - Get clear on what your intention is for communicating with the other person in this feedback format.
  - What need are you seeking to meet by giving this feedback?  
Note: "I need to tell her how poorly this report is written" is not a universal human need.
- Check in: Are you open to choosing curiosity over being right?
  - Choosing curiosity over being right will create the spaciousness for someone to respond to your feedback and for you to hear this response for what it is.

#### 3. giving feedback

- specific observation [as distinguished from evaluations or judgements]
- specific needs met or not met
- clear request

Making a clear request will help the person you are evaluating to focus on strategies to meet your needs rather than keeping their mind dwelling on criticism where there may be none intended.

#### EXERCISE:

1. Without any inhibitions, write out some feedback you have been wanting to give someone at work.
2. Go through the list of items under the "preliminary acknowledgments" category. Are there any of these that seem particularly relevant to the feedback you've been wanting to give?
3. In preparation for giving feedback using the distinctions provided by the NVC framework, do self-empathy and ask yourself: What need are you seeking to meet by giving this feedback?
4. What is the specific observation this feedback is tied to?

5. What needs were or were not met?

6. What request would you like to make?

PROCESS:

- Emotional honesty: "Could you tell me how you feel right now having heard what I just said?"
- Understanding: "I want to be sure that I've communicated myself clearly; would you reflect back to me what you just heard me say?"

ACTION

- Specific, doable, present-tense: "Would you be willing to...?"

## RECEIVING FEEDBACK

### Step 1. Self-empathy

You are likely to be triggered into defensiveness and tempted toward giving counter-criticism when feedback is perceived as negative. If you are triggered, practice self-empathy to reconnect with your own needs.

### Step 2. Silent-empathy

Use silent-empathy to guess at what needs the other person is trying to meet with their feedback.

### Step 3. Use NVC distinctions; collaborate on developing a clear request

Go through the observations and needs of the situation; collaborate with your evaluator to help them formulate a clear request. This will help you focus on strategies to meet their needs rather than keeping your mind dwelling on criticism where there may be none intended.

EXERCISE:

1. Think of some feedback you recently received at work. Write out this feedback as you can recall.
2. Go through the list of items under the "preliminary acknowledgments" category on page one. Are there any of these that seem particularly relevant to when you were receiving this feedback?
3. Self-empathy: INITIAL FEELINGS – UNDERLYING FEELINGS – NEEDS.
4. Silent-empathy for your evaluator: What needs were they seeking to meet by giving this feedback?
5. What is the specific observation (as distinguished from evaluations) this feedback is tied to?
6. What needs were or were not met in this situation?
7. How could you help your evaluator formulate a clear and compassionate request?

PROCESS

- Emotional honesty: "Would you like me to share how I feel having heard what you just said?"
- Understanding: "I'm seeing you an effort to communicate yourself clearly to me right now; would you like me to reflect back what I just heard you say so that you can get a sense of my understanding?"

ACTION REQUEST

- Action / agreement [specific, doable, present-tense]: "Would you like to agree right now that...?"