Essentials of Feedback

To be helpful, feedback must be such that the person: (a) understands the information; (b) is able to accept the information; and (c) is able to do something based upon the information. Certain types of feedback should be avoided since it serves only the needs of the person giving it, not the person receiving it.

Giving Feedback

1. Perceptions, reactions, and opinions should be presented as such and not as facts.

2. Feedback should refer to the relevant performance, behavior, or outcomes, not to the individual as a person.

3. Feedback should be in terms of specific, observable behavior, not general or global.

4. Feedback should avoid "loaded" terms that produce emotional reactions and raised defenses.

5. Feedback should be concerned with those things over which an individual can exercise some control.

Receiving Feedback

Receiving feedback always offers the possibility of learning something valuable that can serve as a basis for future improvement. Consider the following:

1. Listen carefully while not letting defenses build; mentally note questions or disagreements.

2. Paraphrase what you think you hear to check your perception.

3. Ask questions for clarification and ask for examples in those areas that are unclear or in which disagreement exists. Paraphrase answers again.

4. Carefully evaluate the accuracy and potential value of what you have heard.

5. Gather additional information from other sources or by observing your own behavior and others' reactions to it.