How to give constructive feedback[*]

1. *Minimize and downplay evaluation*. The purpose of the feedback is not to give the learner a score (e.g. "very good" or "needs improvement"), but to identify ways in which they could further learn, develop and improve. (A good operating assumption is that every activity is in some way "very good", and also in some way "needs improvement".)

2. *Ask many questions*. Questions are generally preferable to answers, as the former tend to stimulate and sharpen thinking while the latter tend to shift responsibility from the learner to the person providing feedback.

3. *Listen to the learner.* Try to understand their reasoning, motivations, concerns and needs. Allow these issues to direct your comments and the conversation.

4. *Adopt the learner's perspective.* Try to "get inside the learner's mind" and see the issues from their perspective. It doesn't matter how you might have performed a task or would solve a particular problem – what is important is to help the learner find their own path. Another useful perspective is that of the intended audience – e.g. the reader of a piece of student writing, or the students in a classroom lesson (when giving feedback to the teacher). Reflect back to the learner how their actions might be interpreted by or affect the intended audience.

5. *Direct feedback to what can be realistically changed or improved* in the current context. For example, if giving feedback to a short basketball player, it would be unhelpful to dwell on how much better they would be if they were taller – presumably an issue outside of their control. Rather, it would be considerably more constructive to discuss ways of coping with their height disadvantage.

6. *Anchor the feedback in examples, but generalize from particulars to broad principles*. Don't share with the learner your "gut feelings"; if you can't provide examples of a problem or issue, the comment should likely be discarded. Seek to move from particular examples to a general principle that is potentially applicable to other contexts.

7. *Be balanced and moderate* in your feedback. Balance between encouraging and critical comments. Don't overdue it; too much feedback can be damaging.

8. *Conduct the feedback conversation in an appropriate location and at an appropriate time*. This seems obvious, but worth reflecting on because in so many schools there are so few locations and such little time for an intimate, uninterrupted conversation.

9. *Converse, don't preach*. The general tone of a feedback conversation should be one of two friends talking about a topic of mutual interest. Let your curiosity guide you – share with the learner your questions, responses and reflections as an interested participant or reader. Try to avoid an authoritative tone.

10. *Encourage the learner's own self-criticism*.

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[*] Adapted and translated from the Hebrew: Adam Lefstein, "The calf doesn't grow because you weigh it." *Thinking Education* **18**, 1999: 124-130.