

Providing Beneficial Feedback

Feedback means letting someone know on a timely and ongoing basis how they are performing, and it includes both positive and negative observations.

Providing quality feedback can be an incredibly powerful teaching tool. Research has shown that appropriately given feedback positively impacts the interpersonal development of student veterinarians. In order to better understand the feedback process, let's compare three groups of students receiving feedback from a peer who felt their teammate "patronized" the client at some point during the clinical interviews.

Examples: (These are exaggerated illustrations!)

Harsh, non-specific, personal feedback: "You seemed really arrogant. I didn't like the way you talked to the client, and I don't know what you can do about it. It's probably just the way you are."

Positive, non-specific feedback: "Well...I think you did everything really well. You were really good. I can't think of anything you should change."

Specific, balanced feedback: "I thought you seemed very confident while you were interviewing the client and this made me feel comfortable with you. You made eye contact, and shook the client's hand when you were leaving, which gave the feeling that you were really "with her" on this case.

There were a couple of occasions where you smiled while sharing some difficult news with the client while you were talking to her. This made me uncomfortable and I wondered how it appeared to her. It seemed to be something of a mixed message. You might want to be aware of that facial expression when talking to clients so you don't inadvertently convey something you don't mean."

These tips will assist you as you think about how to develop the technique of providing specific, balanced feedback.

1. Make specific statements, and support general statements with specific examples. Precise and specific statements are valuable to the receiver for both positive behavior ("Exactly what did I do right?" or "What should I be sure to continue doing?") and negative behavior ("What precisely should I change?"). To be told that "you did well in our meetings" may be satisfying to both parties, but it's not nearly as effective as saying "when you stepped up and helped us figure out how to delegate our research duties, you did it respectfully and fairly. It made me see you as a leader." The latter statement clearly describes exactly what the person giving feedback sees as positive in the receiver's performance.

2. Use descriptive language. Describe the impact of the peer's behavior on you or others on the clinic in concrete terms. Describe behavior, not personal

characteristics. For example, "When we all got together for the last meeting, you appeared rushed and uncomfortable. It made me concerned that something was wrong with how we were all working together."

3. Be direct, clear, and to the point. No matter how well motivated a peer might be, certain actions ("beating around the bush," and talking in general terms in hopes that the person will "get the message") create misunderstanding and discomfort. The objective is to communicate directly, not to leave them guessing.

4. Direct feedback toward behavior that the receiver can control. By providing concrete, specific feedback, you give your peer something he or she can concentrate on altering or improving.

5. Always use "I" phrases: It's more truthful and effective to place your remarks in the context of how you "felt" rather than how the peer 'was'. For example, say; "I felt anxious for the client when you came in and sat across from her without looking at her." rather than, "You were quite cold when you told the client about Sam's latest test results."

Use this situation to stress the importance of realizing that all clients, coworkers and peers are different people and that students should be prepared to learn and adapt to many different personality styles.

When done correctly and effectively, giving feedback can be extremely rewarding for both the reviewer and receiver.. Simulated client exercises like DC's provide the opportunity to make a major impact in the development of student's interpersonal style, team skills and future client communication skills. Since the positive development of communication skills is highly correlated with professional success, your role in assisting each other can have life long benefits!