

Handout B

Giving constructive feedback

When learning practical skills, feedback is essential. We need to help each other learn how to communicate better by observing and commenting on how colleagues practise new skills. To become aware of what we do well and where we have problems in communication is not easy for most people. During the course, we will help each other develop such skills. It is easier for another person to see how we communicate, but we need to develop our own skills in this as well.

When commenting on how another person communicates, we should follow some simple rules for constructive feedback. See below for key rules. You may identify other important considerations when giving constructive feedback.

Rules for giving constructive feedback:

- **Rule No. 1. Comment on positive things first**

Point out what the person is doing well. This makes him or her feel good, and puts him or her in a positive mood to listen to you, and receive constructive criticism with an open mind.

- **Rule No. 2. Be constructive**

Constructive criticism is helping the person receiving feedback to do better. Ask the person first if he/she can see any areas where they could do better, and if so how he/she might improve on those areas. If the person does not see any way to improve, then give suggestions for how you would do things in a better way.

- **Rule No. 3. Be specific**

Give advice which the person can use directly. Avoid generalizations.

Aim (by using rules 2 and 3): helping the person to learn.

Effect: motivation to learn and improve.



Positive feedback: Different aims and benefits



Negative feedback: Different aims and benefits

- **Rule No. 4. Do not give direct or blaming criticism**

When you do this, you imply that he or she is not as good as the person giving feedback.

Aim (when criticizing or blaming): to imply that you are better than him/her, you are superior.

Effect: the person feels inferior and bad. Becomes passive and stays passive.

NB In many settings where hierarchical structures are strong, blaming criticism is common. Many participants may have grown up with this as the norm. Spend some time discussing with others how it feels to be criticized this way, and whether blaming criticism is likely to lead to improvements. Discuss why being constructive is more likely to inspire the person to learn and improve.