

Mentoring skills: Challenging a mentee through feedback

Feedback is valuable because it will help a mentee reflect upon and get insights into their behaviour. Effective, descriptive feedback provides the opportunity for individuals to know how they and their behaviour is perceived by others, thereby giving them the chance, if appropriate, to change or improve.

The manner in which challenging feedback is delivered by the mentor is a major factor in determining whether it is helpful, constructive and taken on board by the mentee. Feedback based on the suggested list below is more likely to generate an effective learning experience for the person receiving it and reduce the likelihood of its rejection.

If you need to challenge a mentee's perception of himself/herself, or a situation s/he is in, you will be more effective if:

- the mentee is invited to review and give feedback about the situation/issue first. This encourages the development of **self-appraisal** skills.
- the feedback is **specific** rather than general. To be told 'your approach is fine' is less helpful than being told 'It is clear to me that you have thought through all the options, have done a substantial amount of research and are taking a considered approach about this'. **Avoid being evaluative**, e.g. 'you did that poorly', 'your attitude is awful'. Instead be descriptive and specific.
- the feedback is **balanced**, being neither overly negative nor positive.
- the feedback **takes account of the needs of both receiver and giver** of the feedback. Feedback which originates from a hidden agenda and does not take into account the needs of the mentee is likely to be destructive.
- the **behaviour isn't controllable**. To be told you are too short is to invite frustration. What can the person do? Grow?
- once you have discussed what went wrong and why, feedback moves on to **focus on what to do** rather than what was.
- the feedback is **checked out with the mentee**, so that you are clear that it has been correctly understood and taken on board by him/her.
- the **mentee has opportunity to respond**, to ask for clarification or to give you more information about the situation.
- you as the **mentor are able to model receiving feedback** i.e. by welcoming and encouraging the mentee to challenge them, and by not reacting defensively when this occurs.