

Asking for and Receiving Feedback

Simply put, feedback is a process of communicating directly to an individual what you experience, observe, think, and feel about his or her leadership. In this process of communication we engage each other.

Jesus asks the disciples what people are saying about him. Then he asks them what they say for themselves. The pause between his question and Peter's response, "You are the Christ," forms a moment of risk. The teacher is asking what the students have been observing through his teaching. And, as we know from the gospel accounts, the disciples didn't comprehend him until after the resurrection.

The ministry of feedback must be saturated in prayer. Knowing we are secure in God's love becomes the core from which we can invite and offer feedback. Holding ourselves and others in prayer is essential preparation for the ministry of feedback.

Feedback involves saying what you experience, observe, think, and feel about another person's leadership.

Feedback IS:

- plain speaking
- self revealing on the part of the speaker
- humbly invited, humbly offered
- a free gift invited and offered
- a dimension of covenant and love

Feedback in NOT:

- winning a point
- coercing another to do something
- passing rumors
- hiding behind what someone else is saying
- advocating a theological perspective
- defending one's self or others
- scandal
- objective truth

Leaders in the church exercise gifts of leadership in covenant and trust with others. Responsibility resides with leaders to invite others to give feedback about their experience of the leader's words and actions.

Invited feedback can be formal and informal, named and anonymous. Multiple processes are needed. Because of the perceived power of the leader and the vulnerability of the respondents, some feedback can be given anonymously. Opportunities for such communication are important. Questionnaires and rating scales that invite response without names attached offer one way of inviting such feedback.

The face-to-face feedback sessions with individuals and appropriate groups of people are just as important. The pastor/staff parish relations committee is responsible for providing direct feedback to church staff. Yet such feedback is difficult and mostly unhelpful when it is not invited by the pastor and other staff members.

Below is a checklist of important items for church leaders in asking for and receiving feedback. Use this list for yourself. It is not just for clergy or church staff. **ALL** church leaders are part of feedback processes. The board chair, the church school teacher, and the treasurer, no less than the pastor, are strengthened through their invitation for feedback from others.

Which of these apply to you? Why? Which do not apply? Why not?

When you invite feedback from others about your leadership, do the following:

- specify the feedback you seek (a general survey of your leadership is very different from specific feedback about a particular task you do in leadership)
- be certain that the person/persons understand what they are asked to do
- state your expectations (why are you asking?)
- structure the feedback (use question sheets, rating scales, etc.)
- plan the feedback sessions carefully
- have adequate time
- select a physical setting where you won't be interrupted
- be clear about confidentiality
- invite observations/experiences of your leadership related to the area of focus
- assume positive motive and intention on their part
- ask them to be specific and give details
- remember they are speaking from their own perspective
- test for clarity of communication (do you hear what they intend to say?)
- ask and invite questions for clarification
- be aware of your feelings, breathing, physical situation
- call for a break if needed
- divide the feedback and the conclusions from the feedback into two different sessions

This checklist is especially important in situations where feedback is difficult to give and to receive.

AT ITS BEST, FEEDBACK IS LOVE IN ACTION

-Excerpted from "Ministry Assessment Process – Assessment: Giving and Receiving Feedback," by Art Gafke, General Board of Higher Education and Ministry. For complete set of materials write to the Board, PO Box 871, Nashville, TN 37202.