**Making the most of feedback**

Many of us take considerable time to process feedback, and most of us can remember instances where we feel feedback has been unfair. To what extent does this continue to influence our judgements?

Most of us take feedback at the personal level and not at the task level. This means that if we haven’t done as well as we would like, we take it to mean we are not good enough. Is that really true?

A better interpretation might be that we didn’t quite understand what we needed to do, we were lacking in prior information, we weren’t motivated etc. This doesn’t mean that we lack the capacity to achieve. Sometimes when our calibration is out of synch with someone else’s assessment of us it may also mean the information provided was not clear enough, and/or the methods of assessing the specific task were not up to the job. The challenge to us all as individuals is to assess the personal responsibility we have in attaining good outcomes, and also acknowledge where, sometimes, the learning/work context also lets us down and how can we deal with this professionally.

We can change the way we deal with feedback (and get the most out of it) by adopting what psychologist Carol Dwek calls a ‘growth mindset’ rather than a ‘fixed mindset’. Find out more from [this video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hiiEeMN7vbQ), or this [short summary](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M1CHPnZfFmU). How would a growth mindset change what you can get from feedback? (Note it is possible for us to have a growth mindset in one context and a fixed mindset in another).

Linked to the notion of growth mindset is our goal orientation. If we are exclusively focused on performance goals and doing better than everyone else we may set ourselves up to fail. More successful learning is often associated with setting ourselves mastery goals – doing the best we can in a specific task.

When we get feedback that does not align with our expectations, it can be hurtful and confusing. We all need time to process the feedback, so give it some time. Think about what the key messages of the feedback are; are they valid; what can you do to address the situation on your own, and what things do you need to ask for help with.

We also come to learning with established *schema* – what we believe we need to do in order to do well. It is very stressful when previous ways of being successful no longer work, perhaps because we are in a new context. Giving up on what has always worked before is also really difficult.

We objectively need to think about the key message in the feedback. We must also be prepared to put our work out there and be willing to receive critique on it.

Not all that we do will work, and we should all consider the notion of ‘smart failing’: in order to succeed, we have to put ourselves out there and learn quickly from our mistakes.

**Avoid the Ostrich position!**

* What do I know I could have done better in retrospect?
* What I am still confused about?
* Who can I ask for clarification?
* What resources can I go to?
* Do I not know enough: do I need to go back and research this?
* I have worked hard on this but have misconceptions. Do I need support?
* I do not know of any other way to do this task. I need to see and be made aware of other approaches. Where can I go for help?
* What is my strategy to address the issues?



**Template 6: My Attitude to Feedback**

Look at these statements, where feedback seeking is shown in bold. **To what extent are you feedback seeking or feedback avoiding?** Once you have done this, try the emotional regulation exercise on the following page.

**What am I looking for in feedback?**

1. Confirmation of how I think I have done.
2. To know that I am doing okay.
3. Acknowledgement of the work I have done.
4. To bench mark myself against others.
5. Ways to improve on my previous performance.
6. To maximise my performance on the task.

**How I process feedback?**

1. I focus on the mark and ignore the feedback if I think I have done well enough.
2. I only focus on the negatives.
3. I take it personally – that I am not capable.
4. I look at what I can do to improve.
5. I ask if I don’t understand the feedback.
6. I look at a range of ways I can get support when I don’t understand.
7. I am able to work out whether it is down to a lack of work on my part – go back and do the work.
8. I know when I need to ask for help because I don’t understand.

**Seeking Feedback**

1. I avoid seeking feedback as I am nervous about what I will be told and don’t know if I can handle it.
2. I actively seek feedback as I want to know how to do better and I am not embarrassed to ask.
3. I know where to get support within and beyond my module/ programme.
4. I feel confident to give feedback to my peers.
5. I feel I learn through giving feedback.
6. I do not think I know enough to be able to give good feedback to my peers.

Giving feedback to others is a waste of time.

**Giving Feedback**

**Acting on Feedback**

1. I actively try to apply the feedback I have been given to further my work.
2. I ask if I do not understand.
3. I am good at interpreting what I need to do.
4. I do not feel the need to act on feedback.
5. I am satisfied with an okay performance.
6. I don’t see the value of feedback.
7. When I don’t understand feedback, I ignore it.
8. I can’t see the relevance of feedback.

Giving feedback to others is a waste of time.

**How good are your emotional regulation strategies?**

**Why does this matter?**

Our emotions help us to navigate every aspect of our lives, so we need to how and when to trust them. We also need to know when to adapt them: for example, to regulate them down when we are over excited, or to regulate them up when we need to get motivated.

**How good are my emotional regulation strategies?**
To identify the strategies you most commonly use to manage your emotions, rank the following strategies from 1 to 10. As you rank them, write down some of the situations in which you use them: for example, when you’re stressed, when there’s a deadline looming, or when you are angry.

Here is the key: 1 = dominant strategy and 10 = least used strategy

**Emotional Regulation Strategies**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Dimension | Description | Rank | Situation when used |
| Attention: Vigilance avoidanceRepressive coping(need oriented) | I do not focus on the issue I am concerned about. I try to distract myself by thinking about something positive.  |  |  |
| Knowledge: Cognitive dissonance reduction(need oriented) | I tend to reject feedback I do not like. I blame others to deflect the attention from myself and my own limitations.  |  |  |
| Bodily manifestations(need oriented) | I rely on activities that take my mind off the issue e.g., Eating or non-eating / DrinkingSmoking/Physical exercise |  |  |
| Attention: Focused distraction(goal oriented) | I focus on other tasks to keep the mind busy. |  |  |
| Knowledge: Cognitive reappraisal(goal oriented) | I try to tell myself the feedback was intended for someone else. It is not about me.  |  |  |
| Bodily manifestations(goal oriented) | Inhibiting emotionsI tend to hide my feelings and don’t let people know how bad I am feeling. Redirecting strategiesI laugh when I am stressed and give out the wrong impression and/or I get quite angry about things – I have to get it off my chest.  |  |  |
| Attention: Counter-regulation(person-oriented) | Flexible action control I use a range of strategies to make me feel better – I work thorough the issue using meditation, mindfulness – seeing it differently – removing own biases. |  |  |
| Knowledge: Cognitive integration | Eventually, I am able to put my feelings into perspective. |  |  |
| Bodily manifestations(person-oriented) | Deep breathingProgressive muscle relaxation |  |  |
| Other strategies | What else do I do?  |  |  |

**What now?**

Use Kolb and Fry’s (1975) experiential circle to reflect critically on the following questions.

1. Experiencing (when I last experienced or avoided this)
2. Observing and experiencing (what I did and felt in the past)
3. Forming abstract concepts (what this makes me think about now)
4. Testing in or anticipating new situations (what I will try next time)

* To what extent do you take on board feedback and/or try to do something about it?
* How long does it take you to work through how you feel and to become objective?
* What networks of support do you use to support you in understanding what you need to do?

Finally, make a commitment to test your new strategies and to reflect on them once you do.

**References**

Deimann, M., and Bastiaens, T. (2010). The role of volition in distance education: an exploration of its capacities. *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning, 11*(1), 1-16.

Fried, L. (2011). Teaching teachers about emotional regulation in the classroom. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 36*(3), 117-127.

Gross, J.J. (2001). Emotion regulation in adulthood: Timing is everything. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 10*, 214-219.Koole, S. (2009). The psychology of emotion regulation: An integrative view. *Cognition and Emotion, 23*, 4-41

Koole, S. (2009). The psychology of emotion regulation: An integrative view. *Cognition and Emotion, 23*, 4-41