

How to give effective peer-to-peer feedback

How would you rate your skills in providing peer-to-peer feedback? Those who have well-developed skills in this area know how important they are in fostering relationships with peers and in helping people on your team learn and grow.

Years ago, I worked with a colleague who tended to become overly excited whenever a patient had a cardiac arrest. In one instance, she slammed the arrest cart into a wall as she rushed to get it into the room. A big chunk of the wall came off, and I said, without thinking, "You need to have more control of what you are doing. It will be of greater benefit to the patient."

My comments didn't go over well with her, and rightly so. I was definitely out of line. I had said what immediately came to mind, which could only have led to a poor outcome.

Here are three common mistakes people make when attempting to give feedback to peers:

- **Making judgments labelled as feedback.**
When I told the colleague of mine that she needed to have more control, she heard me judging her. I didn't provide any context for my comments. The intent should never be to scold, punish or point out someone's faults.
- **Using the scavenger hunt approach.**
Suitable for those of us who want peers to have to go looking for our feedback! If you find it difficult to bring up an issue directly, you will probably drop broad hints (or make sarcastic comments) and just hope the other person's behaviour changes: "I certainly don't need to go to the utility room

to get dressing supplies. We have enough here for the next six weeks." Then you report the real issue, your frustration with the clutter, to other colleagues.

- **Believing feedback has to be negative.**
This leads to an expectation of conflict and weakens the will to give feedback of anyone who wants to avoid conflict.

Getting peer-to-peer feedback right means following a simple process:

- **State the behaviour that is troublesome.**
Remember to stick to the facts. What was it that you saw or heard? "I notice that when you leave 2x2s, cups and syringes behind at the bedside..."
- **Explain the impact this behaviour has on you.** "...I get overwhelmed with the clutter and feel I need to deal with it right away. That makes it difficult for me to focus on the patient."
- **Ask a question that puts control in the other person's hands.** "Would you be willing to tidy the bedsides at the end of your shift?"

Here are some other examples of what this process looks like in action:

When you are late for our meetings, we fall behind and end up having to book more meetings to get the work done. What sort of reminders do you need to help you to arrive on time?

Lately, when I've been speaking, I've noticed that you interrupt me frequently. I'm not being allowed to make my point. What agreement can we make so we both get to share our perspectives? ■

If you'd like Barb's help with a communication problem in your workplace, tweet her!



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