



The Feedback Tango

It takes two to tango when it comes to feedback.

Lead GIVING FEEDBACK

Follow RECEIVING FEEDBACK

1 How to Show Up

GATHER CONTEXT

You need to know some backstory of the work. Who's the intended audience for the deck you're looking at? Or what's the designer of the prototype trying to achieve? Once you know this, you can ground your feedback in something solid. You might ask, "Will the tone of your piece create maximum impact with your intended audience?" Or, "I think tweaking the design just a little in this way will help you achieve your goal."

CALIBRATE YOUR FEEDBACK

Tune into the needs of the person you are helping. That means you want to take a little stroll in their shoes and practice empathy. What's their timeline? What type of feedback will best serve them in their work? What should you be looking for? What should you not be looking for?

2 The Deed

EMBRACE RADICAL CANDOR

We often joke at IDEO that when giving feedback we exist in the land of Ruinous Empathy. We confuse caring with not giving constructive, candid feedback. Your feedback is in service of the receiver of feedback and their work. It's possible to give constructive feedback and be caring at the same time.

BE SPECIFIC

There's nothing worse than hearing "I just don't like your idea." It's important to point out specific moments that may or may not have worked. Ground your feedback in examples.

3 After the Fact

PRACTICE

Giving feedback can be awkward. But the good news is, if you practice it enough, you'll get better at it (and it will get less awkward).

CREATE SPACE FOR REFLECTION

Feedback elevates self-awareness. If you tune into the body language and attitude of the receiver of feedback, you can learn a lot about your impact and delivery. Learn and grow. To do that, you need to carve out time for it.

DESIGN TIME/SPACE TO RECEIVE FEEDBACK

Don't wait until two hours before your assignment is due. Invite feedback early and often. Ask more than one person, and at different times. Different people bring different perspectives. Different moments along a journey bring unique learnings. We like to say, "All of us are smarter than any of us."

EXPLAIN WHAT YOU'RE AFTER

Be clear about where you're at and what you need. Is your work at an early stage? If so, ask for high-level, structural feedback (e.g. Does the flow make sense? Is the narrative sound?). Or, are you late in the game and just need one more sets of eyes before turning in a project? If so, maybe you want that fine-tooth-lens for feedback (e.g. Did you find anything glaring? What can I improve upon in the next few hours?)

ASK SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

Give guidance to the giver of feedback. That's an alliterative mouthful. At IDEO, we use variations of three simple questions:

1. What was memorable/What resonated?
2. What's missing/What didn't work?
3. How could you build upon my work/How could you push it further up the mountain top?

BE BRAVE/DON'T TAKE IT PERSONALLY

Feedback can sting a little. But when receiving feedback, divorce your ego from the work. Your work isn't you. It's okay if it gets diced and sliced a bit on the chopping block. Repeat a few simple words: "This is in service of the work."

LOOK FOR PATTERNS

It's common to receive conflicting feedback, so your job is to find patterns. Then, improve those "hot spot" areas. Remember, it's okay to disagree. Sometimes you have to trust your intuition.

ALWAYS CREATE SPACE FOR REFLECTION

Let feedback breathe. Don't go hacking away at your presentation right after you receive feedback. That's reactive. Sleep on it and then return to it. A night's sleep can make all the difference in the world.