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In order to avoid stress and disharmony in the daily work routine and to appear professionally as a team to the outside world, clear communication with one another is important. Reciprocal feedback is therefore of vital importance in order for communication in the dental practice to be as simple, appreciative and smooth as possible. What needs to be taken into account in this regard will be highlighted in this article.

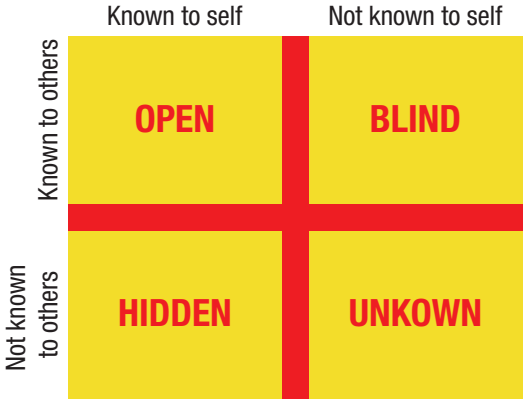
Feedback is important

Why we need feedback is explained by American social psychologists Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham in a model that sets out conscious and unconscious personality and behavioural traits. Their Johari Window, a combination of the psychologists' first names, is divided into quadrants and shows the differences in self-perception and perception by others. The open quadrant relates to what one reveals about oneself and what is known or visible to others. This includes external characteristics such as appearance, manners or even physical reactions, as well as internal attitudes and behaviour. The hidden quadrant is what a person knows about himself or herself, that is, things that he or she is aware of, but either unknowingly does not make available to others or consciously hides from them. The blind quadrant is everything that a person conveys and is perceived by the recipient without the sender being aware of it. Others thus recognise behaviours and characteristics that one does not perceive in oneself. Only through constructive feedback can information be moved from the blind quadrant to the open quadrant. It also allows reflection on things that we unconsciously keep from others. Feedback is an effective instrument to support colleagues or employees in their personal development. Unfortunately, the potential of this powerful tool often remains unexploited in many companies.

What is feedback?

The term "feedback" refers to a response to or assessment of a person's behaviour. It is a central process by which a reaction is conveyed. With feedback, we inform someone about how we perceived and experienced his or her behaviour. In this way, we invite the other person to employ metacommunication, that is, to talk about his or her behaviour. The most common feedback error is criticism of personality traits—and that is exactly what turns feedback into ridicule. Discussion in this manner of one's personality—which cannot be changed—is insulting and abusive, and no good or fruitful outcome can come from it. Authentic feedback, however, always aims at a positive change in behaviour; it is constructive and supportive. Feedback complements self-perception through external assessment and external perception. Feedback can

Johari Window (Joseph Luft & Harry Ingham, 1995)
Conscious and unconscious personality and behavioural traits



make visible how one's own behaviour has an effect on or is received by the other person, how a situation or performance is assessed or what potential for improvement exists. Correctly used, feedback can therefore be extremely valuable. In everyday professional life, it is almost indispensable for the further development of one's behaviour.

Differentiation from praise

Praise is usually not very specific, such as "you did a good job", "I am very pleased with you" or "keep up the good work". Praise is therefore positive feedback which, owing to a lack of specificity, does not bring about any lasting change. Praise might be very important in daily interaction—but giving feedback is essential.

Giving feedback

Giving constructive feedback has to be learned because, if applied incorrectly, it can have the opposite effect to that intended. Ideally, feedback should follow a methodical framework—feedback rules. The feedback should help the recipient to reflect on his or her behaviour in order to better assess its effect on others and to modify his or her behaviour if necessary. Feedback must be conveyed in a particular form in order to be fully effective.

Feedback rules

In order for feedback to have a motivating effect and to encourage one to develop oneself further as a consequence, it is important to follow the ten golden rules of feedback. The context especially is of vital importance: feedback is particularly effective if it is given promptly. Feedback should never take place according to fixed times. It makes much more sense to give constructive feedback as relevant things—whether positive or negative—arise.

Receiving feedback

Receiving feedback is also something that has to be learned. Most people initially react defensively to feedback and this is just what must be avoided. Constructive feedback is valuable because it reduces our blind spot. Explaining or justifying oneself immediately after receiving feedback would be counter-productive. Furthermore, feedback is not debatable. Even if one perceives the situation differently to the feedback received, it shows in a very appreciative way how one's behaviour affects others. The giver of the feedback must always intend to trigger a positive outcome—regardless of whether it concerns something negative that needs to be improved or something positive that needs to be reinforced. If one is not receptive to feedback, one is unlikely to receive authentic feedback. Hence: LISTEN. TAKE IT IN. SAY THANK YOU.

Rules for constructive feedback:

1. Give feedback only in an emotionally relaxed state. This will help you to stay objective and avoid strong emotional reactions.
2. Is your counterpart receptive to feedback? Is feedback desired? Ask for feedback!
3. Separate statements about behaviour from statements about personality traits! In this way, you can avoid affronting the person and increase the probability that your feedback will be well received. IMPORTANT: Behaviour must be clearly separated from identity. There must be no moral judgement, generalisation or interpretation.
4. If you have negative things to communicate, also express your positive experiences, perceptions and feelings.
5. Give very specific feedback. Use concrete examples of the behaviour to which your feedback relates.
6. Observation: Describe only what is visible and objectifiable for all.
7. Perception/effect: Make sensory statements and name your own (emotional) reaction to the recipient of feedback. Say what and how something has affected you: "It affects me …".
8. Express yourself exclusively using "I": "I have seen …", "I have noticed …", "I feel …".
9. Recommendation/wish: Address specific criteria for desirable behaviour so that your feedback is useful for future situations. "I recommend …", "I would like …", "I would like it if …".
10. Be brief and only convey as much as your counterpart can take in.

In teams, feedback should always be given directly to the intended recipient.

about the author



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