**The Gift of Feedback**

Everyone practices the art of giving feedback every day. Although we often are unaware that we are giving feedback, many of our actions deliver signals to others about how we perceive them and their actions. In addition, our effectiveness at giving feedback is a powerful determinant of how others perceive and respond to us. **An awareness of when you are delivering and receiving feedback effectively can be a powerful coaching tool.**

Think of giving feedback the same way you think of giving a gift. That mental picture facilitates effective feedback. The following points are helpful in learning how to provide useful feedback.

* **Give feedback for the right reasons.** We give gifts that are of value to others. In the same way, feedback should be of value to the recipient. Occasionally, we make the mistake of giving feedback intended to harm the recipient or to show how perceptive or intelligent we are. Feedback should always be helpful.
* **Give feedback at an appropriate time.** Just as Valentine’s Day gifts are better given in February than in October, feedback should be given at the appropriate time. Is the receiver ready to hear the feedback? Is the receiver in an emotional state conducive to hearing the feedback? Can that person devote full attention to hearing the feedback? Feedback about a particular event should be given promptly after the event, unless the receiver is upset or too distracted to listen.
* **Feedback must be voluntarily accepted.** Feedback is not a command; it is information for the consideration and benefit of the recipient. You cannot force feedback on anyone. Just as people can refuse gifts, they can refuse feedback. The receiver always has the option to listen or ignore whatever feedback you offer.
* **Feedback begets feedback.** When you give a gift to someone, he or she may give a gift in return. The same is true for feedback. Returning feedback is a natural reaction for many people, so be prepared. Because this often is a two-way conversation, it is useful to practice the art of listening while giving feedback.
* **Feedback is *not* the same as truth.** You select a gift from many choices. When you provide feedback, you are presenting one perspective out of many. Recognize that you are not providing indisputable truth to the recipient – you are describing *your* perception and reaction to an event. Because it is subjective, feedback is more effective if it is specific and descriptive, not general and evaluative.