



FEEDBACK

Recently, you may have heard the words “culture of feedback” around a burn barrel somewhere. If not, you have now. The Black Rock Rangers are transitioning toward an ethos where feedback is encouraged, expected, and well received all around.

If I do something that bothers you, I may have no idea that I’ve done it unless you tell me about it. I’m sure we’ve all fallen into the age-old issue where someone does something that bugs us, we feel that it’s not that important, so we don’t say anything. Over time, the little things can build up and animosity ensues. Conversely, maybe you’ve seen someone else doing something that is outstanding; let them know about it. Catch people doing something great and tell them.

If we are going to improve as Rangers and as people in general, we have an obligation to give feedback to others and receive feedback graciously. In my experience, the best way to do this is to lay out a set of ground rules for both giving and receiving feedback.

An important concept about feedback is that it is a gift. The giver must carefully select the feedback to be given. This can take quite a bit of courage for some people. We’ve all dealt with giving feedback to folks who don’t receive it well, get defensive, or become argumentative. Similarly, it can sometimes be tough to give honest feedback to somebody who you perceive as more senior or “above you in the food chain.” This can create a situation



where folks can be hesitant to give feedback to avoid conflict. And that’s a bad thing.

In this light, we also need to ensure that when we’re receiving feedback, we are receiving it as a gift. Think about when grandma gave you a sweater for your birthday. Maybe it fit perfectly. If so,

great! But maybe it didn’t fit so well, or was ugly as sin. Whether you like it or not, it was well intentioned. Like that sweater, you have the option, as the receiver of feedback, to use it, set it aside for later consideration, or ignore it completely. You should, however, receive the feedback graciously and accept the gift in the spirit that it is intended.

Giving Feedback:

In the interest of creating a culture of feedback, we need to ensure that we are following a model of SAFETY. In other words, when giving feedback, make sure that your guidance is:

- Specific – is it clear what the feedback is about?
- Actionable – is it something the person can actually change?
- Factual – is it objectively true?
- Empathetic – is it given with the best of intentions to help, not hurt?
- Timely – is it soon enough after the incident that it’s relevant? Is the timing appropriate to ensure the receiver is in a mental space to accept the gift?

There’s a lot of discussion to be had around the concept of each of these terms. The important thing to keep in mind is that feedback must be about something that the receiver can change, delivered with careful thought (how would I want to hear this?), and given soon enough that it is relevant.

A very fine template for delivering feedback is:

- This is what I observed
- This is how it made me feel or how it affected the situation
- This is what I’d suggest to do differently in the future

Most of us have had some sort of guidance on how to give feedback. Through recent research, I’ve come to believe that the way I was taught was WRONG. I was told that when giving negative feedback, one should always preface it with something positive or give a “feedback sandwich” of positive, negative, positive. In some people, this can cause a conditioned reaction to any positive feedback. They tend to shut down and not hear the positive because they are bracing for the negative that’s about to follow. (You did that one thing really, really well, but . . .)

Therefore, speak straight. In many cases, following negative feedback with something positive is a wonderful thing. On the other hand, don't delay giving the negative feedback while you look for something positive to say.

Receiving Feedback:

When receiving feedback, a few suggestions:

First, remember that just like giving feedback is a gift, so is receiving it. However, like grandma's sweater, it's not always what we want or what we are looking for. Remember that the giver is trying to help. Whether you take it or leave it, either way, please appreciate that someone is paying attention to what you are doing and is taking the time to hold up a mirror for you and to offer you some heartfelt, empathetic advice.



Second, ask clarifying questions to get the most out of feedback. You can ask for examples, interpretations, details, etc. The key when asking clarifying questions is to make sure that you are not being defensive. Stick to the facts and see what you can glean from the other person's perspective.

Third, and possibly most importantly,

don't offer justifications or excuses. Receiving feedback is a chance to hear someone else's take on what you did. It's not your job or cause to convince them that their perspective was wrong or flawed. If you find yourself starting to justify, make excuses, or correct your feedback-giver, it's time to walk away and reset. Then maybe sleep on it for a day or two and see how it sits with you in the morning.

Finally, be gracious. There are few opportunities in our adult lives to get input from a peer, so be sure to appreciate the person who took the time to thoughtfully provide you with feedback. And as mentioned above, for some people the simple act of giving you feedback about something may represent a courageous effort on the part of the person giving it. Please be sure to respect and acknowledge it with a genuine "Thank You"

If you've read this far, congratulations on completing the ART of Feedback. The first (of hopefully many) Allcom ARTs. Reading this won't make you an expert. Only lots of practice giving and receiving feedback generously will do that. Practice, practice, practice.