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# TA and IMPACT FEEDBACK

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## INTRODUCTION TO FEEDBACK

Feedback is talking to someone about their behavior. Have you ever, with the best of intentions, offered feedback, and then had to deal with the other person getting upset? If so, you are not alone.

There are four types of feedback. Part of the solution is using the best type for the situation. And, if you hope to encourage honest and open communication, impact feedback is that type.

In order to nurture good relationships, we need to be able to give and receive feedback. There are different kinds of feedback. Each kind is appropriate in its own circumstances. By knowing these options and when to use them we can solve or prevent problems as well as build closeness, collegiality, collaboration, and respect.

**What is feedback?** I like the definition, “Telling people something in response to what they have done.”

**Why is Feedback Important?** Feedback is a tool for influencing another person's behavior; this might amount to motivating them to start or stop doing something, or doing more or less of something. It is helpful for establishing boundaries and ground rules. It can be valuable as a way to learn what another person is experiencing. And it is valuable for establishing a closer, more collaborative and cooperative connection. This assumes, however, that feedback is given in the best way for a particular situation.

## IMPACT VS. AUTHORITATIVE FEEDBACK

There are two classes of feedback. Impact feedback is a disclosure on the part of the feedback giver. Impact feedback is about the giver, not the receiver. The other class of feedback is called authoritative. Authoritative feedback is characterized by the giver talking about the receiver. Let's take a closer look at the difference between these two classes of feedback.

**Authoritative Feedback:** There are three kinds of authoritative feedback. One is directive. Directive feedback is when the giver is essentially saying, “Do this or don't do that.” An example is, “start keeping your commitments.” The second kind of authoritative feedback is contingency. Contingency feedback is an “if-then” statement. An example is, “If you keep your commitments others will trust you.” The third kind of authoritative feedback is attribution. Attribution is a statement about the nature or quality of people or something they have done. It can take the form of a compliment, a criticism, or a label. An example of attribution feedback is “Great job of keeping that commitment.” Authoritative feedback can be very effective and timely in situations where one wants to influence, support, or reassure another person.

However, authoritative feedback comes with a risk. The only alternatives that the receiver of the feedback has are to defy or comply. The receiver must accept or reject, agree or disagree. So, authoritative feedback can often trigger conflict.

This can be understood from a standpoint of functional ego-states as they are applied in Transactional Analysis (TA). An ego-state is a pattern of thoughts feelings and actions. Variations of these are the building blocks of our personality. Most authoritative feedback is expressed from a controlling,



demanding, critical, judgmental, or nurturing and caretaking perspective. TA calls this pattern of behavior the Parent ego-state. Feelings associated with compliance and defiance in response to authoritative/Parent feedback include hurt, anger, fear, relief, and gratitude. TA calls this pattern of behavior the Child ego-state. If you don't want to risk Child responses, avoid authoritative feedback, and use impact feedback.

**Impact Feedback:** impact feedback is very different from authoritative feedback. Impact feedback givers disclose their experiences in terms of the giver's thoughts, feelings, wants, and actions. Let me take you back to a point we made earlier. Impact feedback is about the giver; authoritative feedback is about the receiver.

There are four kinds of impact feedback: thoughts; feelings; wants; and actions. Let's look at examples of each type of feedback in response to someone else making a rambling and disorganized statement. An example of thought impact is, "This is unclear to me." Notice, this statement was not "You were being unclear" (attribution). An example of feelings feedback is, "I feel frustrated." Notice, this statement was not "You are frustrating me" (attribution). An example of want impact is, "I want more clarity." Notice, this statement was not, "You should be clearer" (directive). And an example of action feedback is, "I just drifted off." Notice, this statement was not, "If you organize your thoughts better it would help me follow you" (contingency).

Impact feedback can be expressed from any functional ego-state. Of course, the attitude and tone of voice with which it is expressed may influence the response. Under the best circumstances, the hoped-for responses to impact feedback include collaboration, curiosity, identification, empathy, discussion or conversation, and disclosure from the other party.

Here are examples of impact statements. Notice that they are short. The more words we use in in feedback the less likely that the receiver will get the message we really want to send. Also notice that each statement starts with "I." None of them start with "You."

Thoughts:

1. "I understand that reaction" (4 words)
2. "I'm thinking of additional options" (5 words)

Feelings:

1. "I feel frustrated" (3 words)
2. "I feel relieved" (3 words)

Wants

1. "I want a change" (4 words)
2. "I want to understand better" (5 words)

Actions:

1. "I stopped listening" (3 words)
2. "I withdrew my support" (4 words)



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## **INTIMACY**

Intimacy is one of six ways that people can structure time together. TA prizes intimacy above others. It is characterized by spontaneity and honesty. Thereby it enables people to be genuine and real with each other. Here is a definition that I like, “Expressing authentic thoughts, feelings, wants, and actions to each other without censoring or an agenda about what happens next.”

Combining the characteristics of intimacy, with the characteristics of impact feedback, we find the two completely compatible and reinforcing. If we have a spontaneous impulse to talk to other people about their behavior, using impact feedback increases the chances of an intimate exchange.

## **CONCLUSION**

***More To It than That:*** Keep in mind that expressing impact is only part of task. The way we give feedback can make a big difference. That’s where using the best ego-state comes in. Typically, that means Nurturing Parent, Natural Child (which is spontaneous and emotional energy) and Adult (which is objective, rational, problem solving energy). And it can be worthwhile to examine the impacts we experience in relation to what we know about our own script, life position, rackets, and games. These are topics for other essays.

***Practice:*** Impact feedback is harder to master than one might think. Practice it frequently. When the time comes to use it with the hope of an intimate moment, you will want to be prepared to use it without having to think it through. Practice it until it can do it spontaneously.

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