

Find the Ball: An Exercise in Feedback

OBJECTIVE: To experience different feedback "styles" and get a feel for the effects that they have upon the receiver. The lesson that you're trying to drive is how specific feedback that is delivered in a positive way really does impact someone's performance.

TIME FRAME: 15 Minutes

PROPS: one golf ball

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Ask for 4 volunteers from the group. Copy their names onto a flipchart or white board, then inform them that they will be called back into the room one at a time to search for a golf ball. Ask them to leave the room.
2. Coach the remaining participants about the process and their roles at each stage:
 - a. **Silent Feedback:** when volunteer #1 enters the room, the participants are to remain completely silent and motionless.
 - b. **Negative Feedback:** when volunteer #2 enters the room, all participants should give negative feedback, no matter how close or far away the searcher is from the ball. Be sensitive to your group, but instruct them to give the kind of negative feedback that they might hear back in the workplace when someone is dissatisfied with their performance (and with certain audiences - rig hands, for example - this gets kind of raw ... make sure you know your group). Participants should NOT respond to any requests for direction or assistance (except with derision).
 - c. **Positive Feedback:** when volunteer #3 enters the room, all participants should give positive but non-specific feedback (e.g., "attaboy," "way to go," "I really like how you get after it," etc.), no matter how close or far away the searcher is from the ball. Participants should NOT respond to any requests for direction or assistance (except with further exclamations of "you can do it" or "we have faith in you").

- d. **Specific Feedback:** when volunteer #4 enters the room, participants should provide specific hints and suggestions for finding the ball, without giving it away. They should respond to yes/no questions.
3. Ask the group to help you choose which of the volunteers will receive the different types of feedback. Note that some individuals get upset with the negative feedback, even though it is a simulation. Ask your group which of the volunteers would have the least difficulty with the ribbing involved.
4. Hide the golf ball. Invite the participants in one at a time. Each volunteer receives the prescribed feedback noted above.
 - a. **Silent:** Hide the golf ball in a not-too-difficult location within the room. Allow 2-3 minutes for the search.
 - b. **Negative:** choose a more difficult spot. Allow 2-3 minutes for the search.
 - c. **Positive but General:** choose a more difficult spot. Allow 2-3 minutes for the search.
 - d. **Specific:** choose a more difficult spot. Allow 2-3 minutes for the search.
5. **Debrief.** Suggested process: ask the volunteers, one person at a time, in the order in which they came into the room ...
 - a. How did you feel while looking for the ball?
 - b. What did you think/feel as a result of the feedback you received?
 - c. How did the feedback you received affect your performance?
 - d. What did the feedback you received prompt you to think/feel about the other folk in the room who were giving it?
 - e. If this was the type of feedback that you received every day, how do you think it would impact your desire and/or ability to keep yourself and your teammates safe.