



**Part 1 of 2 parts**

Feedback:  
**The Art Is in  
the Delivery**

**Lisa J. Hunter, MSW, LSW**

Colorado State University College of Veterinary  
Medicine and Biomedical Sciences

**Jane R. Shaw, DVM, PhD**

Colorado State University College of Veterinary  
Medicine and Biomedical Sciences

The importance of feedback for personal and professional growth is universally recognized, yet the word *feedback* generally has a negative connotation.<sup>1</sup> Feedback is not intended to be a litany of wrongs that makes it difficult to give and uncomfortable to receive—it is simply information about a person’s performance of a task that can be used as a basis for improvement.<sup>2</sup>

## The Art of Delivery

### Challenges

Feedback, given properly, can be used to motivate, assess, evaluate, compare, educate, and align expectations toward growth. Those providing feedback face 3 main challenges:

- **Too much information:** In an age of texts, tweets, likes, and swipes, too many people are willing to give copious feedback. This barrage of information can be overwhelming and can cause individuals to stop listening and ignore advice that could be helpful.
- **As a reaction:** Feedback given in a reactionary state (eg, out of anger or frustration, during a conflict, as venting) can harm the person on the receiving end.
- **Vague and obtuse:** Long-winded circuitous feedback that does not hit its target can cause confusion and frustration.

## BENCHMARKS

### Communication Skills Training

29% of team training/CE in Well-Managed Practices is focused on building communication skills.

**SOURCE:** *Benchmarks 2016: A Study of Well-Managed Practices*. Columbus, OH: WTA Veterinary Consultants and Advanstar Publishing; 2016:53.

**Feedback is simply information about a person's performance of a task that can be used as a basis for improvement.**

## Solutions

Tools are available to help deliver effective feedback that is more likely to be heard and acted upon.<sup>3</sup> (See **Resource**, page 36, and **How to Give Effective Feedback**.)

- Integrate feedback into everyday conversations. Feedback is often perceived as a consequence of underperformance,<sup>4</sup> but giving feedback in the moment creates a running dialogue and opens effective channels for continued communication.<sup>5</sup> *If you have a moment, I would love to chat about a few things I have observed.*
- Limit feedback to what is useful and realistic. Prioritize sharing only the most pertinent points. Overloading the recipient reduces the possibility that the feedback will be well-received and put into practice. *For today, let's discuss techniques for getting appointments off to a strong start, to enhance client and patient comfort.*
- Give feedback that is descriptive, detailed, concrete, and specific. *I noticed when you first entered the examination room that your introduction was rushed, and the client got cut off and did not have a chance to introduce himself.*
- Provide balanced feedback by including what worked well and suggestions for alternative approaches. *The client seemed to really appreciate the time you took to put her dog at ease before conducting the physical examination. You might also take your time introducing yourself to help the client feel more comfortable.*
- Link your feedback to outcomes (eg, *to put his or her dog at ease, to help the client feel more comfortable*). *By putting the patient at ease during the introduction, you got the visit off to the right start, which increases client satisfaction, saves*

time, and improves client adherence to our recommendations.

- Use *and* and *what if* instead of *but* to deflect defensiveness and enhance the positive feedback provided.

*I liked how you guided Mr. Allen, who was visibly crying, into an examination room to continue your discussion. What if we used that same approach with clients who are becoming agitated or upset?*

- Focus on behaviors and actions, not on personality traits, to emphasize the fact that the problem lies in what an individual does, not what kind of person he or she is.

*I sense that you feel rushed and are concerned about running late, and this can be off-putting to clients. So, to slow yourself down, you might take a deep breath before entering into the examination room.*

- Share information by using language that suggests rather than dictates. Giving advice can be interpreted as passing judgment or taking an evaluative stance (ie, *you need to*, *you must*, *you should*). Sharing information empowers the recipient to choose his or her own course of action.

*I am wondering if...*

*You might try...*

*One thing to consider is...*

*Something that works for me is...*

- Check on how the feedback is received (ie, chunk-and-check), which allows the sender to remain conscious of the recipient's reaction and the next steps that may be needed to promote learning.

*I am interested in hearing your thoughts on this feedback.*

*I am wondering how you are processing this information.*

- Offer continued support and mentorship.  
*How can I support you in working on these skills?  
What steps would you like to take together to move forward?*

## Conclusion

Take time to practice the art of giving effective feedback to improve reception of the information presented. Misunderstandings happen when feedback is vague, blurred, or indirect. Ensuring that feedback is specific, balanced, descriptive, focused on behavior, and limited helps it be heard and incorporated rather than deflected and dismissed. ■

## BENCHMARKS

### Sharing Information is Vital

One of the most important indicators of a healthy culture is maintaining open communication channels. A common mistake for veterinary practice managers and owners is not sharing information across all levels of the practice.

**SOURCE:** *Benchmarks 2016: A Study of Well-Managed Practices.* Columbus, OH: WTA Veterinary Consultants and Advanstar Publishing; 2016:61.

## How to Give Effective Feedback

- Be descriptive, detailed, concrete, and specific.
- Be useful and realistic.
- Check on how feedback is being received.
- Focus on behaviors.
- Integrate feedback into everyday conversations.
- Link to outcomes.
- Offer support and mentorship.
- Share information.
- Suggest alternative ideas.
- Use *and* and *what if* to enhance positivity.

References

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**LISA J. HUNTER**, MSW, LSW, an alumnus of Colorado State University (CSU), is an advocate of the human–animal bond and veterinary–client communication, and liaison for The Argus Institute at CSU.

**FUN FACT:** A Colorado native, Lisa lives in Fort Collins with her husband, children, dogs, chickens, and 2 mischievous rabbits.



**JANE R. SHAW**, DVM, PhD, is associate professor of Veterinary Communication for Professional Excellence at Colorado State University College of Veterinary Medicine

and Biomedical Sciences. She is a recognized expert in veterinarian–client–patient interactions, implements the communication curriculum at CSU, and conducts skills-based communication workshops nationally and internationally.

**FUN FACT:** Jane is the only girl out of 5 children in a multiracial family.

Resource

- *Thanks for the Feedback: The Science and Art of Receiving Feedback Well*. Stone D, Heen S. New York: Penguin Books; 2014.

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, & CIRCULATION

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