A Look in the Mirror:
Personal Beliefs and Ethics Surrounding Feedback

"Can I give you some feedback?"
"I am looking for feedback."
"If you have any feedback I would like it."

What is your initial reaction when you see these questions/statements? As interpreters we work in a field that has the requirement of life-long learning. We need to stay up-to-date on local and world issues, new advancements in technology, and current practices in interpreting. One challenge faced by interpreters is that after the "fishbowl" of the interpretation program (where it sometimes feels like if we get one more piece of feedback we will burst) we go out into the world and interpret primarily in isolation. This can make it challenging to identify errors in our work and equally challenging to identify growth and progress.

Personally, my ideas and thoughts about feedback have grown and changed as I have matured in my career. I used to think there was "positive" and "negative" feedback. I used to think that feedback needed to be balanced with praise and criticism. I used to think that I had to give pages of feedback. I used to give feedback on "everything" in the interpretation. I used to think that everybody wanted feedback.

Many of my beliefs about feedback still hold true:
- I believe in finding something encouraging or "positive" to say about the work because that is something that I value both as a human being and a teacher.
- I believe in giving/seeking feedback immediately or as soon as possible.
- I believe that timing is everything in feedback.
- I believe in the importance of selecting specific and appropriate people to ask for feedback.
- I believe all people in the feedback interaction have an active role in the design of the feedback process.
- I believe that no matter how "thick-skinned" we try to be that there may still be emotions arising from feedback that I need to acknowledge and deal with.
- I believe that when I don't want feedback it means that I am afraid of what I am going to hear.
- I believe in being grateful to the person who has taken the time to give feedback (even if I don't like it or agree with it).
- I believe that giving feedback is an investment in another person.
- I believe that all feedback can teach me something.

My experiences in teaching have been similar to interpreting in that once a teacher has left the formal learning environment the external feedback and observations often cease. As a teacher I have come to use reflective practice as a means of examining my work on my own.

"Reflective practice can be an important tool in practice-based professional learning settings where individuals learning from their own professional experiences, rather than from formal teaching or knowledge transfer, may be the most important source of personal professional development and improvement."

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reflective_practice)

There are several models of reflective practice. Gibbs (1988) provides one model that may be useful in thinking critically about our work.
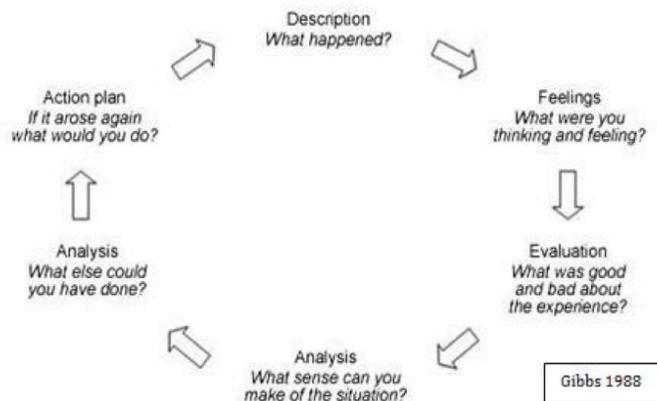
Something I have been giving a lot of thought to lately is giving unsolicited feedback. I am VERY reluctant to give feedback to another professional unless I have been asked. If I do give feedback that is unsolicited it is because I have serious concerns about professionalism or ethics. I think very carefully in these situations and try to discern my motives for giving the feedback. I believe that people have the right to make mistakes - I have made many. I also believe that I don't need to be standing on the sidelines of someone else's professional journey pointing out those mistakes.

And some kind of help is the kind of help
That helping's all about
And some kind of help is the kind of help
We all can do without.
-Shel Silverstein

Feedback is a means to grow professionally. It may not be something I want to hear. It may not be framed in the words I would choose. It may take me a while to process and learn from. Engaging in professional dialogue, feedback and professional growth are also requirements found in the AVLIC Code of Conduct:

2.4.1 Members will incorporate current theoretical and applied knowledge, enhance that knowledge through continuing education throughout their professional careers and will strive for AVLIC certification.

2.4.2 Members will aim to be self-directed learners, pursuing educational opportunities that are relevant to their professional practice. This could include but is not limited to peer review, collegial consultation, mentoring and regular feedback regarding specific areas of skill development.

4.3.2 Members have a professional obligation to assist and encourage new interpreting practitioners in the profession.

I challenge you to think about your philosophy on professional growth and feedback. What role does reflective practice play in your work? Feedback? When is the last time you developed a learning plan? Set professional goals? Stretched yourself professionally by interpreting out of your "comfort zone?"

Thanks for reading and hey...if you have any feedback...By Liana Price

Effective Feedback

We've all been there. That anxious, sweaty, uncomfortable feeling that sets in every time you have to provide someone with negative feedback. Deep breath.

In my first management position, driven by a sense of accountability to my team, and challenged by the need to deliver difficult feedback in a way that was both sensitive and that would result in changed behavior, I began to read, attend seminars and explore best practices for giving and receiving feedback.

It was immediately clear that effective feedback is critical for professional development - and there went my aspirations for a laisse-faire approach to feedback.

Research shows that 89% of low performing employees are unclear about their supervisors' expectations and/or have insufficient support to accomplish those expectations. In spite of countless evaluation processes and the best intentions, many of us are in the dark when it comes to delivering feedback.

The good news is that delivering effective feedback is not complicated. And better yet, you can deliver feedback that leads to changes in behaviour while maintaining an intact relationship. Delivering feedback that has impact will lead to positive working conditions for everyone.

At this point, it is important that I clarify what feedback is and perhaps more importantly, what it is not. Giving feedback is not the same as resolving a problem. Whenever possible, a problem solving conversation should precede giving feedback. Another thing to keep in mind is that giving feedback is not a negotiation. Rather, when providing feedback, the initiator needs to either affirm or request a change in behaviour. Feedback should concern skills, abilities, or performance that the receiver can change or control. If an employee cannot change the behaviour, there is no purpose in asking them to change.

The first key to delivering successful feedback is creating a solid foundation. Find out what your colleagues need and help them get it. Yes, it really is that simple. Do your colleagues know…
- what is expected?
- that asking for help is a sign of maturity and responsibility? (so is giving it!)

This creates a positive environment for delivering feedback. Without this in place, even the most well-intentioned people will struggle in the workplace. Feedback should always take place in a supportive context. The recipient needs to know that you value their work and that you care about their struggles, both in and out of the workplace.

Another consideration for delivering effective feedback is that behaviour is impacted most significantly by frequent, timely, and specific feedback. For example, stating, "I noticed that you arrived at 9 a.m. on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday instead of 8:30 a.m." is more effective than saying, "I've noticed that you are always late." Remember that it is best to provide feedback as soon as possible after an event. The longer you wait, the more difficult it is to recall the specifics.

While formal performance reviews are important and should be scheduled regularly, this is not the appropriate context to raise new concerns. Use your formal reviews to benchmark and create a record of you own job performance and create an environment where feedback is not a major event. Moreover, it is always best when informal feedback, both positive and negative, is an expected and normal part of your relationship.

In addition to providing specific feedback, it is also important to separate your re-action from the initial action. To do this, use language that is descriptive rather than evaluative. For example, instead of saying "you are very rude," it is more effective to say, "you were speaking in a loud voice and I heard you hang up the phone." When you give feedback, focus on describing the behaviour – what they did. Avoid labeling the behaviour and do not have a conversation about what it is. This will allow you to hold people responsible for their actions without neglecting your relationship.

It is equally important to avoid the temptation to sandwich negative feedback between two positive comments. This strategy is usually chosen to reduce defensiveness. However, a mud sandwich always tastes like mud, even when the bread is good. A more effective alternative to reduce defensiveness is to create a supportive work environment, characterized by equality, empathy, and flexibility. This will reduce defensiveness and allow you to have a sincere conversation.

Last but certainly not least, remember that everyone needs positive feedback. This is even more necessary if we intend to provide someone with negative feedback at some point in the future. Negative feedback is more likely to be accepted if it is given in an atmosphere where positive feedback has been given often. Some experts suggest a performance feedback ratio of six positives for every negative.

The most frequent error in giving positive feedback is to be too general. Helpful, positive, behaviour needs to be clear and concise so that the person knows exactly what they did that was good. Do your best to minimize comments such as "good job" or "atta-boy" as they result in reinforcing both good and mediocre behaviour. Each of us has the power to improve the performance of those around us by showing our appreciation.

If you're like I was, and the thought of providing feedback caused your knees to turn to jello, I hope that in the last few minutes you've let out a sigh of relief. Build a solid foundation and a supportive work environment and then (deep breath) give feedback that is specific, timely and descriptive. Remember, feedback is not a major event.

By Samantha Kornelsen

Courses Offered

**Introduction to Conflict Resolution:
Dealing with Difficult People**
Dates: Jan 14 & 21, Jan 25-26, Mar 1 & 8, Apr 3-4,
May 3-4, Jun 1 & 4, 2012

Dealing with difficult people, conflict and workplace stress negatively affect 55 per cent of working Canadians. This introductory course gives you the tools to transform conflict into a springboard for positive change at work and beyond. Participants learn basic concepts and skills to deal with conflict in healthy ways. This course is an essential professional development tool for managers, team leaders and front-line staff.

Art of Collaboration: Success through Synergy [NEW]
Date: Jan 24 & 31, 2012

Collaboration and partnering are not new and with recent economic shifts impacting government, business and non-profits they are even more essential. This leading edge course covers initiating and managing collaborations. Participants will explore the risks and rewards of shared power and responsibilities and co-creating a vision. As well as the innovation that can result from unlikely collaborations. Course offered in partnership with Healthy Hive Consulting.

Effective Feedback,
Date: May 9-10, 2012

Do you struggle with providing honest feedback to your employees? How do employees respond to your attempts? In this interactive course, you will learn how to give effective feedback in small steps to give employees opportunities to change problem behaviour. You will gain skills to maintain and improve relationships with employees while inspiring staff to increase their effectiveness and productivity. (Prerequisite: Intro to Conflict Resolution: Difficult People)