



Key Word for December: Feedback vs Criticism

“Words: So innocent and powerless as they are, as standing in a dictionary, how potent for good and evil they become in the hands of one who knows how to combine them.” Nathaniel Hawthorne

Have you ever had a teacher or coach that gave you feedback, and it feels like a gift—after their words you feel more energized, more hopeful, and excited to try what they recommend? Have you ever had a teacher or coach whose words make you more discouraged, disheartened, or depressed? This newsletter we will talk about how feedback and criticism affect us.

What is feedback: Feedback combines the word feed (nourish, strengthen, grow, foster) and the word back (return). Feedback is words given back to us that make us healthier, stronger, and that foster our improvement.

What is negative or positive feedback? Feedback should, by definition, strengthen us and help us grow. Negative feedback is really criticism.

What is criticism? According to the leading expert in human relationships, John Gottman, criticism is a form of violence and has no use in mature and healthy relationships. Experts at relating never use criticism as a tool for motivation or interaction. Criticism isn’t honesty but a sign of a person’s own inner trouble and ego.

Feedback should be life-giving. You should feel more inspired, encouraged, educated, hopeful, and excited to try what is being recommended to you.

Many coaches overemphasize mistakes and what’s not working. They focus solely on correcting. However, only discussing what is not working or what is falling short doesn’t provide a full picture for growth and improvement. Great coaches also make sure they tell students what IS working, when they are in the sweet spot, when they are on the right track, even if it isn’t perfect yet.

The mind only focused on the problem doesn’t improve as much as the mind in the learning zone. An unfortunate advantage happens when a speedy learner grasps the concepts quickly and it’s easy to say what is going well, but for those who need more correction, coaches must work harder to provide feedback that energizes growth rather than solely giving feedback about how to improve.

Basketball Feedback

At camp a young student was shooting with her elbow out, causing her shot to be out of alignment. The coach recommended she move the shot over her knee and under the ball. She responded with gratitude and happily made the adjustment. The next station, a young man had his elbow out and the coach recommended moving the ball into an aligned position, but the young man responded angrily, “It’s over

the knee.” When the coach demonstrated that the ball was about four inches away from the knee, the player snapped, “I don’t need to change my shot.” He shot the ball all week with limited accuracy. Same coach, different responses.

One college athlete played for a coach who made him feel strong and powerful. Anything the coach told him, he happily did immediately. The team was on the way to be the best in the league. Players encouraged each other. Practice was full of energy. Then the coach left the program, and a new coach took the lead. Every time the new coach said something to this player, even if it sounded positive, it felt like an attack. Compliments were backhanded and during the season, the team had many fights in practice. After the coach yelled at one player during the game, he sat down in the middle of the court and didn’t move until the refs had to remove him from the game. Same team different responses. Both scenarios relate to the problems basketball players, coaches and teams face around feedback and criticism.

As a player, if you can’t see that feedback is crucial for your growth as a player, you can’t improve. Choosing to value feedback is a decision. It is a habit of the mind to be thankful for the feedback you’re receiving. It is a gift to make you a stronger player.

How do you decide if the words are feedback or criticism?

First, eliminate yourself as part of the problem. We all can be part of the problem in some capacity. Here is a simple test: Would most teachers and coaches define you as flexible and receptive to feedback? If you block feedback on the court, you typically block it everywhere else as well.

Another good clue would be, do you make feedback personal or do you see it as a tool to help you become better? Criticism is personal—it is a form of attack. Feedback is not personal and if you make it personal, then you are the issue.

As a player, if a coach is constantly critical, creating discouragement in your spirit and on your team, you need to have a workable plan to navigate this challenge.

If you have a critical parent, coach, or teacher, meet this criticism with your own level of power and dignity. Violence does not become less violent by your reception of it.

Identify Criticism

Criticism uses absolutes: “You always..., and you never...”

Criticism uses labels: “You are slow, you are the worst rebounder on the team, or you are the worst class I have ever taught.”

Criticism is personal: “I don’t know how to work with you, you just don’t get it, or what’s wrong with you?”

How to Handle Criticism

Move away from the bite: If a person is trying to chew you up, politely or quickly remove yourself from the bite. Distance yourself until the person is under control, or you have someone with you who can protect you from getting bitten.

Don’t accept the sting. It’s your choice to be stung by the words of a critical person. Imagine the words falling off you, see they hold no power, don’t spend time replaying the words. If you feel stung, treat the pain at once with compassion, forgiveness, and positive self-talk.

Prevention is the best medicine: Have a game plan to deal with critical people. The best is to get a wise mentor to help you create a game plan before you meet a tough situation. It's hard to handle critical coaches or teachers or parents without wise counsel.

Basketball Season Quick Rules of Thumb

- Get your mind and heart in a place of gratitude to receive feedback as a gift.
- Drop the need to be perfect.
- See mistakes as steppingstones to success.
- Keep negative thoughts and stinging words out of your head. Keep your thoughts positive.
- Don't make assumptions about what someone is telling you.
- Carry yourself with dignity and don't bite back when others bite you.
- If you are getting bitten, use appropriate power to get that person under control.
- When you get feedback, work to incorporate the recommendations as quickly as possible.
- Thank teachers and coaches who give you feedback.
- Seek feedback from people who are wise.

Coaches Feedback

Coaching is tough because you must be mentally and spiritually wise. Through the years, we have seen coaches who think they are amazing but who are actually harming athletes by their criticism, and immaturity. Here is the best barometer you can use as a coach: Are your players more inspired, motivated, encouraged, talented, and better people after time with you?

It's true, unhealthy athletes and parents make coaching difficult. Toxic relationships are very challenging to navigate.

Toxic: gossip, backbiting, grumbling, criticism, anger, rage, hostility, pouting, sulking, name calling, apathy, disrespect, lack of listening, selfishness, cruelty as honesty.

Health: speak the best, believe the best, receptivity, flexibility, compassion, respect, encouragement, inspiring, enthusiasm, energy, vulnerability, and kindness as honesty.

The more toxic your team, parents, administration, the more outside counsel and help you need. Toxicity is dangerous to navigate in isolation.

Look at yourself: Does your feedback create more energy, inspiration or does it create more mistakes, fear, and frustration? Are you giving feedback or are you giving criticism?

We want to say thank you to all our NBC Basketball Coaches who are incredible at providing feedback and who bring a spirit of enthusiasm and hope to the basketball community! Great job!

Parents Feedback

Words, physical touch, and non-verbal cues are the best barometer of a relationship. Take all the words you say and put them in an imaginary clear jar. Inspect the jar. What kinds of words do you find?

Healthy word jars: Words of encouragement, kindness, polite tones, respect, gratitude, self-responsibility.

Unhealthy word jars: blame, anger, yelling, pouting, silence, riddled with to-do lists, tasks or shortcomings, criticism, comparison.

Next take all the interactions with your child: the amount of touch, the type of touch, the non-verbal actions and put this in an imaginary clear jar. Look closely like a scientist at this jar. What do you find?

Healthy interaction jars: loving hugs, ease and peace, kind and grateful eyes, warmth, peace, joy, laughter, respectful, flexible.

Unhealthy interaction jars: frosty, cold, bitter, eye rolls, distance, aloof, dangerous, harmful, disrespectful, rigid, stubborn, angry, rageful.

If you find you have jars that are unhealthy, the work lies with you, not the child. Too many parents want to blame the child for the unhealthy jars, but these jars can be perpetuated from our own generational trauma and poor parenting methods.

Healing change begins with submission to real mentoring and accountability. Great parents have great mentors. Parenting without feedback is a recipe for unhealthy relationships. You are as good a parent as the quality of the feedback you receive and receptivity to feedback you prove in your parenting.

Thank you to all the NBC Basketball Parents committed to parenting to the best of their ability and who are raising amazing young men and women. We love our NBC Basketball Parents!