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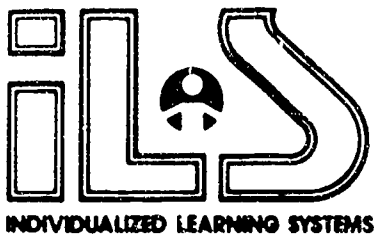
IDENTIFIERS Criticism; Praise; \*Preapprenticeship Programs; Support Groups

ABSTRACT

One of a series of pre-apprenticeship training modules, this self-paced student training module deals with giving and receiving feedback. Included in the module are the following: cover sheet listing module title, goals, and performance indicators; introduction; study guide/check list with directions for module completion; information sheet discussing the importance of group support and teamwork; reading attitudes, getting and receiving positive opinions, and giving and getting criticism; self-assessment; assignment; and post assessment. Emphasis of the module is on the ways in which being able to give praise to others and taking constructive criticism are applicable in the world of work. (Other related pre-apprenticeship phase 1 training modules are available separately--see note.) (MN)

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# PRE-APPRENTICESHIP PHASE 1 TRAINING.

## GIVING AND RECEIVING FEEDBACK

### Goal:

The student will participate in building up, over a period of several meetings, a supportive group. The student will learn the importance of being able to give praise to others and of being able to take constructive criticism. He or she will rehearse these skills and understand the ways in which they are applicable to the world of work.

### Performance Indicators:

The student will practice the skills, within a supportive group setting, of giving and receiving both positive and negative feedback.

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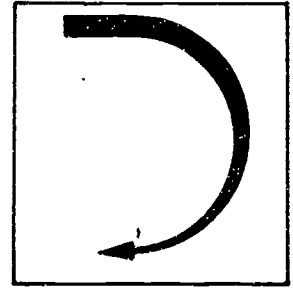
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# Introduction



The purpose of this module is to give you the opportunity, within a supportive group, to practice giving and receiving information about how each of us comes across to other people. If you get sufficient evidence about what sort of person you seem to be, from the attitudes you reveal, and the way you behave, then you have a starting point for developing new personal skills. It is the function of the group in which you are a member not only to provide personal feedback to each person, but also to do it in an encouraging way; each person will have an interest in helping each other. It is of great value to practice the skill of listening to positive personal comments without being shy, and practice the skill of receiving negative responses without getting defensive or aggressive. This will be a more direct and honest way of communicating than many of us are used to in our everyday life, but it could be an invaluable set of skills to have in a work setting. Honesty of communication, the ability to reward good attitudes and behavior, and to limit and do away with unproductive ways of behaving, are crucial to creating an efficient and satisfied working team.

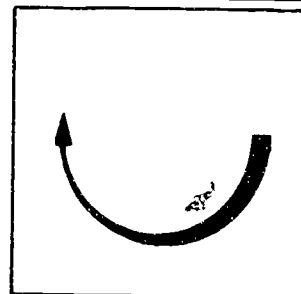
# Study Guide



Read the following guide and check off each task when you have completed it. Since this module could stretch over several group meetings, it is all right to continue to another module even though you have not completed all the assignments.

1.  Read the Goals, Performance Indicators and Introduction sections.
2.  Study the Information section and discuss the ideas within your group.
3.  Complete the Self Assessment and discuss your answers with a partner.
4.  Complete as many assignments as your instructor decides are necessary.
5.  Complete the Post Assessment.

# Information



## The Importance of Group Support and Teamwork

Can you work in a team? Can you be a productive team member? It isn't enough to be thought "nice" or to treat everyone else as "nice". You don't need to be considered a wonderful person, liked by everyone, in order to be a good team member. You do need skills such as being tactful and diplomatic, having a sense of humor, the skill of showing enthusiasm and the skill of being able to get things done in a team--working toward a common goal and finding the most efficient path to get there. The only way to build a satisfactory team is for everyone to know just where they are and what they are being asked to do. This can only happen by means of direct communication. If, for example, you are in production work and there is one worker who frequently 'goofs off,' leaving you with his or her work, what do you do? Do you smile, act nice and keep the peace at all costs? Do you stay quiet and secretly build up your anger and resentment? Or do you try to do something about it? If working together is important, it means you have responsibilities for other people as well as for yourself. In a tug-of-war battle, the individual members will be different weights and strengths, but unless each and everyone pulls to the fullest, there is no team.

Once the team's aims have been agreed upon (e.g., completing so many production units, meeting completion deadlines, completing your job in the construction process to allow the next trade worker in, etc.) the responsibility of each member is to the team. Team members all pull together. There is an option: get out and do something on your own or find a team whose aims and goals you can agree with.

Unless there is this experience of a real team, it is unlikely there is going

to be much direct communication between people. A characteristic of a poor working environment is that you hear about things indirectly; you maybe are told six months after you did something, that it was wrong. You probably get only the faintest and smallest of praise, even when you know you have done an excellent job, or you get a gush of praise that doesn't sound true and you know has only been said because it is supposed to be the 'right' thing to do. What happens under these conditions is that efficiency and production decrease; everyone is in it only for themselves.

The existence of a genuine team which has open aims and goals and honest feedback to individuals can benefit any organization and enhance all people. In the training suggested in this module, group support and team spirit is built up gradually so that there can be increasing levels of practice in giving and receiving inter-personal feedback. This basis of support helps people feel more secure and confident and is vital to the success of the team and the well-being of the individuals within the team setting.

### Reading Attitudes

Many people's attitudes are visible within the first few minutes that they speak. You may not realize just what consequences that might have; you are more likely to be hired and fired for your attitudes than for any skills or work experience you may have gained before being employed. What many of us probably don't realize is that there is no science of hiring, promoting or getting rid of a worker. Even though it is possible to count up certain behaviors (e.g., punctuality, attendance, productivity, etc.), the interpretation of your attitudes is purely a matter of opinion. This means that how you come across to somebody else could make the difference between getting and keeping a satisfying job and working in something dead-end.

How can you find out how you affect other people? Sometimes a close friend will give you a one-sided picture, but usually we don't find out that we are getting negative responses from other people until it is too late. "I'm sorry, but you just don't fit in here." You know the way advertising plays on this lack of information; people spend a fortune each year on deodorants, mouth wash, etc. for fear that even their best friend won't tell 'the truth.'

How do we read attitudes? The most obvious way is to listen to what someone says; how do they organize their thoughts and experiences, what are their values and beliefs? Also important is the way they say it--in an off-hand way, a sly manner, with sarcasm, etc. All of these, remember, are interpretations by the listener. You may not even be aware that you sound bored. This is the value of getting other people's opinions on how you come across. But, it isn't even necessary to hear someone speak in order to form an impression of them. Take, for example, the way a person moves. Watch within your group. Does he or she go directly to a seat? Does he or she wander around in a vague manner? Does he or she go in one direction, then change his or her mind and go another way? It might seem small, but you can reveal a lot even in the way you move. You can show a definite sense of purpose that might get you or lose you a good job. Even deciding ahead which tool you need, reaching directly for it, and getting on with your job, is a skill. You can learn to appear and be purposeful. There are many other ways that someone else can pick up on our attitudes. What does your voice sound like? Does it have variety in speed and in pitch? Does it sound interested, enthusiastic? Many people being interviewed for jobs speak words that mean they are interested, but the sound is dull and bored; they are not convincing. It is not necessary to become an actor, but all of us can learn minimal skills in matching our voice with the content and feeling of our words. Even the way you use your eyes can betray attitudes. Some people's eyes sparkle as soon as they talk with you, other people's eyes look like the eyes on a dead fish. It is a good idea to try looking in a mirror when you are talking on the telephone. See how much expression there is in your face. Does it match with what you are saying?

Many people, when they talk, look as if they are playing poker instead of participating in two-way communication. You can watch the different ways in which people in the group stand, sit, use their hands, dress, do their hair, etc. All of these and dozens of other signs can be seen by others as revealing attitudes. Take one last example: You are going for an interview. Because the job is frequently dirty and muddy, you decide it doesn't matter whether your shoes are clean or not. After the interview, you find out that you lost an opportunity because, "You didn't even think the interview was important enough to prepare for it. If you're that casual here, what would you be like doing high quality work?" It is in these little ways that conclusions can be drawn that can affect the course of your whole life. Perhaps the person made a mistake and didn't have



the skill of revealing through his or her appearance just how important an opportunity of getting into the trade was. Remember, employers are also people, and they respond just as the rest of us do--in a very human way.

### Giving and Receiving Positive Opinions

Let's move on to the experience of giving and receiving positive comments. If genuine compliments are exchanged between people who respect each other, it leads to a greater feeling of solidarity and of self-worth. It is impossible to spoil anyone by saying they are doing well or you like something they have done. By giving honest praise, the result is that the individual complimented is more likely to go on doing what you liked. Some people have difficulty in accepting compliments. For example:

A. "You've done a great job."

B. "Yes, but I made a mess at this end, and I bet I can't do it as well, again."

It is possible to help people stop putting themselves down in public. Again, it is a skill. If people praise you, ask yourself, "Am I the expert on their opinions, or are they?" An individual giving a compliment is the only one who knows what he or she thinks, feels and believes about you. If he or she thinks you are wonderful, allow them to think that. If you undermine someone's praise, you are putting down not only yourself, but the other person as well.

Most students and young workers forget that giving positive feedback is part of communication, and, therefore, a two-way process. They wait around to be told they are doing well without it even crossing their minds that they can give positive praise, as well. When your instructor or supervisor does something you enjoy, try telling him or her, rather than just thinking it. If you tell your supervisor, "I really appreciate the way you gave that extra time to show me how to do that," the effect is likely to encourage your supervisor to give time again in the future. If, on the other hand, you enjoyed something your instructor presented, but you keep silent, there is no way in which he or she is definitely going to know how it went. The instructor might decide, "Well, I didn't make much of an impression that time; I'll have to try another approach."

Giving honest praise, communicating when you like what someone else has done, is a skill; you are not born with this ability, you learn it by practice. When you give positive feedback to a fellow student or worker, you are increasing the likelihood of what pleased you happening again in the future. By praising, you are stating values and standards; this is the way that we all learn the best way to do things and the most effective way to behave with others. It is a way of sharing and a practical way of encouraging progress and improvement.

### Giving and Getting Criticism

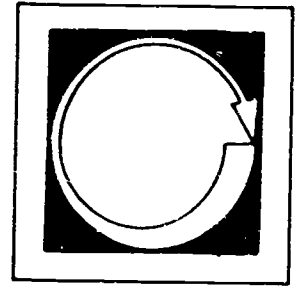
The skills of giving and responding to negative comment help bring about an open, honest, working environment where things of value are encouraged, and those things that don't benefit the team are discouraged. It's often difficult, even for people in authority, to say directly anything negative. You might be in a job for months and fail to find out that you are not working up to standard until it is too late; "You're fired." It is in each of our interests to know anything negative that applies to us, even though, at times, it may be uncomfortable to hear. This does not mean that you have to act immediately everytime you have other than a positive response; just as in giving compliments, the communication of criticism is still an expression of personal opinion. When you start taking criticism very seriously depends on you and who it is who is giving the feedback; if it is several people or someone who can influence your future, you'd better take notice right away and act on it, unless you want to leave.

If you're feeling critical of a fellow worker in a situation that directly affects you, and you leave things to smolder, they are likely to blow up in your face. The silent build-up of interpersonal difficulties can eventually lead to an all-or-nothing confrontation. If a worker is not pulling his or her weight, how long do you put up with it before communicating your concern? You could simply pass on your grievance to the employer or supervisor. But, if you are interested in building up a genuine team, the first people to communicate with is the person himself, and your fellow workers. Direct feedback to a person is much more useful than something filtered through several others and distorted along the way. You know the party game of passing a whispered message along a line of people and how "the sun is shining" becomes "the china syndrome" as more people repeat it.

The skill of giving criticism is to do it in a way that is not threatening, but helpful to the individual, and in keeping with the aims and goals of the group. This involves an approach that combines praise with blame. If it is difficult to communicate criticism or advice, and, at the same time, you feel it is essential that you do it, it is better first to catch the attention of the other person with genuine praise and then follow up with your observation of what you don't like, together with a suggested alternative. It is too blunt and challenging, along with the heat of an argument, to say, "I think you are a liar." It is, however, highly skilled to be able to say, "I think you are very likeable. I would prefer, though, to be able to believe everything you say. Do you mind if, sometimes, I question things that don't seem very convincing to me?" Or, in this example where a person is constantly cracking improvised jokes, "I think you've got a great ability to poke fun and be creative. You don't accept anything exactly as it is; and I like that. But, I'd like you even more if you didn't joke at everything. Could you please hold off your jokes while we're listening to the next lecture?"

The skill lies in giving honest, constructive feedback, and avoiding making the other person feel or seem inferior. As in Communication Skills, where making sure you were listened to was discussed, it is very important to remember that both people are equals, and it is necessary to demonstrate that each respects the other as an individual.

# Self Assessment



Demonstrate how you feel about giving and getting positive and negative feedback. Put an "x" in the space that best describes what you would prefer. When you have completed the exercise, join all the "x's" together in one line from top to bottom. Discuss with a partner what your answers reveal.

How would you like:

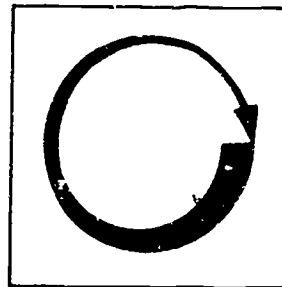
1. Working with people who help and support each other.
2. Knowing how you come across to other people.
3. Letting other people know how they come across to you.
4. Receiving praise for doing well.
5. Being told, as soon as possible, when you have made a mistake or done something wrong at work.
6. Telling other people what you like about them.
7. Confronting other people, in a kindly way, when you think they are not pulling their weight in your team.
8. Being told the truth even though it could be uncomfortable.
9. Working in a group of people who are honest with each other.
10. Receiving praise and criticism when it arises and not long after it is relevant.

Prefer

Don't care

Not prefer

# Assignment

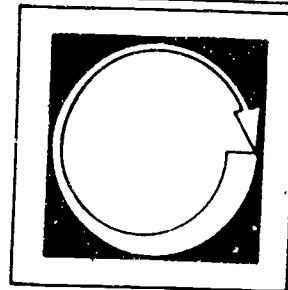


This will take place over the course of several group meetings. If possible, some work on the skills should be done at least once a week. These activities get harder as they become more personal and start dealing with criticism and advice. The activities are only suggestions, and it might be possible for the group members to suggest additional ways in which they can achieve group solidarity and practice the skills of giving and receiving praise and blame. It is best if the people in the group sit in a circle so that everyone can see everyone else's faces.

1. Write down on an index card something you like about the person next to you on your left and your right. One member of the group collects the cards, shuffles them and deals them out again. In turn, read out (even if it is your original card) the two descriptions. The rest of the group should guess who is being described.
2. On index cards, each member should write down the name of the three people in the group who, by their expressed attitudes, seem at the present time most likely to be successful in getting and keeping a job. One member should gather the cards and tally the number of times each name is mentioned. Discuss the five people who are mentioned most, and offer suggestions why they might have been chosen.
3. Each group member thinks of three specific things (experiences, activities, places, memories, pets, people, etc.) that are very important to him or her. One person volunteers to begin, and tells the rest of the group. The person answers any questions, then invites someone else in the group to share the three important things. Continue until everyone has had the opportunity to contribute.

4. One member volunteers to be the focus of attention. The person to his or her right then offers direct feedback. Try to keep it as much as possible positive. For example, you could begin, "I like the way that you..." Continue around the group until everyone has given feedback. Then the first person chooses someone else to be the center of attention.
  
5. This is similar to #4, with one person at a time being the focus of attention. The next group member on the right then says, honestly and in as full detail as possible, how the first person comes across to him or her. This will involve negative as well as positive responses. Allow the person "on the spot" to ask follow-up questions if he or she wants anything clarified. In this exercise, it is important to keep the group supportive. When everyone has given a response to the first person, he or she invites someone else to be the focus of attention. This continues until everyone has had a chance to receive full feedback of how he or she comes across to the others.

# Post Assessment



Write down your answers to the following three questions:

1. What was most important to you in this module?
2. What did you learn about yourself?
3. What of value did you learn about other people in the group?

When you have completed this, share your conclusions with either the whole group or in a small group of five or six people.