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# IFAS Leadership Development: Giving and Receiving Feedback[1]

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## Introduction

This article is part of the series IFAS Leadership Development, with eleven modules developed for use by UF/IFAS Extension agents. They are designed for training agents and officers. Information and activities provided in this series will help Extension leaders in facilitating leadership development for their agents and officers. Handouts for audience use are labeled in the leadership development modules. These may be duplicated for use during training sessions. Each lesson is designed for a workshop approximately two hours long. Various parts of the modules can be shortened or expanded according to the needs of participants and availability of time.

## Recommendations for Leader Training

- Prepare to teach this lesson by reading and familiarizing yourself with the objectives, materials, handouts and activities/exercises.
- Begin preparation several days in advance in order to secure whatever additional resources you need to make the lesson a "local" learning experience.
- Plan a learning environment with care so that the surroundings contribute to the achievement of the objectives.
- Begin on time, and end on time. Schedule a break at about halfway through the lesson.
- With each lesson after the first one, ask participants what they did as a result of the previous lesson. Record these!
- Introduce each lesson with an overview of how it fits into the overall major leadership development program.
- End each lesson with a summary and restatement of objectives. Explain what the participants are expected to do with the lesson after they leave.
- Heighten anticipation for the next lesson by sharing a brief description of it, but be cautious not to give too much away.

## Objectives

1. To understand a communication process involving more than two people.
2. To give and receive feedback in a communication process.
3. To have participants evaluate themselves on communicating with others in face-to-face situations.

## Lesson Outline

Introduction and Overview of Objective (25 minutes)

- *The Two-Step Flow of Communication*

Exercise and Discussion (30 minutes)

- *Communication Evaluation*

Exercise and Discussion (30 minutes)

- *Communication Feedback Exercise*
- *Feedback Form A*
- *Feedback Form B*

Group Development Lecture (30 minutes)

- *Giving Feedback* (20 minutes)
- *Receiving Feedback* (10 minutes)

**Total Time: 2 hours**

## Lesson Plan—Giving and Receiving Feedback

### Step 1—25 minutes

Use *Communicating in Two Steps* for the introduction. Use *Two-Step Flow Chart* as visual to accompany lecture. Make an overhead or put on chalkboard.

State objectives and write them on chalkboard.

Use appropriate questions to stimulate brief discussion, for example:

Can you think of instances where B (leader in flow chart) failed to communicate?

What happened?

How and when did A (sender) and C (receiver) find out?

### Step 2—30 minutes

Refer to *Communication Evaluation Exercise* for an introduction.

Pass out *Communication Self-Evaluation Form and* break into small groups to conduct exercise. Refer to discussion questions at end.

### Step 3—30 minutes

Refer to *Communication Feedback Exercise* for instructions to *Communication Skills Exercise* and *Communication Patterns Exercise.*

Use *Communications Skills* as a brief lecture and a handout. Have each participant practice each of the four skills in a small group setting.

Hand out *Worksheet Form A* for participants to use in their organizational meetings.

Have participants engage in *Communication Patterns Exercise.*

### Step 4—20 minutes

Use *Giving Feedback* as lecture background and summary handout.

Have participants give examples of each kind of feedback. This can be done in small groups or with total group.

### Step 5—10 minutes

Emphasize how to use feedback to evaluate meetings with *Receiving Feedback*. Hand out *Feedback Form* as a sample.

Evaluate and adjourn.

## Communicating in Two Steps

The communication process organization involves two steps. The two-step communication process occurs when messages are relayed through a third person from the sender to the receiver.

In the Two-Step Flow Chart (Figure 1), the sender **(A)** selects messages from the available information he or she wishes to transmit to the receiver **(C)**. Both the sender and the receiver may be either individuals or groups.

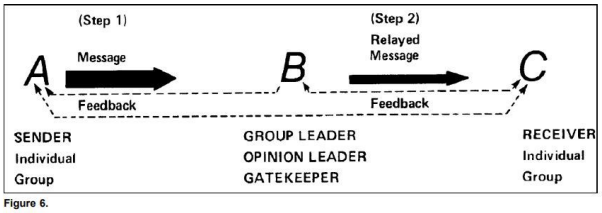



Figure 1. Two-Step Flow Chart.
Credit: Adapted from Communication Process and Leadership by L. Beaulieu, University of Florida Cooperative Extension Service, 1992.

**A** could be a state Program of Work Chairman in the Florida Association of Family and Community Educators, an organization that has councils in most counties. In achieving the goals of the organization, the state president will likely need to communicate to the members **(C)** in the different local clubs.

Since the state chairman is unlikely to communicate directly with each individual member of the association, we need a third person **(B)**, to relay the messages from the sender to the receiver. **B** is often referred to as the opinion leader, the group leader, or the gatekeeper. The local group leader (possibly the president or secretary of the local club) selects information from **A's** messages and transmits it on to **C**, the receivers or local club members. Thus, we have a two-step flow, from **A** to **B** and from **B** to **C**.

Suppose the state chairman of an organization (**A** in the flow chart) would like local club members to examine hurricane warning needs in Florida communities. In Step 1 of the two-step flow, the state chairman considers the available information. The information the state chairman considers could include the current knowledge local club members have, the needs the local community members have, the available information for the members, and previous information sent to local club members. After selecting from among the available information, the sender **(A)** transmits messages about hurricane warning needs to the local group leaders (**B** in the flow chart).

In Step 2, the local group leaders consider the transmission from **A**. In addition to considering the information provided by **A**, the local group leaders consider other information. For instance, the local leaders evaluate the messages received from the state leader about hurricane warning needs. Other information, which they may evaluate, includes similar information evaluated

by **A**, such as the current knowledge local club members have about hurricane warning systems, the needs of local members and so on.

After evaluating the available information, the local group leaders **(B)** adapt the message information received from **A** to their particular local needs. The group leaders then transmit the messages to the local club members (**C** in the flow chart). The receivers or local club members consider the messages received from **B** in addition to other information. After they have received and evaluated the messages, the receivers will decide what will be done with the information.

### Reversing the Flow

The two-step flow can work just as well in the opposite direction. Assume that the members of local clubs examine their community needs on hurricane warnings. The state chairperson would receive a myriad of confusing information if local clubs forwarded their information directly to him or her. In this situation, the state chairperson becomes the receiver and the local members the sender. However, we still need **B**, the local leaders. They collect information from the group members, summarize it, and transmit it to the state leaders.

The third person **(B)** in the two-step communications flow between sender and receiver is important. He or she is the gatekeeper, permitting some messages to reach group attention while blocking others out. For this reason, groups will find it more desirable to select leaders who are group-oriented rather than self-oriented. The group-oriented leader will relay messages that he or she perceives as beneficial to the attainment of group goals. In contrast, the self-oriented leader is more likely to relay messages that are beneficial to himself or herself.

### Key to Success

**B** is the key to success of the two-step flow. We know that no two people have the same meaning for a message. It is up to **B**, however, to ensure that **A's** message, when relayed to **C**, is as close as possible to what **A** actually said. Otherwise, **C** will not comprehend the message in the way that **A** wanted. For this reason, **A** should require feedback from **B** to see if **B** understood correctly, and B should require feedback from **C** to see if **C** understood correctly what was relayed to him. If possible, **A** should try, from time to time, to get direct feedback from **C** to see if **B** is relaying messages properly.

The group can practice communication improvement by setting up a two-step flow situation. Have one member be **A** and transmit a message to another member who is **B**. The message should be written down to check accuracy. **B** will then transmit the message to **C,** who is played by a third group member. Both **B** and **C** provide feedback to **A,** who determines how accurately the message was relayed.

Through practice sessions such as these, group members can develop the habit of providing feedback to indicate the proximity of meanings and also develop skills in relaying messages. Both feedback and message relay are important to successful group communication.

Adapted from *Communication Process and Leadership* by L. Beaulieu, University of Florida Cooperative Extension Service, 1992.

## Communication Evaluation Exercise

**Number of people:** 3 to 25

**Minimum time:** 20 to 30 minutes

**Materials:** *Communication Self-Evaluation Forms*, pencils

**Setting:** space to break into small groups

### Purpose

The *Communication Self-Evaluation Form* (see Table 3) helps individuals think about how they communicate with others in face-to-face situations. Individuals can use the information gleaned from this exercise to set up their own goals for improvement of communication skills.

### Process

1. Read through the entire list on the *Communication Self-Evaluation Form* marking each item to show whether you think you are **doing it right, should do it more often, or should do it less often.** Check each item in the appropriate column.
2. You may find that some important goals are not listed. Write those goals on the blank lines.
3. Now go back over the whole list and circle the three or four skills you believe would be most valuable for you to improve at this time.
4. Break into small groups (3 to 5 people) and share those three or four items with others in your group. Discuss why each person selected his or her items.
5. Give and receive feedback. Do others in the group agree with your choices? Do they think there are more important skills for you to consider?

6. After the discussion in step 5, read through the list again and decide which skills you want to improve most. This final selection should be based on your own judgment after receiving input from others in your small group.

Complete the *Communication Self-Evaluation Form*.

### Discussion Questions

- What did you learn about your face-to-face communication skills?
- Was the group sharing helpful? Why? Why not?
- How will you go about accomplishing improved communication skills? Did your group have some suggestions?

## Communication Feedback Exercise

**Number of people:** 2 to 3 per group

**Minimum time:** 5 to 15 minutes spaced through meeting

**Materials:** *Communication Feedback Forms A and B*, pen and pencil

**Setting:** group setting that enables observer(s) to see and hear all members

### Purpose

To identify the types and amount of communication that is taking place within a group. The exercise can help to identify nonproductive individuals and group communications and can "set the stage" for corrective measures to be made.

### Process

1. Identify 2 to 3 persons with the group (depends on size of group) to observe communication patterns and techniques throughout the meeting by using Form A, *Communication Skills* (Table 1) and Form B, *Communication Patterns* (Table 2).
2. Allow time at the close of the meeting for sharing of the observed information and discuss ways to improve communication at future meetings.

**Note:** Members of the group can be informed at the start of the meeting that the observers will be looking for communication patterns and techniques, or the observing can be done anonymously.

### Discussion Questions

- What does the communication pattern (reported on Form B) tell us about group participation? Are all members contributing? Why? Why not?
- Was there misunderstanding in communication during the meeting? Why? Why not?
- Did feelings become barriers to communication during the meeting?
- What were some good examples of effective communication in the meeting?

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## Communication Skills Exercise Feedback Form A

Sometimes group work does not progress well because different members hold different understandings of a task. Two members may not work well together because they simply do not hear each other correctly.

Mastering the following four skills can bring about clearer communication and a more productive group atmosphere.

### Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is stating in your own words what a speaker's remarks convey to you. By paraphrasing, you can check to make sure that you understand another person's ideas, suggestions or information. For example, you can say "Is this an accurate restatement of your idea?"

### Behavioral Description

Behavioral description involves reporting specific, observable actions of others, without attributing attitudes, motives, traits, or personality characteristics. For example, you might say "Bill, you have been late to our meetings the last three times," and not "Bill, you sure are disorganized. You're always late!"

### Description of Feelings

You can describe your own feelings to give others a clearer understanding of them. For example, "I feel good about the way we are working together." "I feel hurt when you cut me off."

### Perception Checking

Perception checking involves describing what you perceive to be another's feelings in order to be sure you understand him or her correctly. For example, "You look like you feel shocked at my comment. Are you?"

**Turn to Form A Worksheet (Table 1).**

## Communication Patterns Exercise Feedback Form B

Sometimes you will find that only a few members communicate within the group, thus there is limited group participation.

To check the pattern of communication within a group, have an observer tally throughout the meeting (possibly at set intervals) "Who is communicating? How often? With whom?"

**Note:** You are looking for communication patterns in this feedback exercise.

### Process

1. Draw a circle for each person in the group. (See Figure 2.) It is helpful to draw large circles for each person, so the lines and arrows are not so close together. Use space provided or use a separate piece of paper.
2. Each time that a person speaks, draw a line with an arrow from that person to the person he or she is addressing. If the speaker is addressing the whole group, draw the line to the center of the grouping. Instead of adding new arrows for each interaction you may want to add "notches" to the arrows. You can expect your observation to look something like Figure 3.

By observing the communication patterns you can observe who speaks to whom. It also can help identify high talkers, and those who talk very little.

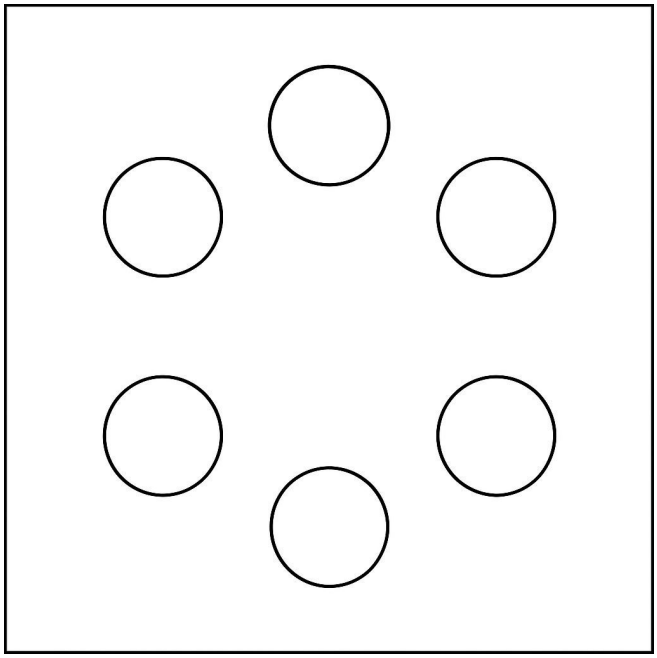


Figure 2.
Credit: Reprinted from FCL Regional Training Institute, 1981.

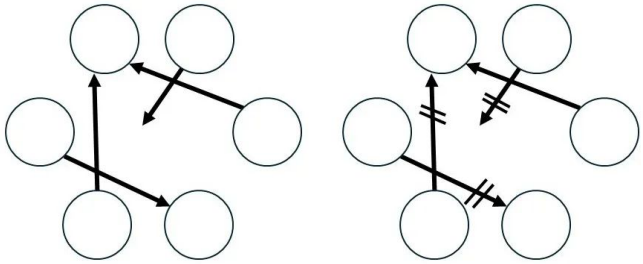


Figure 3.
Credit: Reprinted from FCL Regional Training Institute, 1981.

## Giving Feedback

**Feedback** is a way of giving another person information about his or her behavior in a given situation. The person receiving the feedback is made aware of how this behavior affects him or her and others in the group.

Feedback helps individuals to keep behavior "on target" and focused on intended goals. The person receiving feedback can decide if a behavioral change is desirable.

How well feedback is received depends in part on how well feedback is given. Criteria for giving useful feedback follows:

### Descriptive

Descriptive rather than evaluative. By describing your own reaction, you leave the individual free to use it or not to use it as he or she wants. By avoiding evaluative language, it reduces the need for the individual to react defensively.

### Specific
Be specific rather than general. To be told that one is "dominating" will probably not be as useful as being told "just now when we were deciding on the issue, you did not listen to what others said, and I felt forced to accept your arguments or face attack from you."

### Consider Needs
Take into account the needs of both the receiver and giver of feedback. Feedback can be destructive when it serves only your needs and fails to consider the needs of the person on the receiving end.

### Realistic Request
Direct the feedback toward behavior that the receiver can do something about. Frustration is only increased when a person is reminded of some shortcoming over which he or she has no control.

### Solicited
Feedback should be solicited from the message sender rather than imposed by the receiver. Feedback is most useful when questions can be formulated that the observers can answer.

### Well-Timed
Consider timing. In general, feedback is most useful at the earliest opportunity after the given behavior (depending on the person's readiness to hear it, support available from others, etc.).

### Clear Communication
Check to ensure clear communication exists. One way of doing this is to try to rephrase the feedback you receive to see if it corresponds to what the sender had in mind.

### Check for Accuracy
When feedback is given in a training group, both the giver and receiver have the opportunity to check with others in the group on the accuracy of the feedback. Is this one person's impression or an impression shared by others?

Feedback is a way of giving help and serving as a corrective mechanism for individuals who want to learn how well their behavior matches their intentions. Feedback is a means for establishing one's identity for answering "Who am I?"

Source: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory—PRI, Portland, Oregon, 1978.

## Receiving Feedback Evaluating Meetings

Receiving feedback from the meeting participants regarding the success and/or effectiveness of a meeting offers several benefits. Feedback provides:

- an opportunity for group leaders and members to consider and rate their own performance.
- a "reading" for the group to help spot problems before they become serious.
- an outlet for quiet but unhappy group members.
- the leader with suggestions on ways to improve the meeting and compliments the leader on use of effective meeting skills.
- agenda items and topics for future meetings.
- participants' sense of involvement in the meeting by accepting personal responsibility for the success of the meeting and future meetings.

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## Feedback Form

The first step in building a meeting feedback form is to decide which benefits to measure. Next write down a few questions (seldom more than three or four) that will provide the information desired. Write the question in a style that will be acceptable to your group. The questions in Table 2 are ones group leaders have found valuable.

Plan to make meeting evaluations a regular agenda item. Keep the questions simple and use feedback to make future meetings more effective. Participants are usually willing to give feedback if they can see that the suggestions are considered seriously and changes do occur as a result of their feedback.

## Acknowledgment

Original article written by Elizabeth B. Bolton, professor emeritus, UF/IFAS Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, Gainesville, FL.

## Reference

Beaulieu, L. 1992. Communication Process and Leadership. University of Florida Cooperative Extension Service. https://ufdcimages.uflib.ufl.edu/IR/00/00/45/98/00001/CD01300.PDF

Table 1. Form A Worksheet. As an observer, listen to the communication used within the group throughout the meeting. Chart below what you hear and observe.

| Type of Skill (use A, B, C, D) | Comments/Notes | Who Used? |
|---|---|---|
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Table 2.

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| What did you like best about this meeting? | | | | | | |
| 2. What did you like least about this meeting? | | | | | | |
| 3. What suggestions do you have for the next time? | | | | | | |
| 4. I felt this meeting was: | | | | | | |
| waste of time | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | very worthwhile |
| 5. I felt the leadership of this meeting was: | | | | | | |
| not helpful | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | helpful |
| 6. Based on my experiences at this meeting, I (would, would not, might) come to the next meeting. | | | | | | |
| 7. Topics or events that I would like to see included on the next agenda are: | | | | | | |

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Table 3. Communication Self-Evaluation Form

| **Expressing information, ideas and suggestions** | **Less** | **Right** | **More** |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Brief and concise, get to the point | | | |
| 2. Forceful and definite, not hesitant or apologetic | | | |
| 3. Specific, give examples and details | | | |
| 4. Generalize principles and explanations | | | |
| 5. | | | |
| 6. | | | |
| **Expressing feelings** | **Less** | **Right** | **More** |
| 7. Let others know I don't understand message | | | |
| 8. Let others know I like what they said/did | | | |
| 9. Let others know when I disagree | | | |
| 10. Let others know when they get off the subject | | | |
| 11. Let others know when I am irritated | | | |
| 12. Reveal when I'm hurt, embarrassed or put down | | | |
| 13. | | | |
| 14. | | | |
| **Understanding information, ideas and suggestions of others** | **Less** | **Right** | **More** |
| 15. Listen to understand, not preparing next remark | | | |
| 16. Help others participate in discussion | | | |
| 17. See if I understand correctly before deciding | | | |
| 18. Summarize points of disagreement/agreement | | | |
| 19. Ask questions to get more than yes/no answers | | | |
| 20. | | | |
| 21. | | | |
| **Understanding and responding to others' feelings** | **Less** | **Right** | **More** |
| 22. Check out what others feel, never assuming it | | | |
| 23. Respond to angry person so not to ignore feelings | | | |
| 24. Respond to hurt person so not to ignore feelings | | | |
| 25. Respond to confiding/affectionate person's feelings | | | |
| 26. Survey group to see how much agreement exists | | | |
| 27. | | | |
| 28. | | | |
| **General** | **Less** | **Right** | **More** |
| 29. Talk in group discussions | | | |
| 30. Get feedback on your actions | | | |
| 31. Aware of coping with own feelings, not others | | | |
| 32. Tolerate silence | | | |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 33. Able to stand tension and conflict | | | |
| 34. Accept help from others | | | |
| 35. Offer help to others | | | |
| 36. Yield or give in to others | | | |
| 37. Stand up for self | | | |
| 38. Protective of others | | | |
| 39. | | | |
| 40. | | | |

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