



Enhancing Wellness: The Importance of Effective Feedback

By Sarah Jacobs, BS, RT(R)(M)(CT)

Enjoyment can be found when breast imaging teams use individual strengths and resources to strategically improve performance¹ while contributing to a healthy work environment. You may be surprised to learn that one of the key elements to creating this vision is feedback.

In many fields, feedback is often viewed as an individual assessment or report. However, feedback is defined as “information about reactions to a product, a person’s performance of a task, etc, which is used as a basis for improvement.”² The critical word in this definition is *improvement*.

The idea of someone having an opinion about our work can be terrifying, bringing up fears that managers may perceive our work as lacking or needing improvement.³ Whether warranted or not, these concerns may impact our mental health and response to others. During clinical site visits each month, I often ask mammography technologists how often they receive feedback from the interpreting radiologists who view their images. A simple “never” is the answer 8 out of 10 times. Often, individuals say, “I only get feedback when I need to correct something.” In a recent survey completed in February 2022, a social media platform that offers quality educational resources to mammography technologists created a poll asking technologists how often they receive positive feedback from their interpreting physicians. The poll revealed that an alarming 50% of the technologists only received feedback if there was a problem with their images (Figure). Unfortunately, positive feedback is not provided often enough in the breast imaging setting.

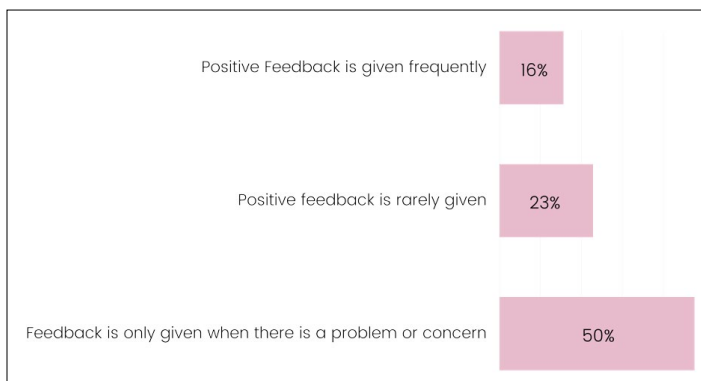


Figure. Results of Facebook poll on feedback in breast imaging.
Source: Jacobs S. Quality Breast Imagers Facebook page. February 2022.
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/qualitybreastimagers>

Rethinking the definition of feedback is needed now more than ever. Tamra Chandler, nationally recognized thought leader and author, has provided a useful definition: feedback should be defined as “clear and specific information that’s sought or extended for the sole intention of helping individuals or groups improve, grow, or advance.”⁴



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Why Feedback Is Important

When leaders embrace this redefined method of offering feedback to their colleagues, it demonstrates attentiveness and care about an individual team member’s contributions to the team. When staff members work in an environment where actions matter to others, they will likely feel more fulfilled, engaged, and healthy overall.

Consistent feedback increases employee engagement and job satisfaction. The mental and physical benefits of working in a feedback-rich culture are extraordinary¹:

- Enhanced immunity
- Decreased burnout
- Decreased depression
- Less physical illness over one’s lifespan
- Greater longevity

Feedback can be delivered in several ways depending on the individual receiving the feedback and the desired outcome. Social scientist and speaker Dr. Therese Huston recognizes three methods of delivering feedback. Placing focus on the method that those receiving feedback connect with the most will drive the opportunity for mutual understanding. It’s important to note that at some point in time, individuals will need all three methods of feedback to sustain engagement in their work.^{5(p42)} According to Huston, the three kinds of feedback that drive results are as follows:

- **Appreciation:** often the first method of delivering feedback and the one that should be used the most. Use appreciation when you want to see more of a specific behavior.

Continued on page 10 >

- Coaching: advice offered with the intent of making a change in behavior. Coaching inspires action and will help the individual find the courage to adapt, improve, and learn.
- Evaluation: lets the individual know where they stand relative to expectations within their role.

Tips for Delivering Feedback Effectively

- Before delivering any feedback, it's important to state your good intentions aloud and let individuals know how you feel without assumptions. Stating your intentions will remind the individual that you support them and that you want them to succeed.
- Timing is everything. Ask the individual when they prefer to have a feedback discussion, as the end of a busy day will likely produce a conversation that doesn't go as planned.
- To show support, ensure that you use words that aim to side with the person, not the problem. This is especially helpful when it is necessary to deliver feedback to correct an action or when improvement is needed. Corrective action feedback can be easily communicated with a few simple steps:
 - Ensure the space is safe and private to give this feedback.
 - Always start with positive feedback whenever possible to show that you recognize and appreciate their previous effort.
 - If there has been a change in performance or image quality, ask why the change occurred and what you can do to ensure their success at getting back on track; then provide them with the resources to do so.
- Critical feedback, given honestly and sensitively, will often lead to the development of improved skills and behaviors.⁶
- Listen, then listen again. Give the individual the opportunity to correct any inaccurate feedback that you've delivered. Ask questions to reiterate that you are learning by listening. Ask "What are your thoughts?" and "How do you feel you performed?" as this will lead to a higher level of trust. Learning and listening will encourage trust and will facilitate feedback conversations.
- To ensure the individual understood your intent, ask "What did you feel were the most valuable parts of our discussion?" Then be sure to follow up on any action items within two weeks.

Trust plays an essential role in giving feedback. If the recipient of your feedback doesn't trust you, they are not likely to receive that feedback meaningfully. Instead, they may dismiss it as a complaint. Building trust within your team must be a priority. A great way to build trust is to give feedback more often. This is especially effective when the feedback you deliver is appreciation.

Ways to Improve Wellness Through Feedback

- Ask others to provide you with the type of feedback (appreciation, coaching, or evaluation) that motivates you the most. Then offer to give others the type of feedback that motivates and engages them. To open these conversations, ask questions such as "What type of feedback are you looking for right now?" or "Would it be helpful to hear what I appreciate about your work?"
- Regular feedback results in significantly higher engagement.⁶ Schedule feedback conversations in advance.
- Real-time feedback is best. Support an increase in honest conversations between colleagues about what's working and what could be improved.
- Offer recognition and acknowledgment of hard work through feedback. Support others when difficulties arise, then acknowledge perseverance.
- Make it safe to provide feedback, ensuring the feedback doesn't feel punitive but rather is constructive and motivating.
- Get to know team members beyond their job description to create connections among your team.
- Double the amount of positive feedback that you would normally provide.

Simply put, feedback should be viewed as a two-way street, not a dead-end road. If the conversation is one-sided, meaning the individual offering the feedback is doing all of the talking, then it's really not a conversation. Making a conscious effort to listen when offering feedback, with the intention of learning what the individual's perspective is, will create trust and more meaningful feedback conversations. This deeper meaning and understanding has the power to elevate engagement and wellness in your work environment. Small, daily attempts to increase the frequency of feedback delivery and the style in which you offer this feedback will compound over time, improving mental health and resiliency for you as well those receiving your feedback.

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