

dear residents

Feedback vs Advice

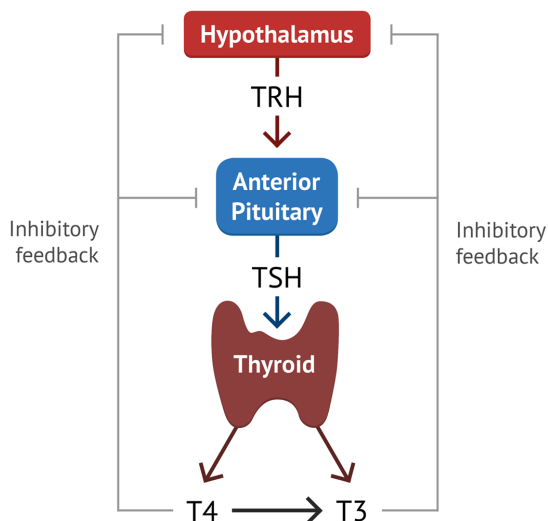
October 15, 2023

Dear Residents,

I came off a 2-week rotation on Parkland Wards, and as is customary, I provided both written and verbal feedback to the residents and students. Feedback is tricky. I don't even like the word. It is officially defined as follows:

1. The transmission of evaluative or corrective information about an action, event, or process to the original or controlling source
 - a. *also*: the information so transmitted.
 - b. The partial reversion of the effects of a process to its source or to a preceding stage.
2. The return to the input of a part of the output of a machine, system, or process (as for producing changes in an electronic circuit that improve performance or in an automatic control device that provide self-corrective action).
3. A rumbling, whining, or whistling sound resulting from an amplified or broadcast signal (such as music or speech) that has been returned as input and retransmitted.

Sounds awful, doesn't it? Feedback suggests that we are being "corrective." It also has the word "back" which suggests that we are evaluating what has already happened. It is not about looking ahead. When we seek feedback about our performance, we are bracing to hear what we did wrong in the past. We dread it. We hope that we get some sort of recognition for what we did well – but again – it's about what he did, rather than what we could do in the future. The feedback loops in hormonal regulation are beautiful and have evolved so elegantly. But human to human feedback – not so pretty. That which is perfect for physiology or engineering fails in human psychology.



From [Culture Amp](#):

Feedback = I observe something you might not be aware of + I bring it to your awareness + I clarify why it matters + you decide what to do.

For example: "I noticed you talked more than others in that meeting and most people didn't speak up at all, so we might be missing important perspectives. What do you think?"

Advice is deceptively similar but fundamentally different.

Advice = I observe something I think you can do better + I tell you what to do instead.

For example: "I suggest you talk less in our meetings. Something you can try is waiting until everyone else has spoken before you chime in with your ideas."

[Yoon and co-authors](#) remind us that feedback is only weakly related to performance. And that most people report that feedback is unhelpful. In their studies, the authors found that what people desire are developmental comments (critical and actionable) but when couched as feedback, it fails because it is not future oriented. The authors observed a powerful alternative: asking for advice instead of feedback permitted the giving and receiving of critical and actionable information – about how to be better in the future. It's a very simple substitution of words, but it is a powerful one.

So, the next time you find yourself asking for feedback – [ask for advice instead](#).

Warm regards,

Dino Kaz