**DELIVERING FEEDBACK TO CANDIDATES**

by Simon Moss

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| **Introduction** |

Occasionally, you will need to convey unfavorable feedback to candidates. You might need to challenge their arguments, correct their writing, question their motivation, or even query their ability to complete a thesis.

Perhaps you assume your capacity to convey feedback is outstanding already. Nevertheless, few supervisors are apprised of all the latest discoveries on how to convey feedback most effectively. To illustrate, each of the following statements have been either verified or refuted empirically. Decide which of these statements are true and which of these statements are false.

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| True or false | Citation |
| After candidates—especially candidates from disadvantaged or minority communities—describe a hypothetical day three years in the future, they become more persistent when attempting to complete demanding tasks; their confidence and resilience also improves. | Destin et al. (2018). |
| If a location or setting seem symmetrical and organized coherently, rather than chaotic and haphazard, most people, including candidates, tend to contemplate decisions and information more carefully. | Rahinel et al. (2016). |
| After they receive feedback on their assignments, candidates learn more rapidly if some feedback was written and some feedback was recorded on audio | Rockinson-Szapkiw (2012) |
| A person described as "utterly changed" seems less warm or competent than a person described as "totally changed" | Hauser & Schwarz (2018) |
| When the ceilings are high, most people, including candidates, think differently. For example, they may classify objects into broader categories—and this tendency can enhance their creativity and flexibility. | Meyers-Levy & Zhu (2007) |
| After most people, includiing candidates, imagine being touched supportively by their partner, their resilience improves. They respond more productively to obstacles. | Jakubiak & Feeney (2016) |

Actually, all these statements are true This document shows how these discoveries, and many other important principles, can help you deliver feedback more effectively.

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| **Develop the resilience of candidates** |

Before you deliver criticisms, you need to increase the openness of candidates to this feedback. That is, supervisors should invite candidates to complete activities that have been shown to foster resilience to challenges and criticisms. For example, candidates should contemplate their strengths, clarify their values, envisage their future, identify the skills they plan to develop, and recognize that competence is modifiable. After candidates have completed these activities, they should be more receptive to your feedback.

The first column in the following table shows how you can encourage candidates to complete these activities seamlessly. The second column justies each activity.

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| Activity | Justification |
| Encourage candidates to record their strengths and talents. In particular   * Ask candidates to identify one to three people in their life who they perceive as invariably supportive and understaning rather than judgmental or unpredictable * Encourage candidates to ask each of these people “What do you think are 1 to 3 of my key strengths or talents” as well as “What do you think are 1 to 3 of my key values—such as learning, justice, altruism, power, money, and so forth” * Invite candidates to record these answers in an accessible file. * Encourage candidates to contemplate how they can utilize these strengths and talents more often to enhance their thesis | When individuals receive feedback from a friend about their strengths, they become more resilient to challenges and feedback. |
| Encourage candidates to imagine their work life five years from now. Specifically   * Invite candidates to consider a role, position, or aspiration that utilizes their strengths, values, interests, and degrees. * Ask candidates to identify their favorite activities during this position, such as presenting a seminar as a keynote speaker, mentoring other employees, solving problems, and so forth * Encourage candidates to imagine themselves complete these activities several years in the future | After people vividly imagine a day in the future, they are more persistent and responsible. They are not as ilkely to sacrifice their future goals to seek pleasure now. |
| Encourage candidates to contemplate how they will develop the skills and qualities they need to achieve their aspirations. That is   * Ask candidates to identify the skills, attributes, and resources or networks they might need to achieve their aspirations * Invite candidates to identify one to three people in their life who has changed fundamentally over time. * Encourage candidates to specify three activities they will initiate—preferably in the next year or so—to facilitate their development of these skills, attributes, resources, or networks. They might seek guidance from the other people that seemed to have changed fundamentally. | Whenever individuals are more motivated to develop qualities than to demonstrate their expertise, they are more inclined to assume they can change fundamentally. That is, they perceive their intelligence and character as modifiable. Therefore, they perceive criticisms as opportunities to improve rather than as threats to their image of themselves. They become more receptive to feedback. |

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| **Fostering the right state to deliver feedback** |

Sometimes, supervisors feel resentment, frustration, or other emotions while they deliver feedback. Unfortunately, when supervisors experience these emotions, their feedback is frequently brusque. The words these supervisors express are often inadvertently unsupportive. Instead, minutes or hours before you deliver feedback, you should

* Contemplate one to three strengths of this candidate
* Identify one to three obstacles this candidate might be experiencing
* Imagine how you would feel if you were receiving this feedback

If possible, do not deliver this feedback in your office. Instead, meet at a location in which

* the ceilings are high
* the surroundings are symmetrical and organized rather than chaotic and haphazard

In these locations, candidates tend to think more carefully; they do not respond as impulsively or defensively.

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| **Presenting feedback** |

Once candidates have become more resilient and you have become more attuned to your emotions, you can now deliver unfavorable feedback, if necessary. The following table specifies some basic principles you should consider to help you deliver feedback more effectively.

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| Principles to follow | Examples |
| Relate the unfavorable feedback to the strengths or talents of candidates. | Because your thinking is advanced and abstract, you do not always explain your arguments clearly enough |
| Relate the unfavorable feedback to the future instead of the past. Individuals tend to be harsher on themselves when they contemplate future, rather than past, transgressions because only the future is malleable (Sjåstad & Baumeister, 2019) | I am not too concerned about the past. But, in the future, you should read more articles each week |
| Refer to your feelings and intuitions rather than imply your comments are definitely correct; comments that seem too definitive often provoke a defensive response | My sense is this plan might be too ambitious. My intuition is you could probably speak more clearly during presentations. |
| Offer choice when delivering feedback | I feel this approach could be justified better. What do you feel? Would you like to include more arguments to defend this approach? |
| Confine your comments to specific examples rather than broad limitations | Your sentences in this paragraph could have been organized better |
| Relate criticisms to specific actions the candidate could initiate to address this shortcoming | To write this paragraph better, perhaps read this article on several principles you could follow |
| Ask candidates whether they want feedback on specific topics. Candidates are more inclined to embrace the feedback they invited | On what research skills or activities would you like feedback. Writing structure? Writing style? Hypotheses? |
| When reading drafts, occasionally record some audio feedback to supplement the written feedback |  |

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