

Monterey Bay Aquarium Essentials of Coaching and Feedback

COACHING

Coaching is defined as *training by means of focused instruction, demonstration and practice*. This is the first step in transferring the skills and knowledge folks will need to master as presenters. Let's look at how we will use each of these aspects of coaching:

- **Instruction:** Instruction may include a brief explanation of the interpretive principle or concept we are focused on and why this is important to apply to our presentations. Examples include mechanics of the presentation (operating equipment, voice projection, eye contact, as well as learning the content behind the presentation. *Remember: Instruction focuses on communicating knowledge and will not result in building the presenter's skills.*
- **Demonstration:** Our presenters need to understand the outcomes we are expecting from them. The easiest way to convey this understanding is to model the skills for them. It's easy in our case, for example simply delivering a sample presentation and pointing out the elements that make this is an effective delivery. *After modeling, ask the trainee what he/she observed in your demonstration in order to check his/her understanding.*
- **Practice:** This is the presenters turn to apply what they have learned and observed. Practice is the acquisition of skill through repeated exercise. The more time and effort invested in practice will yield greater success with the skill. *Giving presenters the maximum amount of practice possible, along with ongoing feedback, will increase their effectiveness and comfort with interpretive skills.*

If you've ever participated in a team sport with a coach, you know the role of the coach is to break down the game into specific elements (rules, strategy, specific skills such as running, passing, etc.) and then help you learn and practice each specific element. When you've mastered the individual elements through instruction, practice and drilling, you start to integrate these individual elements back into the complete game. If there's a problem on the field, the coach usually starts to address the problem by revisiting the basic skills. More often than not, when there's a challenge with a presenter, it's related to the coaching process, and that's the first place to look for the solution.

Now it's time to look at feedback...

over → Feedback

FEEDBACK

Since none of us can step outside of himself or herself to observe our actions, it's helpful to have someone serve as a "mirror" to reflect back aspects of our performance. That is the basic value of feedback.

It's important to set the proper tone for using feedback. To be most effective, feedback should be:

- **Specific:** Use active verbs and describe specific behaviors whenever possible. This helps the subject of the feedback understand precisely the effect of their actions or presentation.
- **Non-judgmental:** Feedback is merely observation and reflection and should not be perceived as personal judgment of the performance.
- **Constructive:** The person providing feedback may include some questions to help the presenter evaluate her/his own performance and formulate her/his own suggestions for improvement.

Tips on giving feedback:

1. Prior to observing his or her performance, ask the presenter what kinds of specific feedback they would like to receive. Their response to this will help you determine how well they understand the desired outcomes in the first place.
2. Add your own suggestions for areas where feedback may be helpful to the presenter.
3. Make specific observations and notes whenever possible (i.e. observed behaviors, actions, quote words or phrases, describe body language or voice characteristics. At times photos, videos or voice recordings may be helpful.)
4. Ask the presenter to evaluate his/her own performance first. Build on their comments whenever possible.
5. Help the presenter formulate specific actions or objectives to respond to the feedback.
6. Set up a plan for additional observations to measure progress if appropriate.

An important goal is to model this feedback process for the presenter so she/he becomes comfortable with both giving and receiving feedback. Provide opportunities for peers to provide feedback to each other whenever possible so peer feedback becomes part of their repertoire.