

Ladder of Feedback

In *King Arthur's Round Table: How Collaborative Conversations Create Smart Organizations* (John Wiley Press, 2003), Dave Perkins writes:

Communicative feedback clarifies the idea or behavior under consideration, so that everyone is talking about the same thing. It communicates positive features so that they can be preserved and built on. It communicates concerns and suggestions toward improvement. (page 46)

The Ladder of Feedback is a tool for providing communicative feedback about an idea, a plan, or a behavior. (See *King Arthur's Round Table*, page 47).

The idea or plan is presented to the group. Then the group moves through the following steps (moving from one rung of the ladder to the next):

Step 1: Clarify

Ask clarifying questions to be sure you understand the idea or matter on the table. Avoid clarifying questions that are thinly disguised criticism.

Step 2: Value

Express what you like about the idea or matter at hand in specific terms. Do not offer perfunctory “good, but,” and hurry on to the negatives.

Step 3: State concerns

State your puzzles and concerns. Avoid absolutes: “What’s wrong is . . .” Use qualified terms: “I wonder if . . .” “It seems to me . . .” Avoid criticizing personal character or ability and focus on ideas, products, or particular aspects.

Step 4: Suggest

Make suggestions about how to improve things. This step is sometimes blended with step 3: people state concerns and then offer suggestions for addressing them.

There is no set time limit for this process: It can be done in a few minutes or over the course of an hour.