

Exercise

Non-violent feedback

Purpose & Output The purpose of this exercise is to practice non-violent communication as a means of improving the effectiveness of communication about security within teams and groups. It provides for a reflection on how we can give our feedback in an understandable, clear way and avoid some of the pitfalls which can lead to arguments or ineffective communication.

The exercise is best carried out in pairs at first, although it can be adapted for larger groups.

Input & Materials It may be useful to write the guidelines for non-violent feedback somewhere visible, like on a flip-chart.

Format & Steps Decide on a setting for conducting a feedback discussion (this can be done in pairs, or with observers, taking turns). The participants should choose a topic (real or imaginary) about which they want to give feedback. This can be a security-related topic, such as an incident which took place already, or something else entirely. Ask the person giving feedback to follow the guidelines below. For each guideline, a small illustrative example is given. Here, we are imagining a scenario in which two colleagues are talking: one of the colleagues often works late and once forgot to lock the door of the office when leaving; the other colleague wants to talk about the incident.

The recipient of the feedback should only ask questions of clarification but not comment, reply, justify or question the content of the feedback.

Format & Steps

Guidelines for non-violent feedback:

I speak for myself: You can only speak from your own subjective experience – not about ‘common sense’, ‘my group’, ‘we’, or ‘one’, but only ‘I’.

- e.g. “I felt unsafe when I found the office unlocked this morning”.
- Bad practice: “What you did yesterday put us in danger!”

What did you observe? You should speak only of the facts as you experienced them, so the interlocutor knows what your feedback is referring to (what you saw, heard, etc.).

- e.g.: “When I arrived at the office this morning, the front door was unlocked and I could open it without the key”.
- Bad practice: “You forgot to lock the door yesterday!”

What was your reaction to it? What were your internal feelings and physical reaction to your experience? Try not to be judgemental, but again, simply speak from your experience as you understand it.

- e.g. “I was very worried, because I thought maybe we had been robbed. When I found that everything was OK, I was still quite angry.”

How do you interpret it? What does your personal interpretation bring to the facts? Although your personal interpretation is indeed subjective, it is still valuable and colours your experience.

- e.g. “I think it happened because you have been working very late and were tired and simply forgot to close it”

What are your wishes, advice, or interests? What are your suggestions for change based on this experience? They should be offered without demands, but rather as requests for consideration by the group.

- e.g. “I would feel better if I knew we were all getting enough rest and not overworking so that we could better take care of things like this, so it would be better if you didn’t work so late”.

Ask the pairs to then share their insights on the process and manner of giving feedback – not about the content. Did they experience different feelings than when they normally receive feedback?

**Format &
Steps**

This exercise can also be used to clarify the content and tone of your feedback as a preparation for an actual feedback session or potentially difficult discussion.

**Remarks &
Tips**

It is important to receive feedback with your ears and not with your mouth, and understand it as a personal reflection from your partner, not as ‘the truth’ or an invitation to justify or defend your actions. You decide yourself if it is valuable to you and how to react to it. Following such an approach might be a preventive step for conflicts within your team. As such, it can contribute to your overall well-being.

If you are interested in deepening modes of communication which deal sensitively with conflict, you might want to have a look at non-violent communication approaches.

Be aware that ‘speaking for myself only’ is not appropriate in many regions around the world. Adapt the methodology so that it fits your needs and setting.
