Receiving the Gift of Feedback

BY ROBYN KELTON

I'm a terrible speller—there, I've said it. Spelling and, to some extent, paying attention to the nuances of grammar are not my greatest strengths, but I do feel like I'm a pretty effective writer. Moreover, I enjoy transforming thoughts, stories, and even statistics, into writing. As a bad speller who loves to write, I'm faced with several options:

1. I can write and know that left un-proofed some readers will de-value my work,

2. I can write and ask for feedback knowing that the process may make me feel vulnerable, but ultimately help me produce a higher quality product, or

3. I can chose not to write and thus, not worry about reactions or feedback.

The second option is my go-to. This is in large part because I've learned to value the process of giving and receiving feedback. When I first started working at the McCormick Center, I quickly learned that all publications went through a rigorous review process. Nothing, it seemed, was distributed unless it was subject to, at the very least, two sets of eyes. At first, this process was intimidating. As a poor speller, I was not thrilled at the idea of having my work edited by my new colleagues. At the same time, when I was given the work of others to edit, I was a little apprehensive about how they would receive the feedback. Those fears quickly faded as I began to see how edits helped elevate the technical quality of my work and how feedback and suggestions increased my knowledge and skills. **Now the process of receiving feedback feels like a collaborative effort to raise quality, and I take pride in being part of a team that looks at feedback as a norm of continuous improvement.**

Feedback may come in the form of edits to your work, a conversation after you've been observed, a performance appraisal, a meeting with a mentor, receiving assessment scores from formal tools (such as the Program Administration Scale, Business Administration Scale for Family Child Care, the Classroom Assessment Scoring System, or the Early Child Environment Ratings Scales), or achieving a quality rating in your state's QRIS. All of these are examples of evaluations, and–more importantly–the opportunity to transform feedback into quality improvement efforts.

When we challenge ourselves to remove our fear or dislike of feedback and begin to view it as a supportive process that fosters growth, it becomes a true gift.

Below are some tips for reframing negative responses to feedback:

- **Be mindful of your immediate reaction and try not to shut down.** It makes sense that your first response may be an emotional one that leaves you feeling defensive. Recognize your reaction and remind yourself to stay present and in the moment. If you shut down and become defensive straight out of the gate, you've put the brakes on your own growth.

- **Listen with the intent to learn.** Rather than focusing on mistakes or negatives, focus on things you can change now or do differently to improve your practices in the future.

- **Ask questions for clarity.** 'Not sure what is meant by certain feedback or what it has to do with improving quality? Ask! This is especially true when you're unclear or disagree with the feedback being given. Rather than agreeing resentfully to make changes you don't believe in, take time to recognize the rationale behind the feedback. You may still disagree, but at least you'll fully understand it.

- **Remember the purpose of feedback.** Feedback isn't about shaming; it's about growing, learning, and improving.

Robyn Kelton is a Training and Technical Assistance Specialist at the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership. In this role she serves as a national reliability anchor and trainer for both the Business Administration Scale for Family Child Care (BAS) and Program Administration Scale (PAS). She holds a BA in Psychology and an MA in Organizational Psychology.