

Renegotiating Roles and Expectations

Resource Section

“... as we act, we not only express what is in us and help give shape to the world; we also receive what is outside us, and we reshape our inner selves. When we act, the world acts back, and we and the world are co-created.”

Parker Palmer

Purpose

To help participants see feedback as a normal part of life and learn ways to use it effectively when the inevitable “pinch” of differing expectations is felt during the first years of a call.

Theological Understanding

Throughout the Bible people respond to the environment around them, adapting their roles and expectations based on the circumstances. Jesus sets a prime example: sometimes a healer, sometimes a teacher, at other times an angry demonstrator. He does not always meet people’s expectations, and he is willing to renegotiate his role when that does not conflict with who he is (witness his changing responses to his mother at the wedding feast in Cana). When it comes to renegotiating expectations, probably no one tackles a bigger job than Abraham when he negotiates with God for the salvation of Sodom.

Special Instructions

If presenting this module to a mixed clergy/lay group, have them work in congregational teams to discuss feedback mechanisms in their congregations (see PowerPoint slide 13). For the rest of the module individual work and sharing with partners, perhaps ones who are NOT part of their congregation, would be best. You may also want to come up with additional examples of situations and ways to phrase feedback (see Talking Points on PowerPoint slide 11).

Related Modules

Conflict Modules I & II
Habits, Norms and Expectations
Polarity: Differences to be Managed
Role Clarity

Bibliography

Maurer, Rick. Feedback Toolkit: 16 Tools for Better Communication in the Workplace. Portland, OR, Productivity Press, 1994 – a little handbook of tips on giving and receiving feedback under different circumstances.

Rendle, Gilbert R. Leading Change in the Congregation: Spiritual and Organizational Tools for Leaders. Herdon, VA, The Alban Institute, 1998 – see especially the opening chapter (pp. 21-25) for a good description of the need for reflection to aid learning.

Stone, Douglas; Patton, Bruce; and Heen, Sheila. Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most. New York, NY, Penguin Books, 1999 – a terrific book on how to raise difficult issues by members of the Harvard Negotiation Project.

Ury, William. The Power of a Positive No: How to Say NO and Still Get to YES. New York, NY, Bantam Books, 2007 – a step-by-step approach to drawing boundaries by saying “no” and still staying in relationship by the director of the Global Negotiation Project at Harvard.

Wheatley, Margaret J. Finding Our Way: Leadership for an Uncertain Time. San Francisco, CA, Berrett-Koehler, 2005 – see especially the essay written with Myron Rogers on “The Uses and Abuses of Measurement” for a discussion of feedback (pp. 156-162).

General Outline of the Session

1. Opening prayer and meditation (suggested reading Genesis 18:16-33 or John 2:1-11)
2. Check-in
3. Introduction to “pinch” theory (PowerPoint 1-7; Talking Points)
4. Johari Window and concept of filters in communication (PowerPoint 8-9; Talking Points)
5. Giving feedback (PowerPoint 10; Talking Points; Handout 1, individual work followed by partnering with one other person)
6. General debrief (large group)
7. Conversation for mutual learning (PowerPoint 11; Talking Points; individual work followed by partnering with same person as in #5)
8. General debrief (large group)
9. Receiving feedback (PowerPoint 12; Talking Points; Handout 2)
10. Built-in feedback loops (PowerPoint 13; Talking Points; Handout 3, small group discussion)
11. Large group debrief, if applicable
12. What if you have to say “no” (PowerPoint 14; Talking Points)
13. Formal renegotiation (PowerPoint 15; Talking Points)
14. Wrap up and closing prayer

Renegotiating Roles and Expectations Handout 1

Think of a current (or recent) “pinch” that you are in. Describe the circumstances, its effect on you, who else is involved.

Draft a few opening sentences that would initiate a conversation with the person or people with whom you have a “pinch.”

After you are satisfied with your draft, find a partner and share the draft, requesting feedback on how it was heard. Then listen to what your partner has drafted, paying special attention to whether he/she used “I” statements; focused on mutual learning; offered personal perceptions, feelings, and observations; avoided inflammatory language and assumptions; was transparent about own assumptions. Be prepared to give your partner feedback on the extent to which you saw these guidelines followed.

Renegotiating Roles and Expectations Handout 2

Tips on Giving and Receiving Feedback

Giving Feedback

- Be sure the purpose is to learn about the other person, express your own views or feelings, and/or to engage in mutual learning or problem-solving.
- Select the right time – close to the event.
- Be certain that you need to address the issue – can you let it go?
- Draft “I” statements (at least in your head) that clearly describe the impact of the situation on you and how you are feeling.
- Express curiosity about how the other person sees the situation.
- Speak of your own perceptions, feelings and observations – do NOT make assumptions that they are congruent with the other person’s or that you know what the other person’s are.
- Share the assumptions that led you to feel the “pinch.”
- If appropriate, be prepared with a specific request of the other person (to stop doing something, start doing something, etc) and have a Plan B in case the person does not agree to do what you request.

Receiving Feedback

- Establish boundaries – are you asking for feedback on the content of your work, your ability to handle administrative or managerial tasks, or your interpersonal skills?
- Listen between the lines, looking for additional clues offered by tone of voice, body language, etc. and probe gently to uncover meaning.
- Ask for specifics and clarification if needed.
- Don’t be defensive – you can decide whether the feedback is valuable and whether you are able or willing to make the changes the other is requesting.
- Don’t feel you have to respond immediately – you can take time to consider the consequences of the request, but do get back to the individual.
- Say “thank you” – the person who gave you feedback took a risk in opening up to you.

Renegotiating Roles and Expectations Handout 3

What feedback loops already exist in your congregation?

How well is each of these working?

What might you want to add or change?

What is the best example of a feedback process that you have seen in congregational life? What made it so? Who was involved?