

SUGGESTIONS ON RECEIVING FEEDBACK AND THE HARVEST

by Simone Helmle

Following the seven phases of learning processes as described by Coenraad van Houten, learning requires an inner readiness for change. Learning is clearly more than just broadening one's horizons and getting to know new things or looking somewhere else for once. Adult learning is about acquiring new skills and understanding learning as part of a process of professional and personal development. As a trainer, I carry with me the triad of insight, development, and improvement. On this basis, I will give suggestions for the design of carrying out retrospectives and the evaluation of a training program. The scope of retrospectives varies greatly, depending on whether I am looking at a single learning unit, a day, a week or even half a year, or a whole year. As a course instructor, I try to look at three levels:

- **What is significant for the individual course participant(s)?** This is about how the individual feels supported in his or her development.
- **What is significant for the learning group?** The question here is whether we are traveling as a learning group in such a way that the individual within the group is able to follow along well. Think of it as a group going on a hike together. We hike together, but each person walks individually. There are phases where I walk in front, other phases where I walk in the middle or behind. There are passages that are playfully easy, other passages are very challenging. Ideally, this is mixed so that it is sometimes easier and sometimes more strenuous for the individual. For the individual, especially at the beginning of a training, the questions arise "am I in the right place here?", "who are the others?", "will I be able to come along?", "what is our relationship to each other?". For the course leader, the question arises as to the pace of learning, the content and method, the organizational matters and also the eye for detail and attention to the whole.
- **What is significant for the course leader?** This is about the harmony of preparation, implementation, and follow-up. Particularly at the end of a training course, feedback contains information on how to improve the next training course. It is important to be aware that participants give feedback on improvements for the next course group and not for themselves.

Questions that address the individual person and thus enable a first-person statement are particularly valuable for the retrospectives. They allow the individual to stay with him/herself and yet they provide information about the individual's relationship to the learning object, the learning path, the learning atmosphere and the learning environment. The following list of questions may serve as a stimulus to pick out individual questions or to extend the list with further questions. The collection of questions is followed by key points from which perspective the question can be asked. Here, too, there are no limits to the expansion of possible perspectives. The issue of "how" the retrospective can be applied is given below in a third list of ideas, how they can be presented for an individual in a larger group. Nevertheless, the most beautiful moment is when you put the lists aside and realize that you only need these collections as cheat-sheets and combine the questions and approaches that are appropriate for the training, in tune with the people and place of the moment.

Question Collection:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What touched you the most this week? What was a precious moment for you personally? What made you wonder? • What do you take away from this week? • When you look back on this week a year from now, what will you remember? What made the week worthwhile to you? • What was unexpected for you? What would you have imagined differently? • What would you like to give your neighbor from this week? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think course participants should know about this week? • What didn't go well from your point of view? Are you disappointed about something? • Did something bore, overwhelm, or underwhelm you? • What thoughts are you going into next week with? • How do you feel? How have you been? • What resonates? • What have you experienced? |
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Perspectives on these Questions

- Time units: although I ask about a week's impression, the units could be individual impressions over days or hours.
- Emphasis on professional learning or personal maturation.
- Conditions of space and place, as well as from the organizational point of view.
- Perspective from the now, but also from the expectations for the week or in the future: "How did I get here? How have my hopes for the training been fulfilled?" or also "When I look at my activity in a year's time, what will have changed by then? What specifically do I plan to do? "
- Depending on how the training is integrated, for example, if it is part of a qualification to be obtained that includes exams, the perspective of exam preparation is also relevant.

Collection Method

There are three levels to consider the method of feedback collection. For the participant, the individual review is most significant for professional and personal development. Here, the individual is completely subject to his or her own inner process. Support can be provided by thought journeys or journaling. Usually, participants feel the need to share. Consider whether this always needs to be done in the entire course group, or whether it is also appropriate in conversations in pairs or small groups.

Support the review of individual participants

- Dialogue walk for two
- Weekly review as a journey of thoughts
- Writing a letter to yourself

Review as a summary and consolidation of learning content

- Write a cheat sheet with key learning moments and outcomes from the week.
- Task for small groups, recording results on flipchart paper.
- Chart paper on the wall for free writing of questions that come up.

Playful creative methods for review

- Everyone collects an object outside that is emblematic for this week.
- Bring dough and knead the mood of the week in the dough.
- Weekly review in the form of newspaper headlines, slogans or even poetry.
- what ideas do you have that could go here?

Support of retrospection from an overall view

- Individual participants take on the task of accompanying the training as reporters for a certain period and report back in the evening or morning. Gladly encourage creativity as a skit, role play, poem, or song lyrics, so that this is entertaining, meaningful and stimulating at the same time.
- Small groups each looking at one perspective, e.g. 3 people looking at Monday, 3 others looking at Tuesday.

Is there anything missing from this list? Where is the classic evaluation questionnaire? The questionnaire comes at the very end, when everything has been said and the participants have said goodbye. Personally, I work with brief feedback sessions, daily or nightly reviews. At the beginning, middle and end of the training, I set aside extensive times for individual reflection. This enables the individual to look at the relationship to the learning, to consolidate or renew the personal relationship or to build it up in the first place. Only individual reflection makes it possible to engage the taught material, to process it and to individualize it through the inner forces and to muster the willpower for repetition and practice until it is finally made one's own. To this end, I like to encourage partner or small group work in which participants listen to each other. What is reflection and digestion to the person speaking becomes stimulation to the person listening intently. Think of the image of the hiking group, there you walk again and again with other people, talk animatedly, take a rest, pack up and walk the next piece. At distinctive points, the course leader's attention now shifts back to the entire group. Is everyone with us? Are we on a path that is appropriate for us? Will we arrive and does the breath of the training inspire us?