

Tools for Feedback and Evaluation

This short guide, adapted from the Ag Apprenticeship Toolkit, is intended for existing and aspiring mentor farmers and ag apprenticeship programs.

When delivered in a timely, thoughtful and skillful manner, feedback can be one of the most effective tools for both professional development and trust building between learner and mentor. This short guide offers several constructive approaches for mentors to provide feedback and evaluation to ag apprentices.

Learning audit

Ask your learner to reflect on these four questions prior to a feedback session of any kind:

- “What do I know now that I didn’t know a week ago?”
- “What can I do now that I couldn’t do a week ago?”
- “What difference does this make for me?”
- “What can I now teach someone else do or know that I couldn’t teach them last week?”

These are powerful prompts for a feedback conversation or for skill sheet/rubric review.

Three accomplishments, three challenges

In this exercise, both you and the learner come up with a list of three things they accomplished since your last feedback session and three challenges they either didn’t take on or are next steps to build on what they did accomplish. This helps you balance positive appreciation of small efforts and learnings, while also giving some ‘hard truth’ feedback on areas that need improvement or more focused attention.

The muddiest point

A great feedback tool to use when you have multiple learners and need to get a sense of how they are each doing with a new set of skills or information. At the end of a training session or discussion/reading of a new concept, ask them to write down or respond in that moment their answer to one or more of the following questions:

- What was the muddiest point for you in what we covered today?
- What was the most confusing idea or element of what we did today?
- What was the most poorly explained idea or procedure today?
- What is least clear to you about the skill we practiced today?

This will help you determine where you need to review the lesson with either the entire group or a few individuals, and helps you improve your own teaching.

One minute paper

This is a good one to use when you’ve had a busy day with lots of potential learning packed into it. For example, a big cattle move on open range or planning the planting

map for a new greenhouse. At the end of the day, give learners one minute to write down “What was the most important thing I learned or did today?” To this, you can add a second question: “What can I do next to reinforce or further what I learned or did today?” This helps the mentees identify learning that is buried in busy times, as well as how they can self-motivate to hone that skill or knowledge. It also helps you know how effective the learning opportunity was and what you might do next to solidify that skill. It can also help you determine if a learner is ready to be autonomous with a particular task.

Critical incident questionnaire

This tool is equally useful with one learner or a large cohort. It is a quick way to gauge how well mentees are learning, as well as what might be getting in their way. It does double duty, since it also gives learners a way to give *you* feedback regarding your teaching and mentoring.

At the end of a week or a particular stretch of days, for example, at the end of the first two weeks of calving or transplanting, ask learners to write answers to the following:

- At what moment during this week/stretch of days did you feel most engaged with what was happening?
- At what moment were you least engaged?
- What action did your mentor or someone else take this week that was most helpful or affirming for you?
- What action did they take that was most confusing or challenging for you?

If you have more than one learner, this will help you see how effectively you are mentoring overall, as well as who is in need of some extra tutoring with a specific concept or skill.

This tool can be downloaded for free from www.stephenbrookfield.com.

Significant learnings

A significant learning is anything that deeply impacts the mentee’s understanding or appreciation of some aspect of farming, ranching, or their own role in these professions. Ask your mentee to reflect on one or two things they learned since your last assessment session. These can be anything from learning how to drive or maintain the tractor to handling a conflict proactively and effectively to reading about a new seeding technique. Ask them to tell you about what it was they did, what they learned about themselves or the work/task/ideas, and how that might alter something about their work, study, or future. You might have to tease this out of your learner at first, so be prepared to keep asking questions to get them to think more fully about what they learned and why it matters to them. This tool is especially effective after the learner has been on-site for a month or more.

Other prompts for assessment reflection and discussion

- “What’s going well in our mentor-learner relationship lately?”
- “What has been our biggest challenge in this relationship so far?”
- “What are we each learning that can help us work together better?”
- “Is there a particular skill that we never seem to get to?”