

The Power of Feedback

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I recently attended a fantastic presentation by Gina Warren, entitled "The Power of Empowerment". Gina is a visionary, servant leader with a career marked by workplace inspiration and empowerment. I really enjoyed her presentation at the Global CEO Summit of UFL in Cannes, France, this past January, and I was delighted to meet her during the lunch that followed. In her presentation about empowerment, Gina identified the following questions that everyone should ask themselves during their next team meeting:

Is it true? - Is it necessary? - Is it kind? - Does it improve the silence?

She encouraged everyone to ask themselves the above questions before speaking up in their next meeting. If each question cannot be answered positively, then perhaps it does not need to be said. With this in mind, I thought about the last meeting I had attended. I had to smile as I believe most of the questions would have not been answered affirmatively by everyone in attendance, including me.

I decided it was time to test Gina's advice and had my first opportunity to do so at the 13th ICC International Commercial Mediation Competition.



For those of you who are unfamiliar with the event: The ICC Competition is a week-long international mediation moot, for law and business school students, that takes place in Paris at the International Chamber of Commerce every February. The students compete in multiple mediation sessions to resolve a "problem"; a commercial dispute between two or more business partners who are unable to reach an agreement on their own. The "disputants" try mediation with the hope of having a constructive discussion and resolving their conflict. The students compete in each session in teams of two, acting either the role of a business partner or his or her legal counsel.

Teams prepare for each session for months prior to the Competition and all 66 university teams must mediate four different cases before they learn if they have scored sufficient points to proceed to the final rounds. Facilitating each mediation session are volunteer mediators who either act as mediator or judge, evaluating the students' negotiation skills. At the conclusion of each mediation session, the judges score the students' performance and prepare detailed, constructive feedback that will enable teams to improve their performance during the competition.

Empowerment through feedback



Being a judge in educational events like the Paris Competition is an absolute privilege, but also an incredible responsibility. With your feedback you can determine the future path of the students, not only in this Competition but also in their mediation career. As impactful and positive as constructive feedback may be, misplaced feedback can be incredibly damaging. Although this was my third time participating in the Competition, it was a unique experience.

Being on high alert during each 85 minute mediation session, observing negotiation tactics, body language, choice of words, interaction with the mediator, advancing of interests, etc., is quite exciting. However, transforming these observations into meaningful feedback in just five minutes is the true challenge! In addition to ICC's feedback guidelines, I used Gina's questions to prepare my feedback for the students.

- Is it relevant?
- Is it kind and true?
- Does it help the students improve?

But I wanted to go further.

At the Summit in Cannes, I also met René Caryol, whose presentation on "Leadership" impressed me deeply. René is, among others, one of the world's leading executive coaches, working with some of the Fortune 500's top CEOs and their executive teams. He asked the delegates of the CEO summit: "When do you provide positive feedback to your team? When they reached the set objective or when they did not quite hit the target, but gave all they had?" He added: "In most western countries positive feedback was only given when objectives have been reached". His words accompanied me during the Competition and I was eager to keep them in mind in my feedback to the students. I strongly believe that recognition needs to be given to everyone who works hard. If the result of that hard work is not quite what one aimed for, it is your duty to enable and empower the recipient to reach the target next time. This awareness accompanied me during the Competition and I tried to articulate that into my feedback to the students.



So what was the result of this new feedback? A smashing success! For the first time ever, the students and professional mediators bestowed the award of "Best students' experience of judge's feedback" by the International Chamber of Commerce, and I was the recipient. I am extremely proud of this acknowledgement and thank everyone who felt I was the right fit for such an award. I would also like to thank Gina and René for their inspiration!

The highlight of the Competition, however, was when one of the law students came to see me after a mediation session and said: "I would like to thank you for your valuable feedback. You helped me re-gain my confidence and I am more than ever motivated to try even harder in the future". That is the most treasured feedback that anyone could ask for.

I am incredibly pleased to know that I was able to provide the right encouragement along with tips for improvement and truly hope the students will include mediation in their future!