

llamatrix

by llamawerx

...an innovative solutions partner™

You forgot to dot your i's and cross your t's.

So, you've worked on this document, presentation, customer solicitation, etc... It's not perfect, but you're pretty happy with it and you're ready for feedback. Trouble is, last time you sent something out for feedback, you got in an argument with the person providing the feedback. How can this time be better? How can you get the review that you want and need without the feedback loop resembling a root canal? Try a few of these suggestions.

Set guidelines for the type of feedback you're soliciting. If you don't want every detail nitpicked, say so at the start. "I'm not finished with all the details yet, but I'd like some general feedback on the layout and content." Starting everyone off on the right foot lays the proper groundwork for a constructive review.

Choose your reviewers carefully. If you always end up in a heated discussion with a particular reviewer, wait to get that person's feedback till you're finished with the item. You'll have more confidence in it and you'll be ready for the nitpicking.

Keep your cool. You're both on the same side here. Try to figure out what the reviewer really means. If you think they're bogged down in minutia, thank them for their feedback and move on to the next person. As teammates, you'll need to work together in the future - Avoiding conflicts will make that easier.

Ask questions. If you don't understand the other person's comments or don't agree with them, ask for clarification and examples. Questions like, "I don't understand your comment." or "How is that different than the wording that is already here?" can facilitate discussion while letting the reviewer know you've heard their feedback.

Use the spell checker. This might seem like a no-brainer, but you'd be surprised. It might not be perfect and it might give poor advice sometimes, but it will help with blatant typos. Eliminating the obvious mistakes will reduce the number of markups and allow the reviewer to focus on content. Isn't that what you really want?

Say thank you. Just as it took you time to write the piece to begin with, it took the other person time to review it. Time they could have spent doing their own work. You may not always agree with what you heard, but if you work in a vacuum, you'll never learn anything.

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Like anything else, there are two sides to every discussion. As a reviewer, you have some responsibilities too. Keep these in mind.

Provide positive feedback first. Remember, the person that just gave you this spent their time and energy creating it. We praise our children and pets for every little thing, yet often we don't pay any attention to how we approach co-workers. Don't they need positive reinforcement too? Starting off with something positive sets the tone for the entire discussion.

Focus on content. Unless the document has so many typos and grammatical errors that it's unreadable, limit your discussion with the author to content issues. Go ahead and give a marked up hard-copy back to them or suggest they run it through their favorite spell checker, but don't go through every item with them; especially not in a meeting.

Give concrete examples. Saying, "I don't like this." or "Why did you write it like that?" just raises the hackles on the author. Try giving an alternative wording whenever possible. If it really sounds better, chances are the author will want to use it. Doesn't that benefit the whole team?

Unless you're an English major or work in technical writing, don't give grammar lessons. If you think something sounds odd, say so, but don't lecture on the finer points of the

language. Is that really helping the author? If things are really awry, suggest Strunk and White's "The Elements of Style".

Be tactful. Remember that people develop attachments to their work. Whether or not you intended to be harsh, they are likely to take the criticism personally. If you think about how you would feel as the recipient of the feedback, you're more likely to take a softer approach. Benevolent honesty is a good motto.

Limit your feedback. Ask yourself, "Is this something that really needs to be changed or is it just different from the way I would have done it?" This is not your work and it doesn't have to be. It does need to be correct. Does that mean you need to give all of your feedback at once? If there are too many changes that need to be made, chances are there will be more than one review. So, hit the highlights... cover the most important things first. If you're afraid this is the only review, meet with the author one-on-one afterwards and offer to help.

Respecting the author's feelings and their writing style may not be easy, but should be part of your responsibility as a reviewer. After all, we're only human. Hopefully they'll remember that when they're reviewing for you.

llamawerx is an agile technology services group using proven and cutting-edge techniques to solve real-world problems. From concept to final integration, the power to succeed.

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