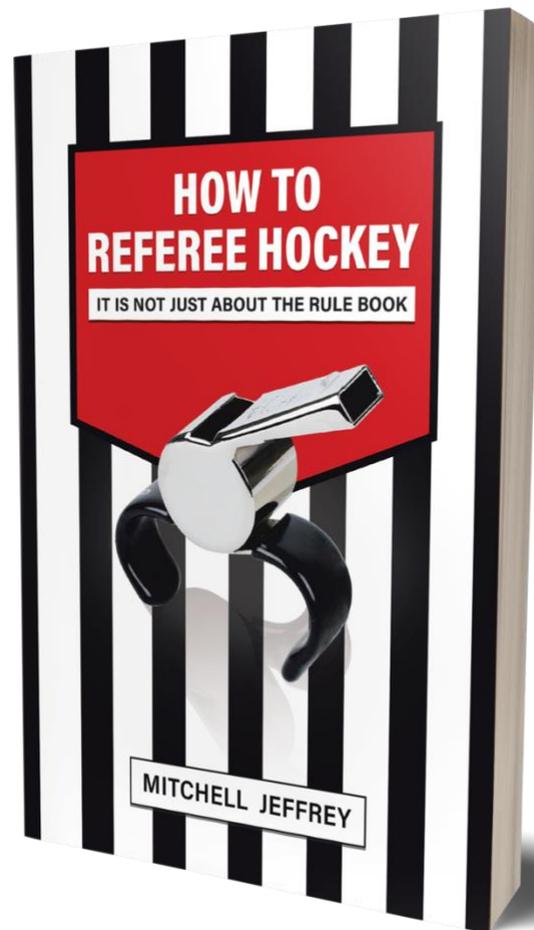


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More information can be found at thehockeyrefbook.com



Giving and Receiving Feedback¹

Receiving Feedback

There are several strategies to improving your skills in a job: read a book, watch a video, officiate games or watch more experienced refs, liners or officials. However, to really learn a job you need to be able to receive feedback. This is one of the most important and most difficult skills to cultivate.

The most common trouble when receiving feedback is defensiveness, which results in negative feelings for the mentor, the person receiving the feedback and anyone else in the room. Here are three statements that are defensive:

- “That’s not what the other guy said”: when one makes a comparison to another mentor with the intent of disparaging the current feedback, it makes the mentorship less effective.
- “That’s just not how I do it”: mentors should be teaching the national branch’s (i.e., Hockey Canada, USA Hockey, IIHF) skills of positioning, procedures and game management. A person who dismisses feedback by insisting his way is better is unlikely to succeed.
- “I did it this way because...”: the mentor watched the game and saw what was going on, so she probably saw the reason you chose to do something but decided to give you feedback to improve. The person who insists they know better is choosing ignorance over knowledge.

The above examples are more complex than just the words; how you say something is as important. If each of the above three are said with curiosity and as a question then defensiveness may not be a problem. For example, “That’s not what the other guy said” excuse can be phrased as, “My last mentor suggested I try _____, which is not the same as your suggestion. Is there a way to use both pieces of feedback or do I need to pick one?” In this example, the mentee is expressing curiosity and asking a question about how to manage two pieces of different information. Curiosity and effective questions can lead to discussion and learning.

Therefore, look for opportunities to ask questions with curiosity and a desire to learn, but avoid defensive statements. With this in mind, here are more thoughts to help you receive feedback:

- The mentor is giving you feedback because he or she wants you to improve; assume they want to help rather than make you feel dumb.
- One mentorship does not define you as a “good” or “bad” referee. Focus on learning, not on your reputation. If you focus on learning, your reputation will be positive.
- Your skills do not reflect on your abilities elsewhere in life. You can be weak on the ice but good at something else. You can be great on the ice, but weak somewhere else. There is more to you than hockey.
- You are going to receive a lot of feedback in your life. Some will be really accurate, some will be terrible and most will be in between. Take each little bit of feedback and bring it together to create your best self.
- When you receive feedback, your response should be, “Thank you for the feedback” regardless of whether you like it or not. If you do not like the feedback, store it in the

¹ From pages 183 to 186 of *How to Referee Hockey: it is not just about the rule book*

back of your mind and review it the next day in case it turns out to be helpful. The “thank you” approach is especially useful when you do not like the feedback you have received.

- After you receive feedback, feel free to ask for clarification. For example, if you do not understand something, ask questions and be curious. “I get the feedback for _____, but I do not quite understand the second part about _____. Can you explain it to me again, please?”
- You are going to receive feedback that you may not understand after the mentor has left. You have a variety of sources to use to better understand: ask another official, ask your RIC, ask another mentor, review this book or try the feedback in a game to see if it makes sense after you try.

Giving Feedback

Your ability to give feedback to others is important as it helps them learn while also creating a concrete understanding of the skills you have learned. However, this does not mean you know everything; admit when you do not know something but share knowledge when you know. It is very important to have humility when giving feedback as it allows you to be open to conversation and accept the discussion of others.

Giving feedback can be challenging in two ways. First, humans do not like to give other people bad news. Second, a person receiving feedback may come to dislike the person giving feedback. The solution to both challenges has three parts.

The first part is humility. When you give feedback, use a tone of voice that communicates that we are all learning, all the time—you, me and those working higher levels.

Second, approach feedback with a passion of exploring skills with the person receiving feedback. This means that the feedback giver is not angry or frustrated, but development focused and gives explanations for why the feedback will help.

Third, give more positive than constructive feedback. A popular method for planning feedback is the sandwich approach in which the feedback giver provides a positive followed by the constructive and then a positive again. This approach ensures that there is more positive than constructive feedback and that a positive always starts and ends the feedback.

Finally, this is a good place to discuss “ripping someone a new one” in which a person giving feedback decides that yelling at a colleague will serve as motivation. In truth, yelling alienates others, makes them feel small and only adds to the stresses we naturally experience. Instead, there are times to speak firmly and assertively during feedback. These times are usually related to poor effort or attitude but are still done with a focus on exploration of why the poor attitude or effort is not helping. Never rip a colleague. Be assertive and firm and focus on exploration.