SBI Situation Behavior Impact Model

Feedback is one of the most useful tools at work, but it often goes wrong. Vague comments such as "great job" or "that was unprofessional" leave people confused or defensive. The SBI model, developed by the Center for Creative Leadership, gives feedback a simple and clear structure. SBI stands for Situation, Behavior and Impact. It helps us describe what happened and why it matters, without judging the person.

1. S: Situation

S stands for the situation: when and where the behavior happened. A clear situation anchors the feedback in one real moment. Words such as "always" or "never" turn feedback into a general attack. It is better to name one specific time and place, such as "in this morning's team meeting". Feedback also works best soon after the event, while the memory is still fresh.

Example: a football coach starts with "in the second half of today's match", not with "you always".

At work: Lina, a project manager, needs to give feedback to Tarek, a member of her team. She begins with "in yesterday's client meeting", so Tarek knows exactly which moment she means.

2. B: Behavior

B stands for the behavior: what the person actually said or did. We describe only what we saw or heard, just as a camera would record it. Words about character, such as "rude" or "lazy", are judgments, not behaviors. Judgments make people defensive, while facts that anyone could observe are hard to argue with. The more specific the behavior, the easier it is to repeat it or change it.

Example: saying that someone left the dishes in the sink describes a behavior, while calling them messy is a judgment.

At work: Lina does not tell Tarek that he was rude. She says that he interrupted the client twice while the client was explaining her budget.

3. I: Impact

I stands for the impact: what the behavior caused. The impact can be on us, on the team, on a customer or on the results. We share our own reaction honestly, with "I" statements such as "I felt worried". This keeps the focus on effects, not on blame. The impact often explains why the feedback matters.

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Example: a friend says that a phone call during a hard week made him feel less alone.

At work: Lina explains that the client stopped sharing details, and she worried that the team had missed important information. Tarek had not noticed this effect.

4. Next Step: Intent and Action

After sharing the impact, we can add a next step. First, we ask about the other person's intent: what they were trying to do at that moment. Listening to the answer turns feedback from a one-way message into a real conversation. Some versions of the model add this step as a second I, for Intent. Then both people agree on one practical next step.

Example: a parent asks a teenager why he came home late, and learns that he stayed to help a friend.

At work: Lina asks Tarek what he intended, and he explains that he was trying to save time. They agree that he will note his questions and ask them when the client finishes.

5. Positive and Developmental Feedback

SBI works for both kinds of feedback. Developmental feedback helps people improve, and SBI keeps it fair and calm. Positive feedback shows people what to keep doing. A quick "well done" is pleasant, but it does not say what went well. With SBI, praise becomes clear enough to repeat.

Example: a teacher tells a student that her clear pictures in today's presentation helped the whole class understand the idea.

At work: a week later, Lina tells Tarek that in today's meeting he let the client finish and summarized her needs, and the client approved the next phase. Now Tarek knows what to keep doing.

Conclusion

In summary, SBI turns feedback into a short, clear story: situation, behavior and impact. A specific moment keeps feedback real, describing behavior keeps it fair, and the impact shows why it matters. Asking about intent and agreeing on a next step turn feedback into a conversation. The same model makes praise more useful and developmental feedback easier to hear. With practice, SBI becomes a habit, and people listen to feedback instead of defending themselves.

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