

Thanks for the Feedback: An Educator's Guide to Making the Most of Student Evaluations

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Introductions





You have just finished a month of ward attending. Your team consisted of a senior resident, two interns, and one medical student. Much of the teaching was done with the whole team, using the Socratic method, and starting with the least experienced learner up to the senior resident. The team dynamic felt very comfortable, and you felt like all of your learners participated and improved over the course of the month. Your medical student specifically did very well, and you gave her good feedback and a high grade at the end of her rotation. You receive the following comments on the rotation:

“Some of the teaching was very advanced. For example, she covered all antibiotics that cover pseudomonas up to the level of detail of levofloxacin. The knowledge is useful, but perhaps would be better taught without pimping. If we are pimped on it, it stresses me because I feel that I should know it already.”

What is your reaction to this feedback?



- This feedback caught the faculty member by surprise and they felt negatively about the content
- In particular, the use of the word “pimping” felt untrue and unfair, and it carried with it some judgement of the learning climate that had never been intended nor perceived by the faculty member
- The first urge was to dismiss this evaluation altogether as untrue and unfair

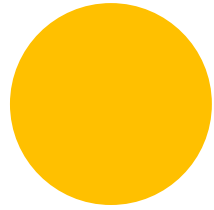
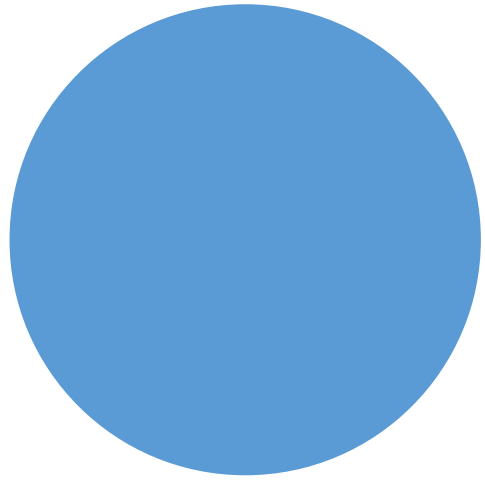
Objectives

- Learn a systematic approach to reviewing positive and negative learner evaluations
- Interpret evaluations in the context of setting, team, and educator characteristics
- Develop a plan for self-improvement based on relevant feedback comments

Outline

- Types of Feedback
- Educational Context
- Identifying Triggers in Feedback
- Small Group: Evaluation Cases
- Putting it all Together





Types of Feedback



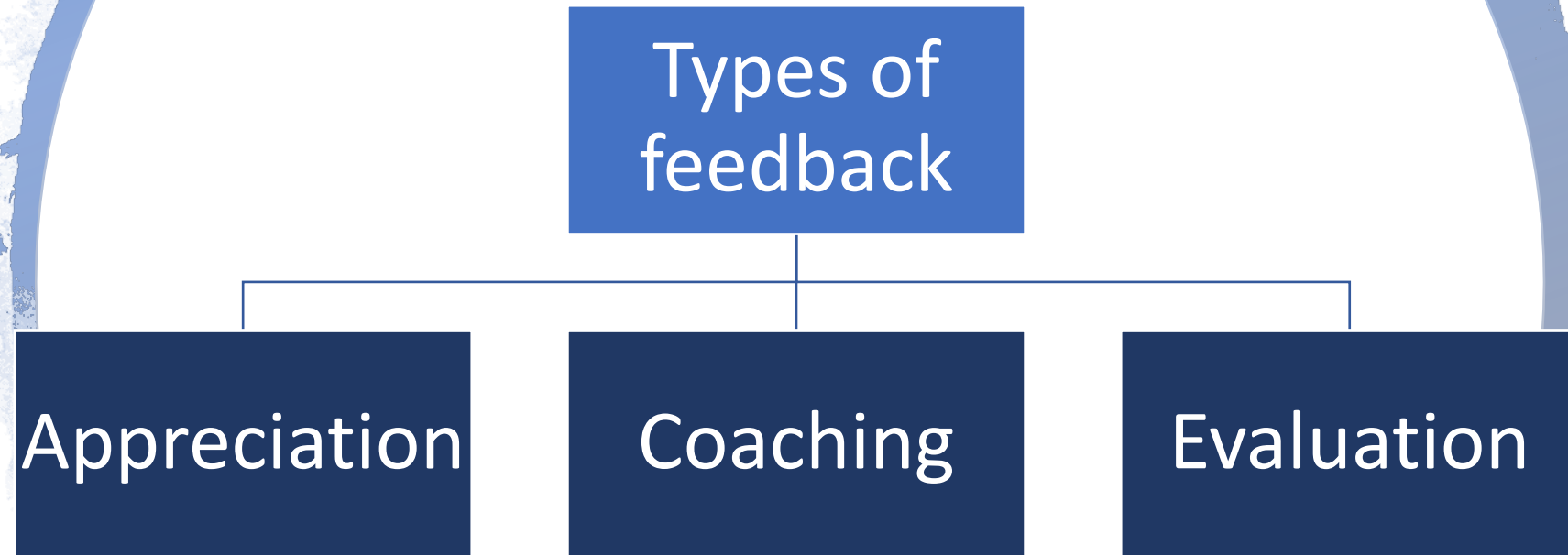
Introduction

- Responses to feedback don't always hinge on the skill of the giver or even what is being said; its based on *which* kind of feedback we think we are getting
- There are three different kinds of feedback, each serving an important purpose and satisfying different needs





3



Types of feedback

```
graph TD; A[Types of feedback] --> B[Appreciation]; A --> C[Coaching]; A --> D[Evaluation];
```

Appreciation

Coaching

Evaluation

Appreciation

- Being seen, feeling understood by others:
 - “Thanks”
 - “I see you”
 - “I know how hard you have been working”
- Appreciation *motivates* us: we want someone to notice and care, not give advice





Types of feedback

Appreciation

Coaching

Evaluation

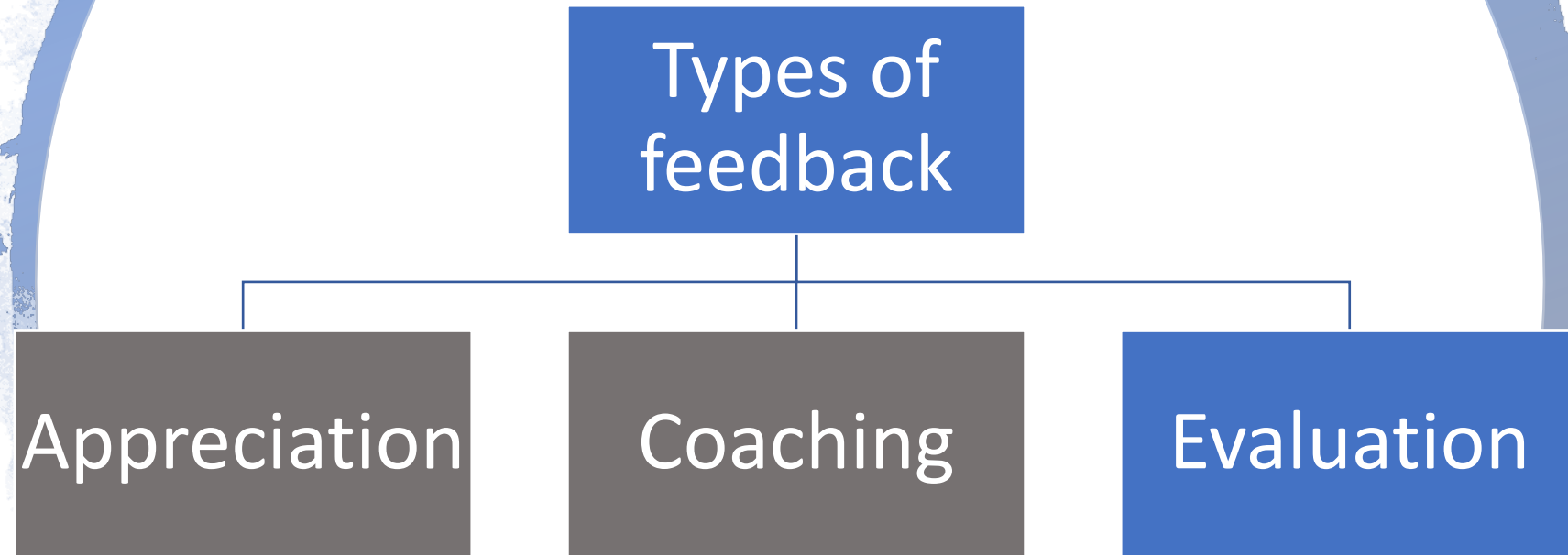
Coaching

- Aimed at trying to help someone learn, grow or change
- Intended to improve your knowledge or skills
 - Veteran waiter assigned to show you the ropes on the first day





3



Evaluation

- Tells you where you stand: Assessment, Ranking, Rating
- Always, in some respect, a comparison
- Conjures up possible consequences to receiver → real or imagined
- Contains judgements that go beyond the assessment itself:
 - “Not only did I fail but I was naïve to think I’d pass; I have fallen short of my potential”





What kind of
feedback do our
learners give us?

Types of feedback

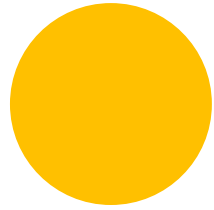
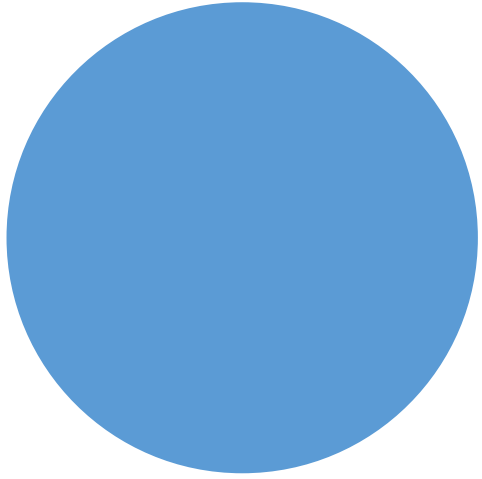
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graph TD; A[Types of feedback] --> B[Appreciation]; A --> C[Coaching]; A --> D[Evaluation];
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Appreciation

Coaching

Evaluation

Almost exclusively evaluation!



EDUCATIONAL
CONTEXT



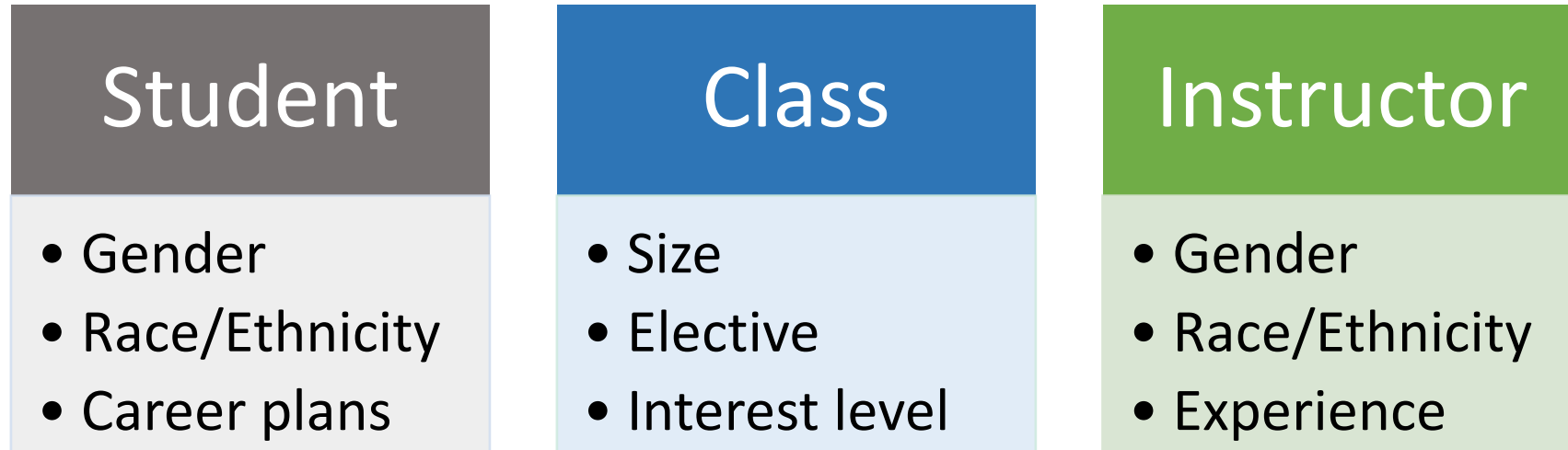
Educational Context

- Before delving deeper into individual evaluations and how to interpret their meaning, we wanted to explore the greater context in which evaluations originate
- Are there any factors about the educational context that *bias* evaluations?



Introduction

There are factors beyond the control of the individual instructor

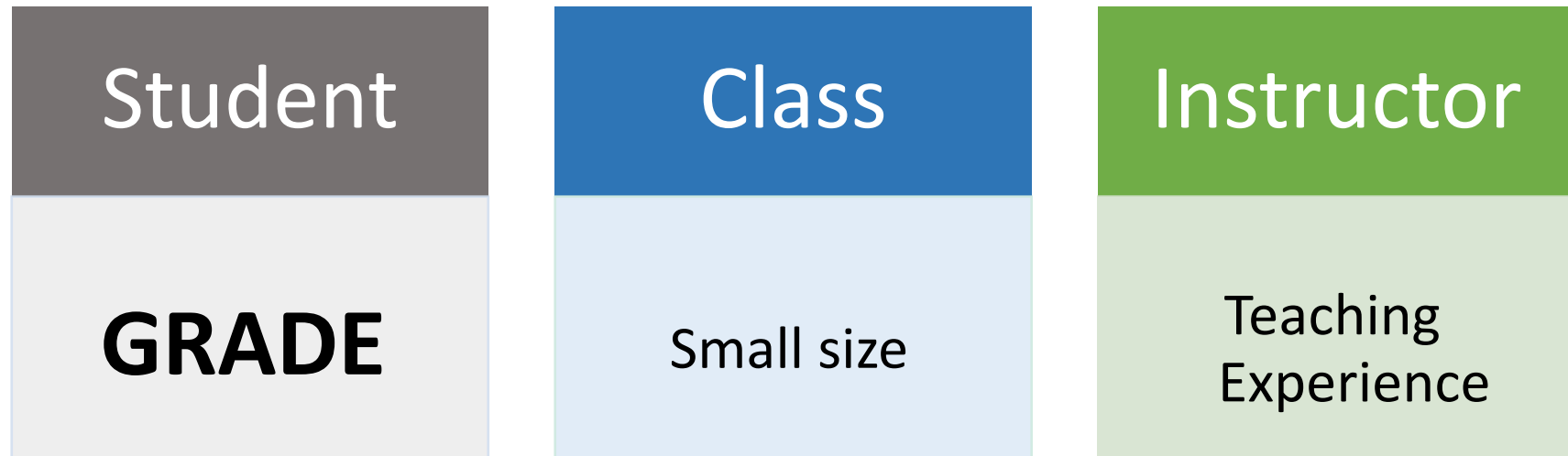


Do these affect evaluations...?



Economics

- McPherson evaluated over 600 courses (2010)
- Andrade and Rocha evaluated nearly 500 courses and 100 instructors (2012)



Class size, teaching experience and ASSIGNED GRADES were all associated with higher instructor evaluations



What about medical education? UME

- Large systematic review examined course-level evaluations



Good evaluations were not associated with actual learning or teaching quality



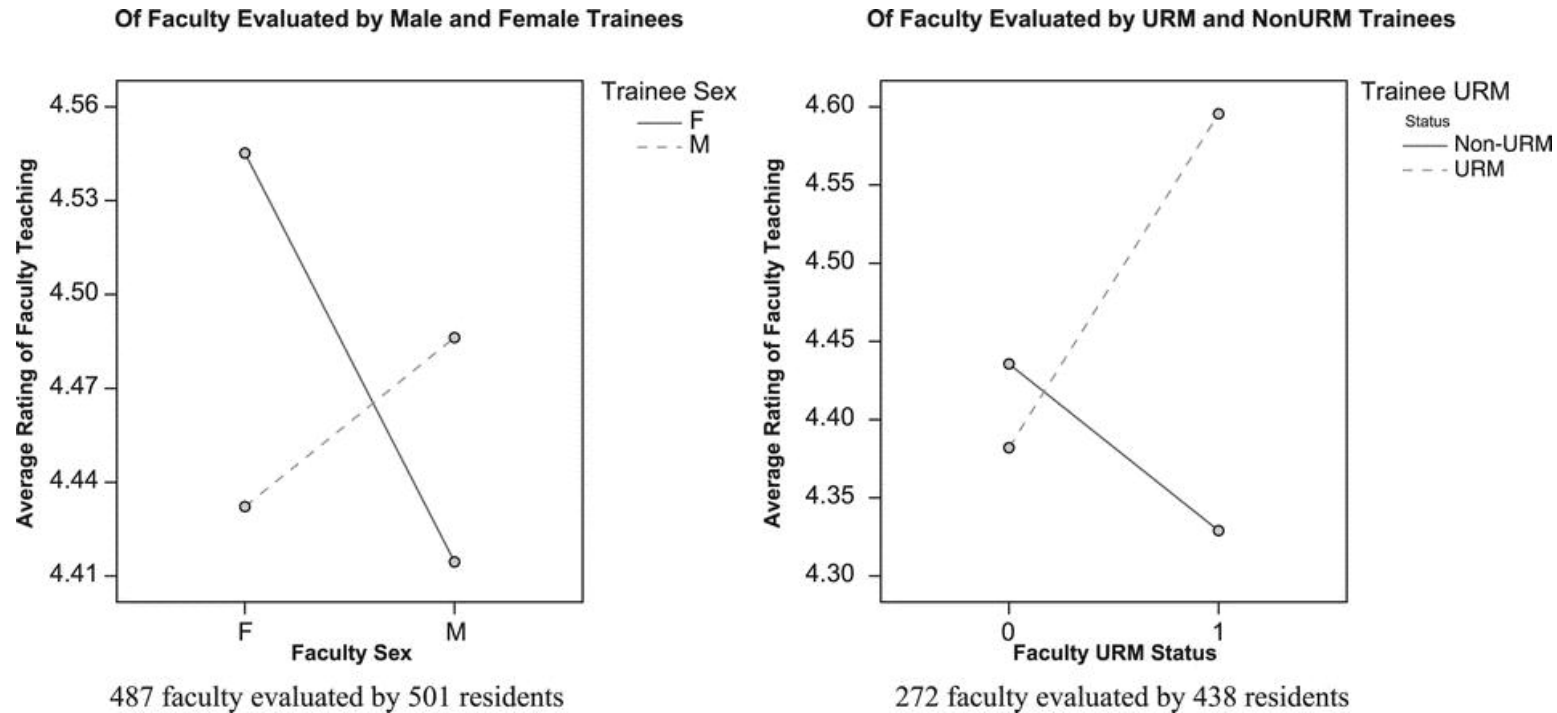
What about medical education? GME

- Even less data available
- One study looking at ~6500 resident evaluations



Teaching credentials were biggest association with higher evaluations

Interactions: Gender and URM



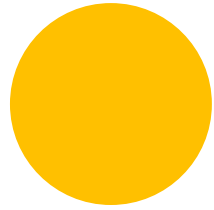
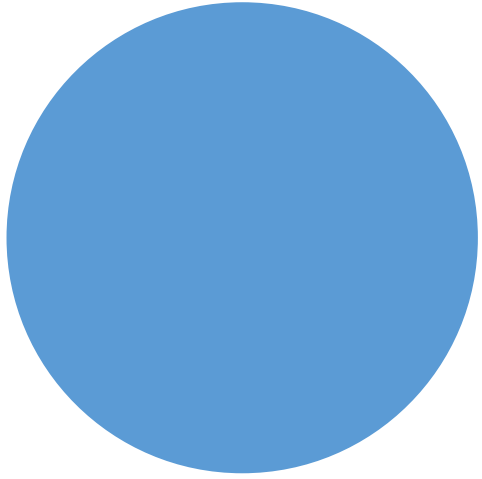
Concordant pairs gave higher evaluations for both gender and URM

Conclusions



- Higher grades do seem to “buy” higher evaluations → should we adjust?
- Teaching credentials/experience do matter
- Class size and elective may matter but medicine-specific data lacking
- Factors like faculty and student gender, URM, etc likely have minor effects

... More research needed, but it appears there is only a small effect

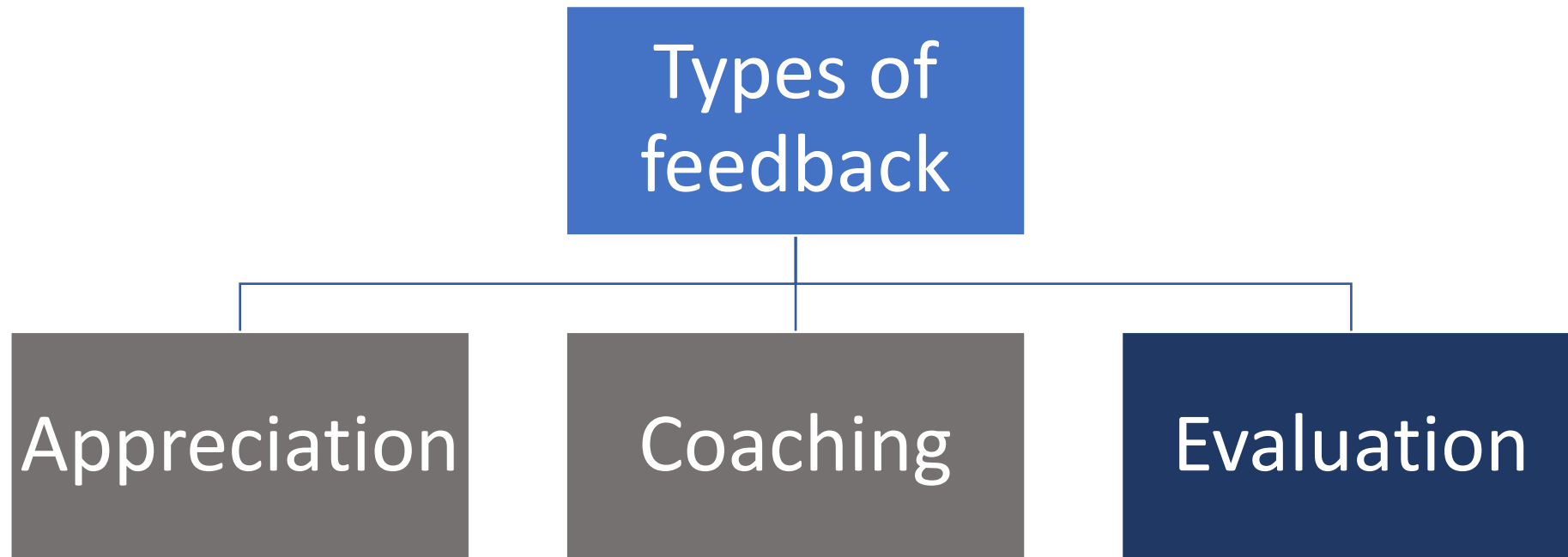


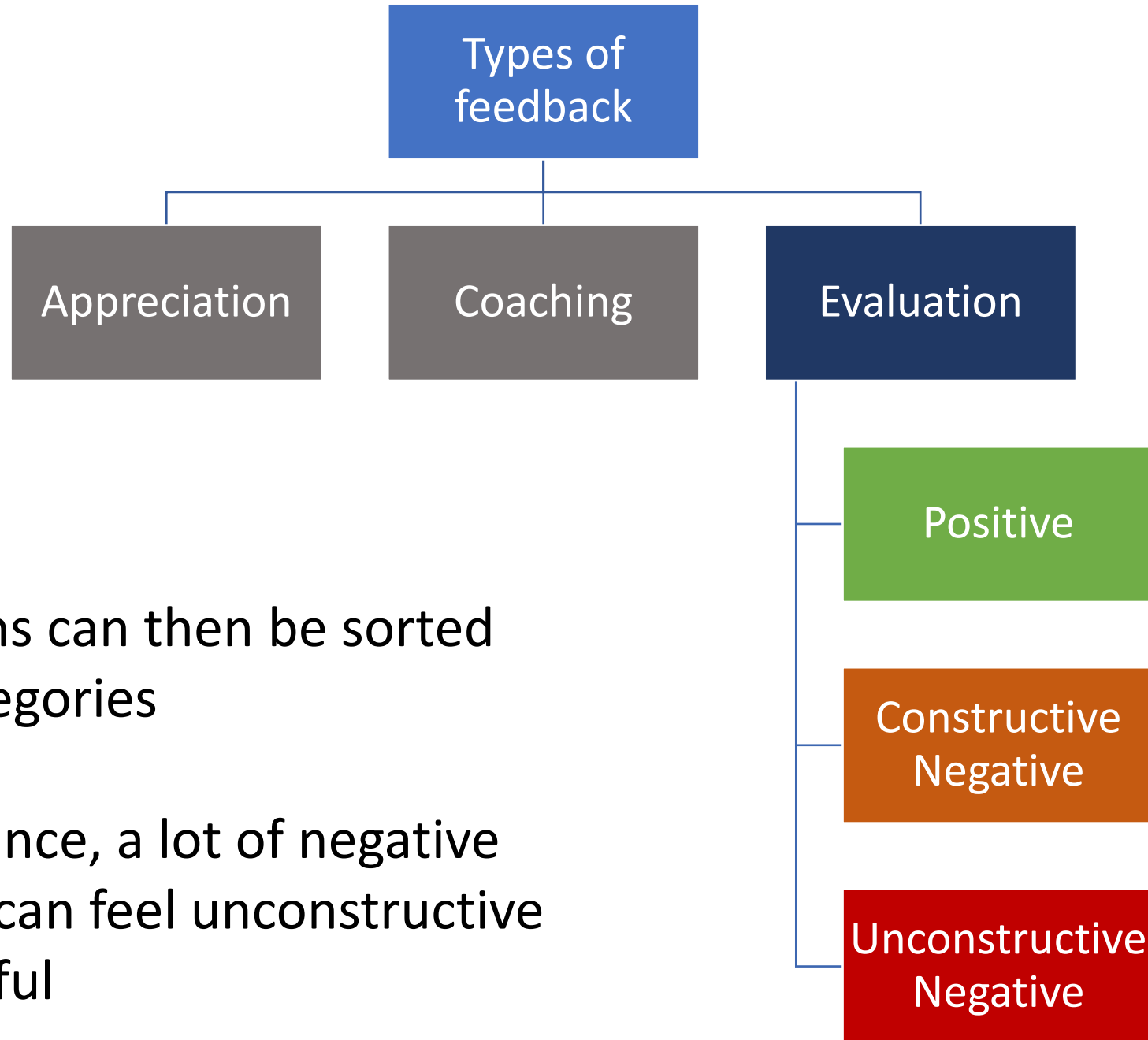
Triggers and Blindspots



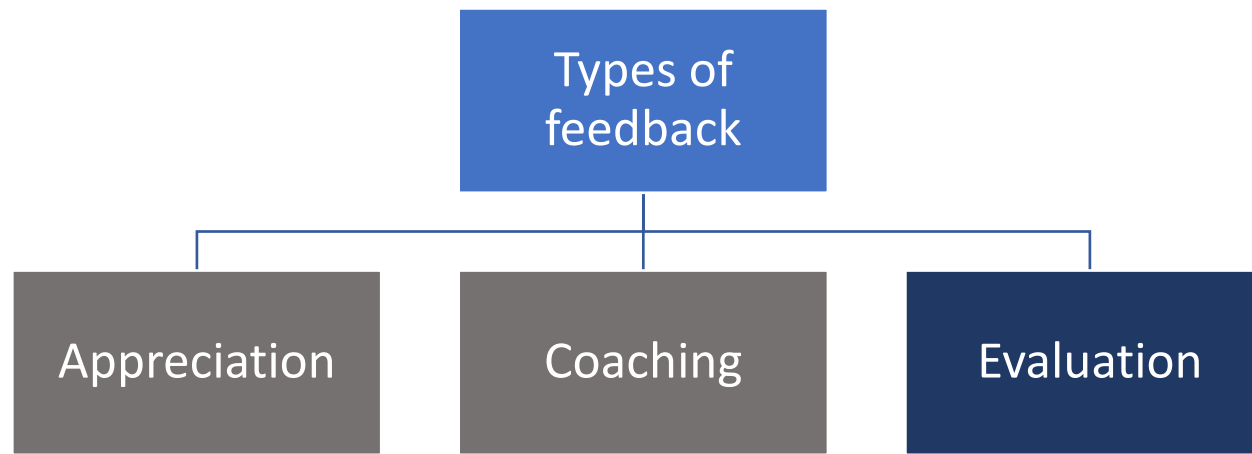


Recall that most learner feedback is evaluation:

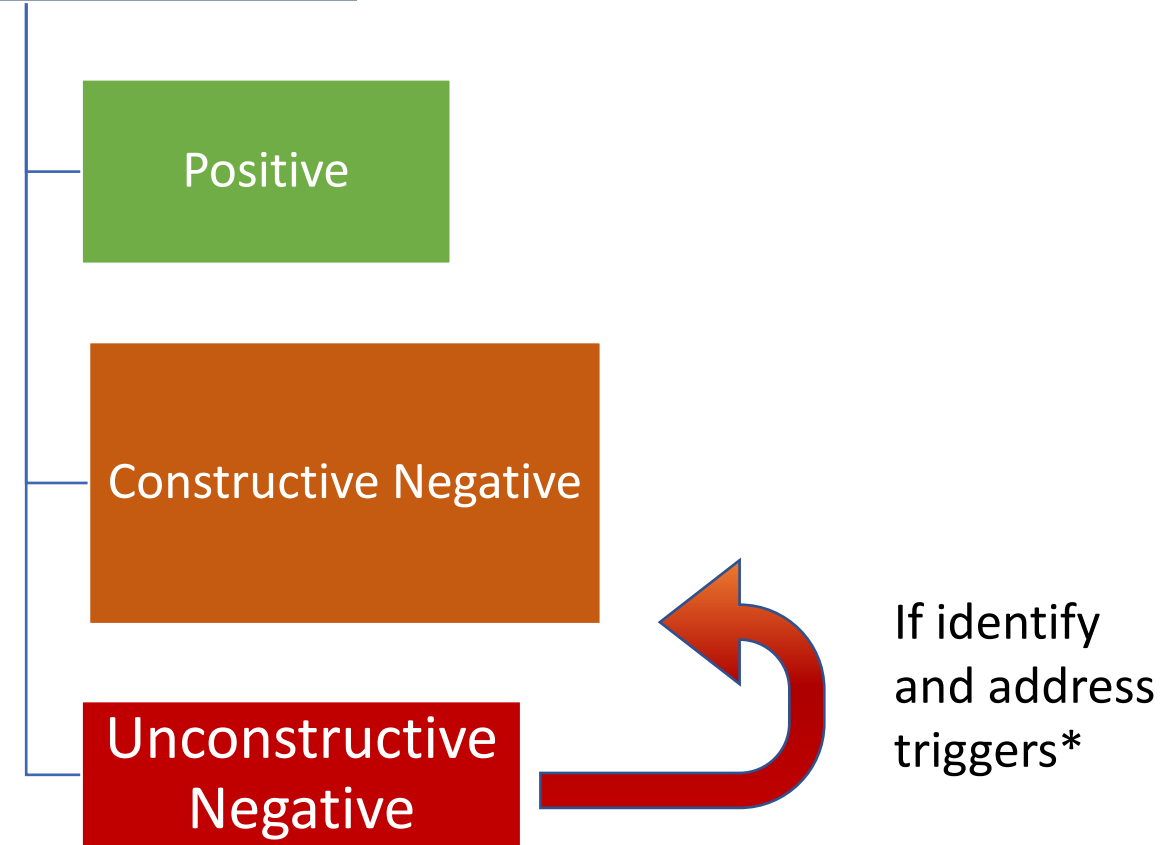




- Evaluations can then be sorted into 3 categories
- At first glance, a lot of negative feedback can feel unconstructive or unhelpful



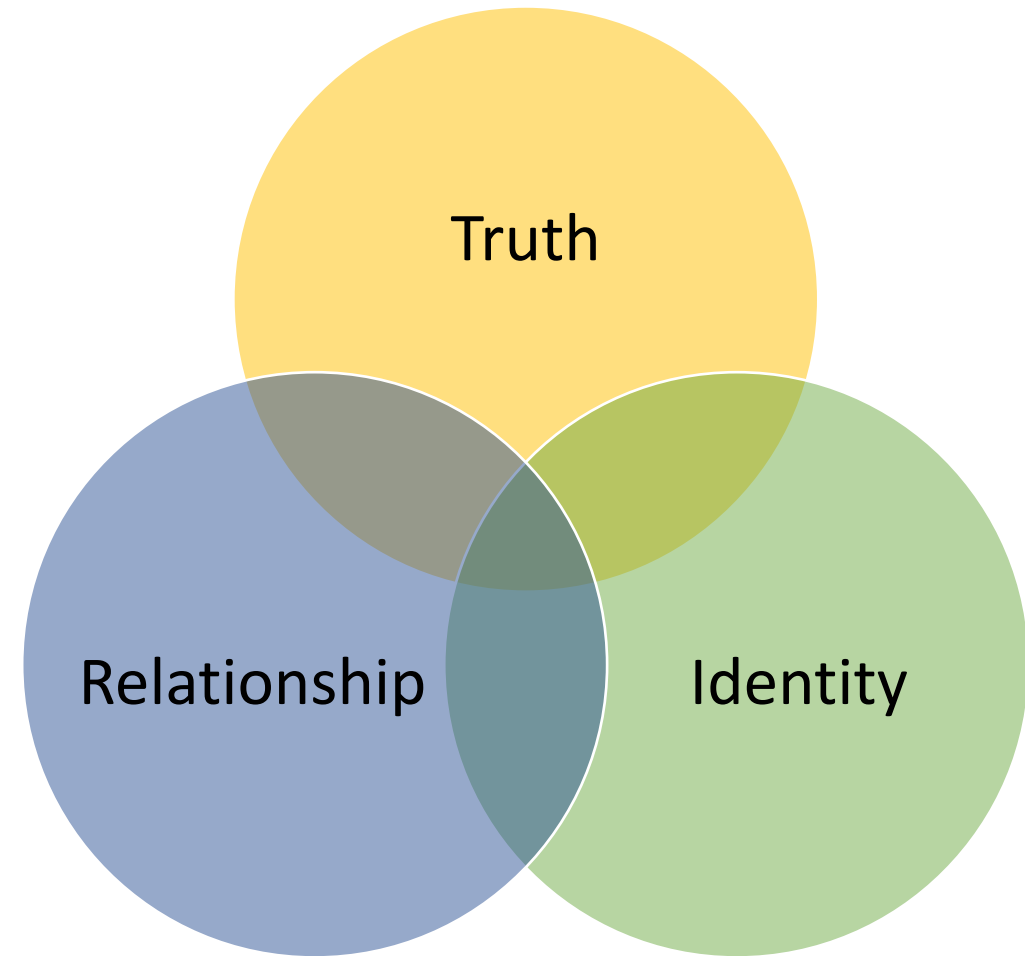
- With the right guidance, faculty can identify and address “triggers”
- This may allow them to reclassify what appears unconstructive





Feedback Triggers

- Strong reactions
- Prevent full engagement
- Three types:



By recognizing these triggers, we can more meaningfully accept the parts of feedback that may be helpful, and discard those that are not, in a less emotional and responsive way



Truth Triggers

- We feel:

“This is is wrong. This isn’t me.”

“This isn’t helpful.”

- Our response: Indignant, wronged, exasperated



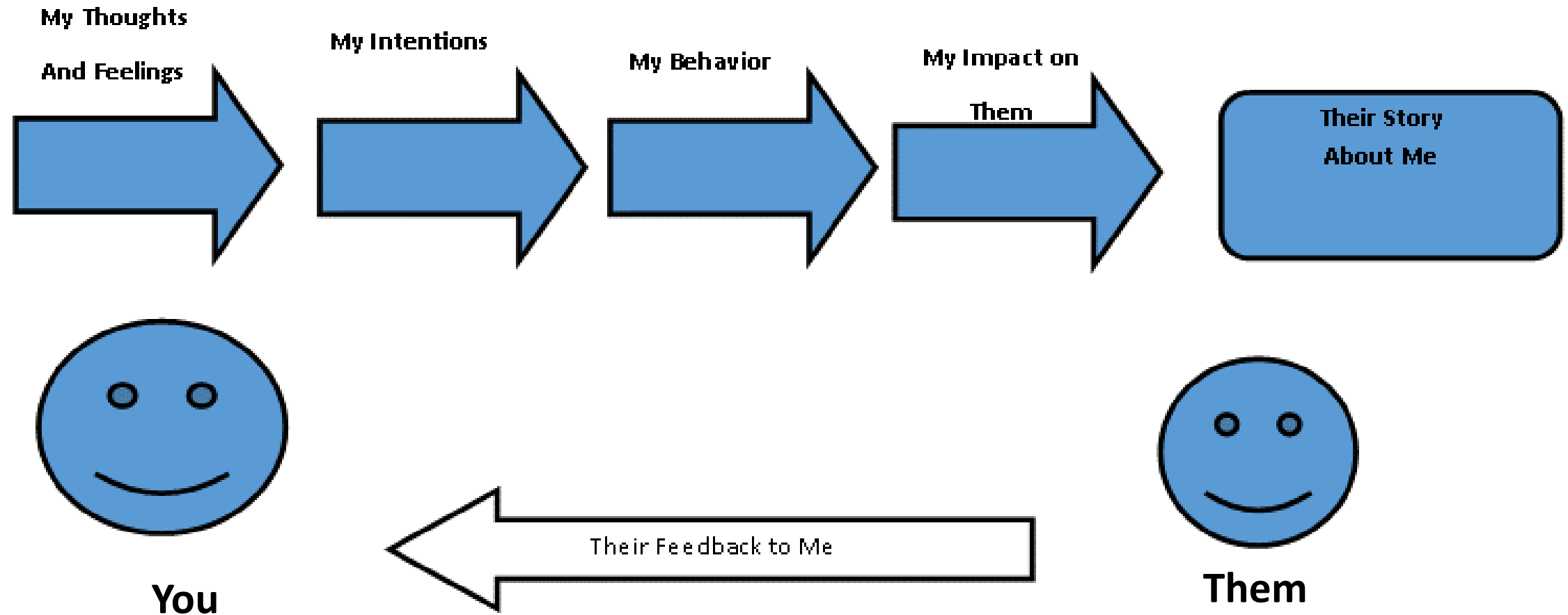
Truth Triggers

- Based on the **CONTENT** – You are bothered by the feedback's **substance**
- The feedback feels like the person isn't understanding us or the situation, or simply unhelpful.
- We feel frustrated by the feedback because it **doesn't feel meant for us or is not what we were asking for.**



Truth Triggers: Blind Spots

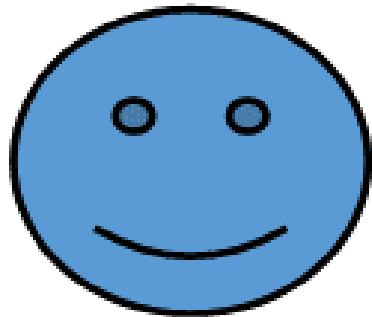
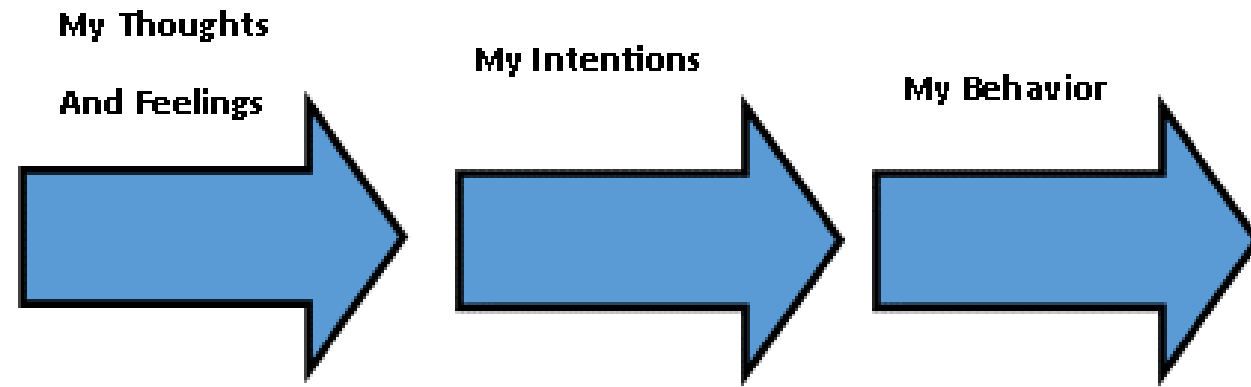
This is the whole
cycle of how
feedback develops



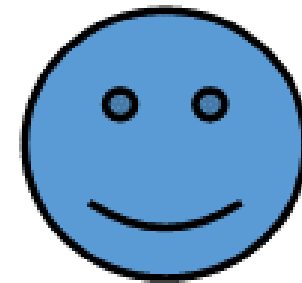


Truth Triggers: Blind Spots

... but this is all you see and control...



You

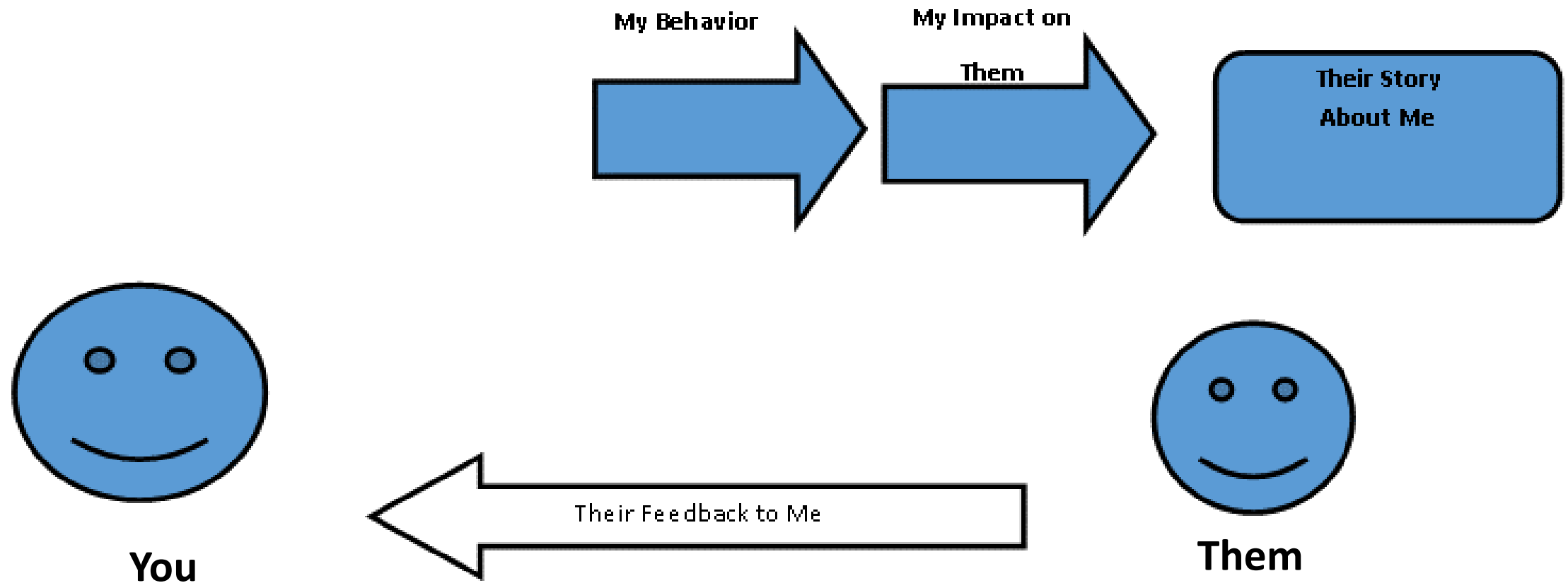


Them



Truth Triggers: Blind Spots

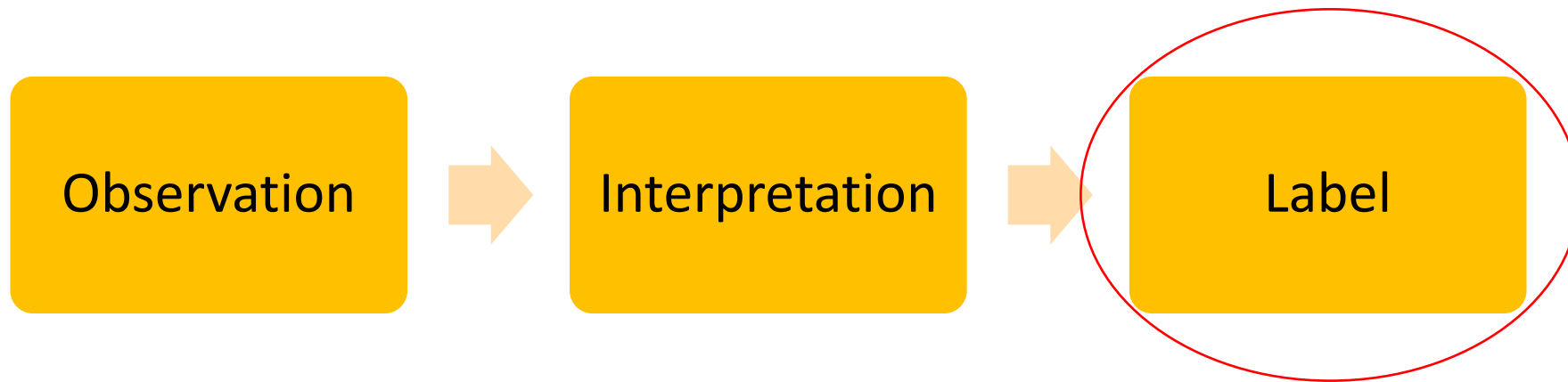
... and the learner only sees and controls this!





Truth Triggers: Response

- ID feedback type (Appreciation? Coaching? Evaluation?)
 - Beware cross-transactions
- Step back – seek to understand



- Check your blind spots



Truth Triggers: A Better Response

First response:
That's not true!

Take a moment:
Our interpretations are different.
What am I missing here?



Wow, that was not my
intention. Maybe you
could tell me a bit
more about how I
made you feel X.



Relationship Triggers

- We feel:

“I can’t hear this from you.”

“You’re the problem, not me.”

- Our response: mistreated, hurt, angry



Relationship Triggers

- Based on the **PERSON** – You are bothered by WHO it is coming from
- We are upset because of how we feel treated by the giver, or what we think about the giver
- Focus shifts from the feedback itself to reaction to the person it is coming from
- We may have a reaction that is based on **the relationship itself, and not based on content**

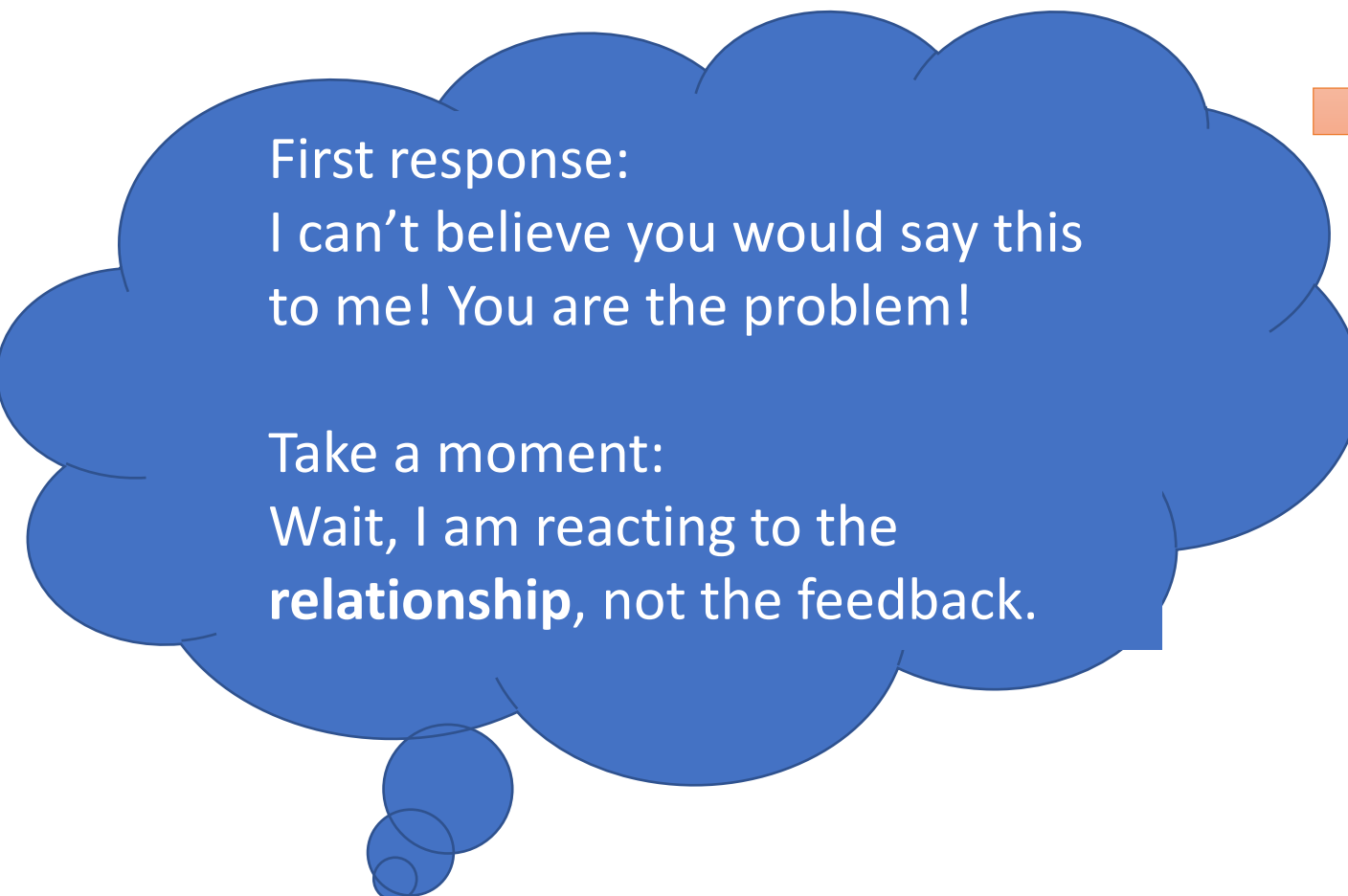


Relationship Triggers: Response

- Acknowledge evaluation is not the same as appreciation
- Find out more data if able
- Recognize then separate the relationship issues

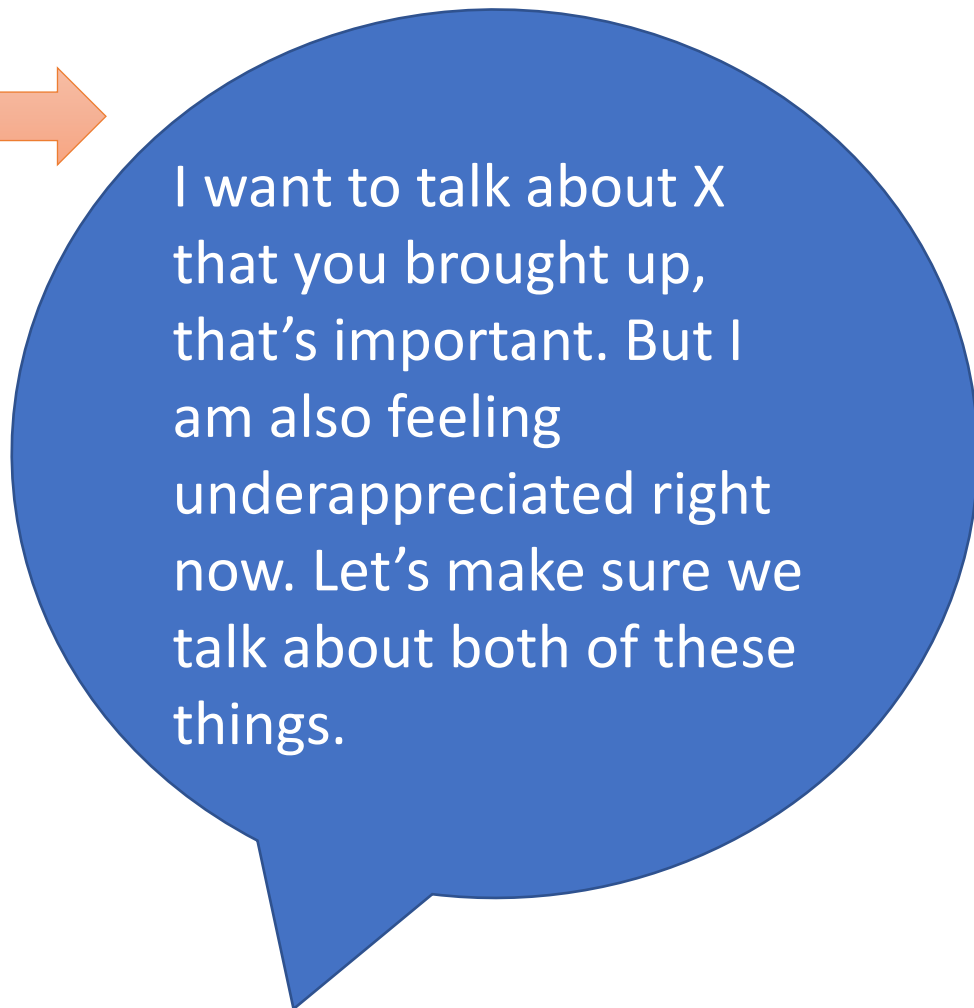


Relationship Triggers: A Better Response

A blue, cloud-like thought bubble with a tail pointing towards the bottom-left.

First response:
I can't believe you would say this
to me! You are the problem!

Take a moment:
Wait, I am reacting to the
relationship, not the feedback.

A blue, oval-shaped speech bubble with a tail pointing towards the bottom-right.

I want to talk about X
that you brought up,
that's important. But I
am also feeling
underappreciated right
now. Let's make sure we
talk about both of these
things.



Relationship Triggers

- If not able to talk about this in person, like a written evaluation:
 - Fully acknowledge that you are thinking about the relationship issues
 - Try to focus on the feedback as much as possible



Identity Triggers

- We feel:

“I mess everything up.”

“I’m not a bad person...am I?”

- Our response: threatened, off balance, insecure



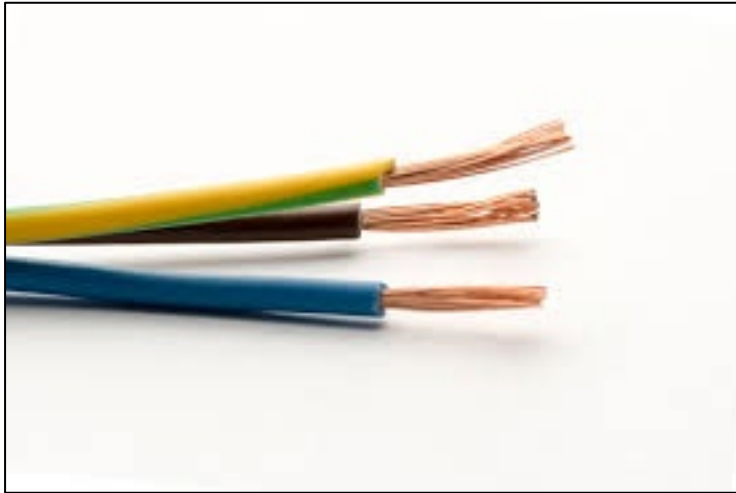
Identity Triggers

Self

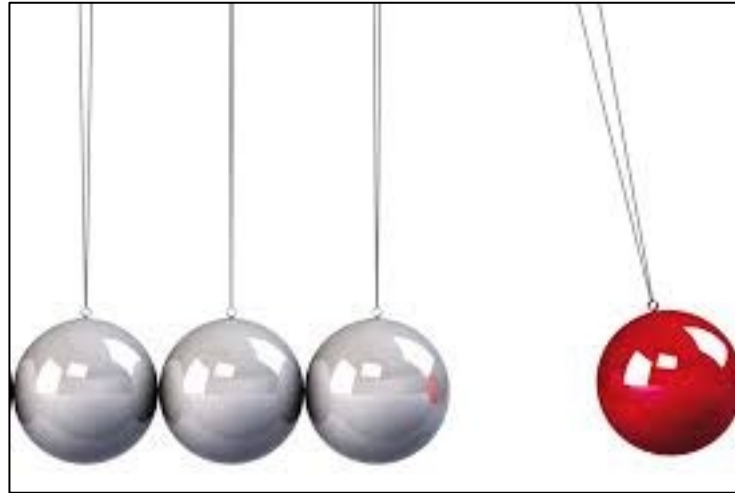
- Based on the self – the feedback threatens who you are and how you define and view yourself



Identity Triggers: Contributors



WIRING



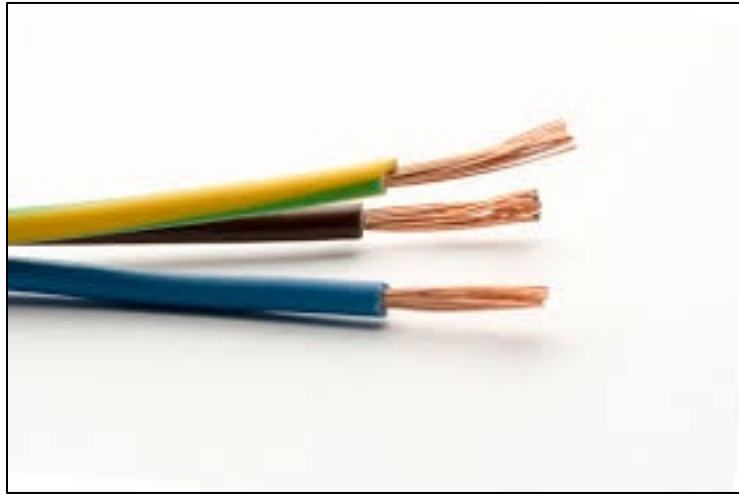
SWING



RECOVERY



Identity Triggers: Contributors

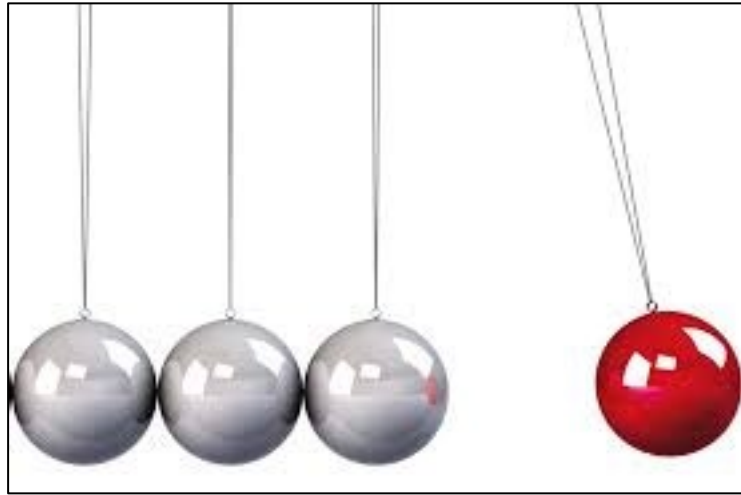


WIRING

- Your **WIRING** and “baseline” level of happiness/unhappiness can affect how you receive feedback and how quickly you “bounce back to baseline”
- People with higher levels of baseline happiness: more likely to respond positively to positive feedback than people with low self-reported well being.



Identity Triggers: Contributors



SWING

- **SWING** is how far off of your baseline a given input will push you.
- Different people have larger reactions to similar feedback



Identity Triggers: Contributors



RECOVERY

- **RECOVERY** refers to the amount of time you are affected by a particular input
 - How long does the good news carry you?
 - How long does the bad news get you down?



Identity Triggers: Response

Self

- Prepare
- Separate the strands
- Contain the story
- Change your vantage point
- Accept what you cannot control
- Sort towards coaching



Identity Triggers: A Better Response

First response:

Am I really that bad at this? Am I even in the right field?

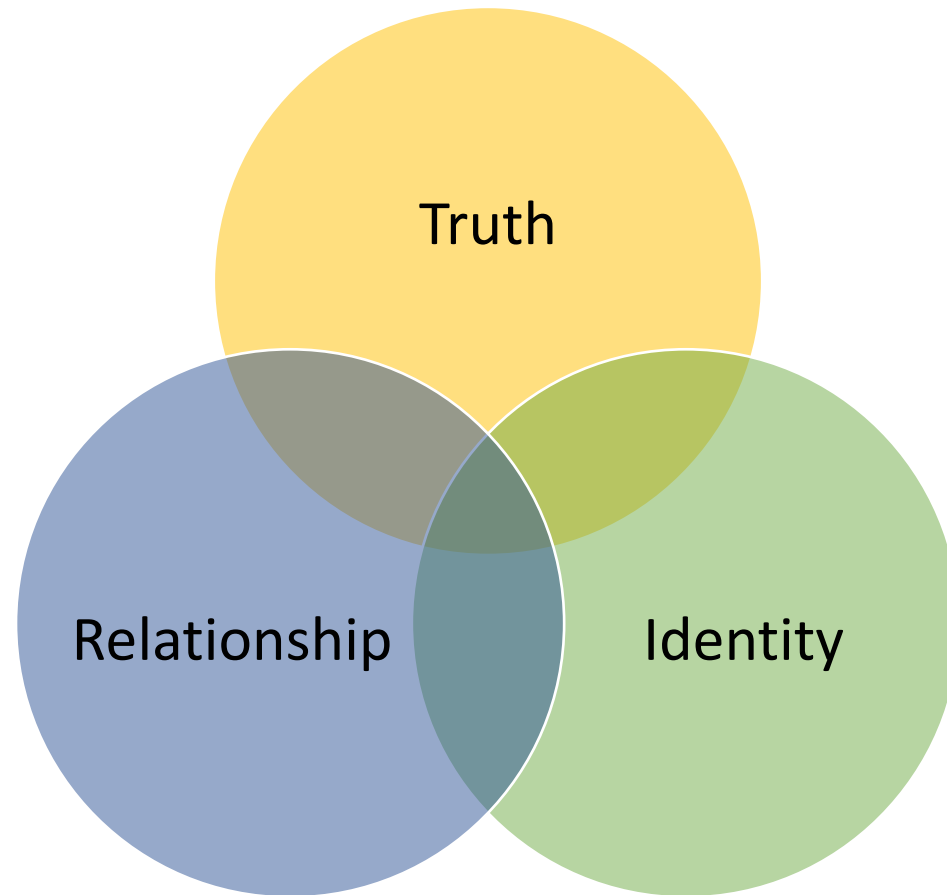
Take a moment:

This isn't about me personally.
This is a chance for growth.



Thank you so much for the coaching. I realize I am taking this personally, but this is a chance for growth. How can I improve?

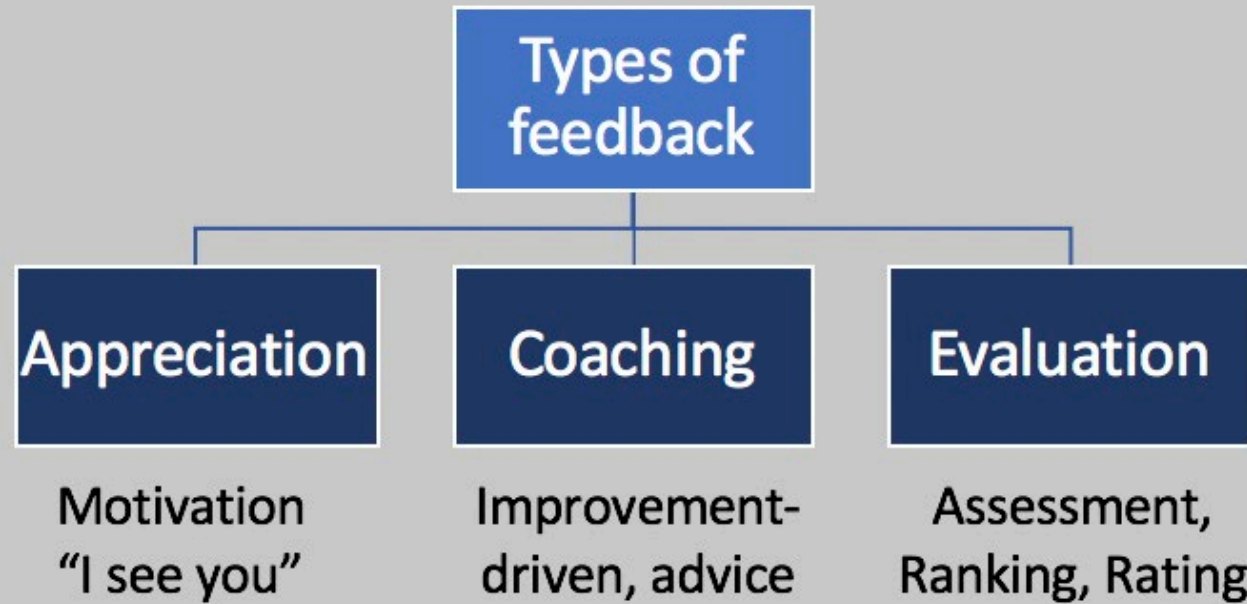
Review: The Three Triggers





An Algorithm for Reviewing Evaluations

1. Identify the type of feedback you are getting



2. If evaluation, does it seem positive or negative? Does it seem constructive?

Positive

Great! Smile and enjoy!

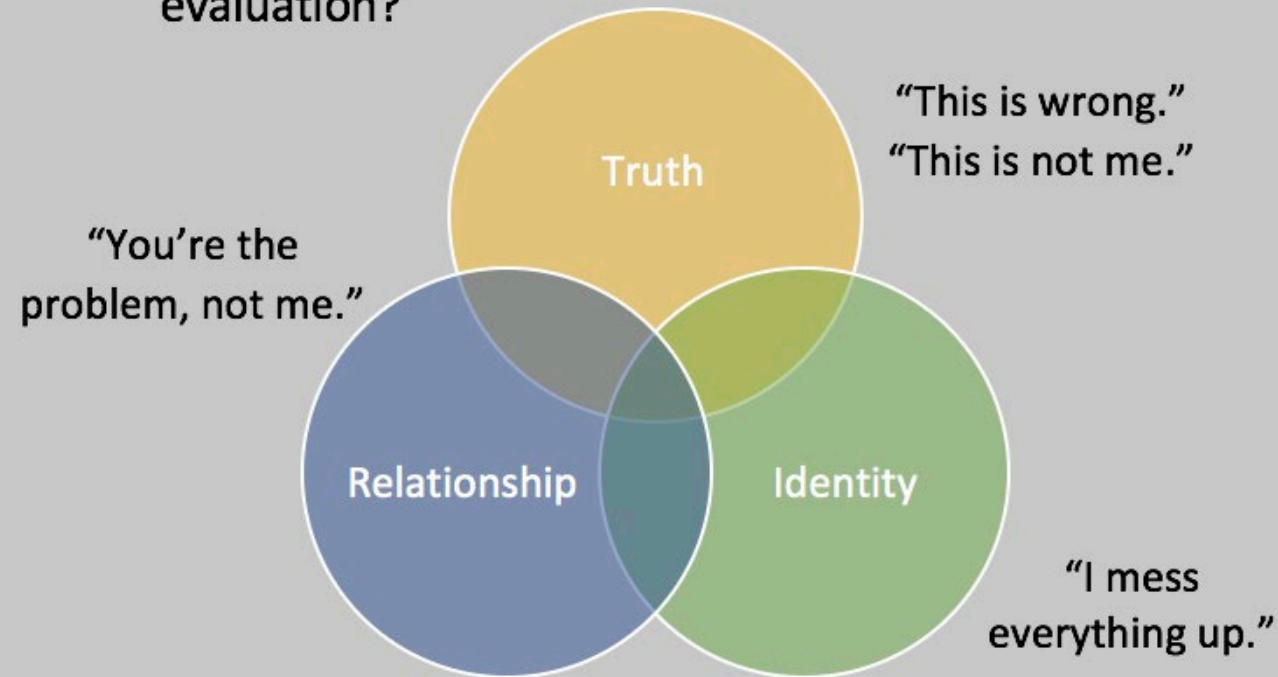
**Constructive
Negative**

The kernel of truth is obvious

**Unconstructive
Negative**

This evaluation doesn't feel helpful

3. If negative feedback, do you feel yourself getting defensive or uncomfortable with the content?
Could one of the triggers be getting tripped by this evaluation?



4. How can you reframe this feedback?

- Acknowledge evaluation is not the same as appreciation
- Remember that evaluation is the interpretation of behaviors
- Perception \neq intention

- Acknowledge evaluation is not the same as appreciation
- Find out more data if able
- Recognize then separate the relationship issues
- No switch-tracking!

- Prepare
- Separate the strands
- Contain the story
- Change your vantage point
- Accept what you cannot control
- Sort towards coaching

5. After some re-framing, can you find the kernel of truth?

Yes!

No...

Consider asking a colleague or mentor OR consider that it may be a truly worthless evaluation

Evaluation Cases for Discussion



Cases

- We have included three real evaluations that illustrate how these triggers can be identified and worked through, starting with the one first presented at the beginning of this session
- The next step is then to review your own evaluations, the ones that felt unconstructive, unhelpful, or untrue to see if you can identify any “triggers” that may be clouding your ability to find a constructive spin

What is your first reaction to this feedback?

What type of feedback is this?

Positive, constructive negative, unconstructive negative?

Any triggers you can see being tripped in this scenario?

How can you process this to find something useful?

What kernel of truth can you learn from and change for next time?

Case # 1:

You have just finished a month of ward attending at the VA. Your team consisted of a senior resident, two interns, and one medical student. Much of the teaching was done with the whole team, using the Socratic method, and starting with the least experienced learner up to the senior resident. The team dynamic felt very comfortable, and you felt like all of your learners participated and improved over the course of the month. Your medical student specifically did very well, and you gave her good feedback and a high grade at the end of her rotation. You receive the following comments on the rotation:

“Some of the teaching was very advanced. For example, she covered all antibiotics that cover pseudomonas up to the level of detail of levofloxacin. The knowledge is useful, but perhaps would be better taught without pimping. If we are pimped on it, it stresses me because I feel that I should know it already.”

Truth trigger

- The faculty in this scenario read this evaluation and was taken by surprise, having expected positive evaluations from this set of learners. In addition, the use of the word “pimping” felt unfair.
- Upon further reflection, this is a perfect example of a **blindspot**
 - The intention of the teaching method was to create a space for all learners to share their knowledge and show off what they learned without pressure
 - The way it was perceived by this learner was NOT low stress
- In response, the faculty has adjusted by clarifying the intent of the teaching format and defining her expectations more clearly with learners of various levels

What is your first reaction to this feedback?

What type of feedback is this?

Positive, constructive negative, unconstructive negative?

Any triggers you can see being tripped in this scenario?

How can you process this to find something useful?

What kernel of truth can you learn from and change for next time?

Case # 2:

You just concluded two weeks of ward attending. Your team consisted of a senior resident, two interns, and two medical students. You found the learning environment and team dynamics very challenging, particularly with the medical students. Both students gave substandard performances and pushed back significantly on any of your attempts to give feedback. Your patients were very sick, with one of them having an acute decompensation right when you were about to meet a student to observe his history-taking skills. You receive the following comments on the rotation:

“She tests (“pimps”) knowledge above a third year level (e.g., rates, dosing) or until you get an answer wrong - usually late to scheduled appointments/meetings (sometimes hours late), occasionally never shows up; does not seem to respect the time of others - chats in team room for long periods of time, giving little time for students and interns to think and work; does not seem to respect the workload of others.”

Relationship trigger

- The faculty in this scenario read this evaluation and was not surprised that it was negative. However, given the terrible working relationship with a medical student who was performing very far below expectations, this evaluation felt retaliatory, especially since many elements were objectively untrue.
- The first perception of this evaluation was that it had no worthwhile component, particularly coming from *this* learner
- Upon further reflection, and by separating their own negative reaction to the learner in question, the faculty was able to identify small things that they could change, such as the time they spent in the team room.

What is your first reaction to this feedback?

What type of feedback is this?

Positive, constructive negative, unconstructive negative?

Any triggers you can see being tripped in this scenario?

How can you process this to find something useful?

What kernel of truth can you learn from and change for next time?

Case # 3:

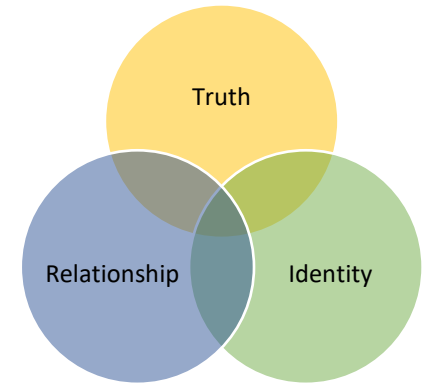
You just completed a month of student teaching attending, in which you teach all the third year IM clerkship students in a case-based format for an hour a day. This was your first experience teaching in this format and with this group of learners, and you did not feel completely comfortable with the expectations. Your group was overall productive and accomplished, but some of your students did not always perform up to your expectations. When you attempted to give corrective feedback throughout the rotation, you did not feel that it was always well received. The following student feedback is representative of multiple comments included in your rotation feedback:

“She could set clearer expectations up front and be consistent with how she grades assignments. She could learn how to grade assignments more similarly to those of her peers and superiors. She could better facilitate a positive learning environment during teaching sessions and avoid putting students down when their comments are not exactly what she was looking for.”

Identity trigger

- The faculty in this scenario felt demoralized by the negative evaluations they received and felt themselves question their ability as a clinician-educator
- They ended up reaching out to mentors in the department who could help them decipher the most important areas of improvement
 - They were able to "shadow" more senior faculty teaching the sessions
 - Mentors set up time to observe and give this faculty feedback on their teaching
- At a system-level, the expectations for teaching this course were clarified for future incoming educators who had previously received little guidance on how to run these sessions

Take Home Messages



- Feedback from our learners is mostly evaluations
- Factors beyond instructor control weigh into these evaluations
- Evaluators have blind spots that may interfere with our ability to hear constructive feedback
- Identifying triggers can help frame seemingly unconstructive, negative feedback into constructive
- Seek to understand: “How am I getting in my own way?”
- Feedback is about looking forward not looking back—reality remains in the eye of the beholder