The Heart of Communication

Using Validation to Strengthen Advisor-Advisee Relationships
Adapted from...
“Being listened to and heard is one of the greatest desires of the human heart. And those who learn to listen are the most loved and respected.”

Richard Carlson
LISTEN

HEAR

??
LISTEN

HEAR

VALIDATE
Why this is HARD for advisors...

WE ARE FIXERS AND WE ARE BUSY
Why is this worth your time...

- ...CALM (& sometimes even eliminate) concerns, fears & uncertainties
- ...add a BOOST to others’ excitement and happiness
- ...provide SUPPORT & ENCOURAGEMENT to others, even when an immediate ‘fix’ to a problem is not known
- ...more easily show UNDERSTANDING & COMPASSION
- ...help others feel SAFE & COMFORTABLE confiding in you
- ...avoid or quickly RESOLVE DISAGREEMENTS
- ...GIVE ADVICE & GUIDANCE that sticks
Shenk – Fruzzetti Study

- Participants were asked to complete a number of difficult math problems during a short period of time and then asked to report on their emotional state.
- The facilitator then responded with validating or invalidating comments.
  - Emotional state: Frustration
    - “Whoa, other people were frustrated, but not as much as you seem to be.”
    - “I don’t blame you—completing math problems without pencil and paper is frustrating.”
- Steps 1 & 2 were repeated for two more rounds.
Researchers measured participants’ response to the stress and feedback by tracking their heart rate and skin conductance level (SCL).
Participants who received invalidating responses showed:

- a gradual increase in SCL,
- a prolonged stress response,
- and a steady increase in heart rate.

These participants also reported regular increases in negative feelings after each round, despite being told “not to worry.”
Participants who received validating responses showed:

- a significantly lower trajectory of SCL,
- a steady decrease in heart rate.

These participants also reported no significant increase in negative feelings after each round.

Shenk – Fruzzetti Study
Elements of Validation

 Acknowledges a specific emotion

 Offers justification for feeling that emotion
“...there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.

William Shakespeare, Hamlet
How invalidating responses are born…

“Invalidating responses are often born out of good intentions, but they do anything but help.”
A student comes in to see you and they are worried about an upcoming exam that will determine their acceptance (or non-acceptance) into their program. They are expressing fear and feelings of anxiety. The student has a positive academic history and you believe the student has no cause to worry.

What are some examples of invalidating responses?
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“You’ll be fine!”

“You’ve always done well on exams in the past.”

“Just relax and you’ll do great!”

“There are other students who need to be worried much more than you!”

“Don’t worry; everything will work out.”
A student comes in to see you and they are worried about an upcoming exam that will determine their acceptance (or non-acceptance) into their program. They are expressing fear and feelings of anxiety. The student has a positive academic history and you believe the student has no cause to worry.

What are some examples of validating responses?
“I understand why you might feel that way. I remember how nervous I was before I took the exam for admission into the teacher education program.”

“This is a big benchmark in your program. It is understandable that you are anxious.”

What are some examples of validating responses?
Elements of Validation

- Acknowledges a specific emotion
- Offers justification for feeling that emotion
- Validation must be nonjudgmental
• Validating is only for negative emotions.
MISCONCEPTIONS IN VALIDATION

• Validating is only for negative emotions.
• You can’t validate if you don’t agree.
MISCONCEPTIONS IN VALIDATION

- Validating is only for negative emotions.
- You can’t validate if you don’t agree.
- Validation is simply repeating what the other person says.
The Four-Step Validation Method
1…
LISTEN
EMPATHETICALLY

Give your full attention.
LISTEN EMPATHETICALLY

Give your full attention.
Be observant.
1... LISTEN EMPATHETICALLY

- Give your full attention.
- Be observant.
- Invite them to open up.
1. LISTEN EMPATHETICALLY

Give your full attention.

Be observant.

Invite them to open up.

Match their energy.
LISTEN EMPATHETICALLY

1.

Give your full attention.
Be observant.
Invite them to open up.
Match their energy.
Offer micro validation.
LISTEN EMPATHETICALLY

1....

Give your full attention.
Be observant.
Invite them to open up.
Match their energy.
Offer micro validation.
Don’t try to fix it.
2...
VALIDATE THE EMOTION

Validate the emotion.
2... Validate the emotion.

Validate...even if you don’t agree.
2... Validate the emotion.

Validate...even if you don’t agree.

Not sure what the other person is feeling? Ask.
VALIDATE THE EMOTION

2...

Validate the emotion.

Validate...even if you don't agree.

Not sure what the other person is feeling? Ask.

If you can relate, consider letting them know.
2... Validate the emotion.

Validate...even if you don't agree.

Not sure what the other person is feeling? Ask.

If you can relate, consider letting them know.

If you can’t relate, let them know.
2... VALIDATE THE EMOTION

Validate the emotion.

Validate...even if you don’t agree.

Not sure what the other person is feeling? Ask.

If you can relate, consider letting them know.

If you can’t relate, let them know.

Tell the truth.
Offering feedback or advice is entirely optional.
Offering feedback or advice is entirely optional.

Avoid giving unsolicited feedback.
3. OFFER ADVICE OR ENCOURAGEMENT

Offering feedback or advice is entirely optional.

Avoid giving unsolicited feedback.

If you do give feedback, lead with a validating statement.
Offering feedback or advice is entirely optional.

Avoid giving unsolicited feedback.

If you do give feedback, lead with a validating statement.

Use “and” instead of “but.”
Offering feedback or advice is entirely optional.

Avoid giving unsolicited feedback.

If you do give feedback, lead with a validating statement.

Use “and” instead of “but.”

Lead with “I” instead of “you.”
Offering feedback or advice is entirely optional.

Avoid giving unsolicited feedback.

If you do give feedback, lead with a validating statement.

Use “and” instead of “but.”

Lead with “I” instead of “you.”

Avoid absolutes.
VALIDATE AGAIN

Re-validate the emotion.
Re-validate the emotion.

Validate the vulnerability.
“If you want to make a difference in someone’s life, you don’t need to be gorgeous, rich, famous, brilliant, or perfect. You just have to care.”

Karen Salmansohn