Feedback Revolution

How to Give and Receive Effective Feedback

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In *Feedback Revolution,* writer and speaker Peter McLaughlin explains the benefits of fostering a workplace culture marked by "timely, specific, two-way feedback." To achieve this, leaders and employees can identify and learn key practical strategies and create an organization that genuinely embraces constructive feedback. A workplace with a culture of effective feedback thrives with dramatically improved communication, relationships, effectiveness, and output.

Key Quote

"Why should you learn feedback? Because properly prepared, presented, and received feedback is among the most valuable sources of information, insight, understanding, and knowledge in any career or industry, in classrooms at every level of education" (p. 23). — *Peter McLaughlin*

Key Points

Introduction. "Feedback is information that is shared with another person for the distinct purpose of improving results or relationships. Effective feedback is not venting, shaming, or giving excuses" (p. 35).

Sports – The Original Feedback Factories. Good coaches tell you what you are doing wrong and how to change, and what you are doing right. Then they reinforce what they have said in carefully planned out practices. Effective coaches and players have *the whole team* in mind.

Feedback – The Elephant in the Room. Effective feedback is "specific, honest, candid, focused" (p. 70). It is also "inclusive and motivating" (p. 76).

Real. Positive. Feedback. Positive feedback motivates and brings results. It is authentic and forward-focused. Companies with a high rate of positive feedback flourish economically.

This Is Your Brain on Feedback. People tend to be either left-brained or right-brained. Use tools to evaluate the "brainstyles" of people you work with, and then tailor your communication style to their type. NB: The author recommends the "Emergenetics Profile," available online.

Feedback Across the Generations. There are generational trends in how people receive, respond to, and give feedback. Tailor your feedback approach to the generation you are working with. [Author includes specific tactics for working with each generation.]

Putting Words Into Feedback – In Writing or Speaking Them. In spoken feedback, be aware of tone, demeanor, and how you are oriented to each other – e.g., are you sitting side by side or standing over someone? Make sure you are clear, organized, and prepared for telephone feedback. For written feedback, outline first, consider things like fonts, and revise and edit.

Virtual Feedback. When using technology for feedback – e-mails, texts, social media – remember to use the suitable medium for the content. Check subject lines and "pause and review" before sending. Remember, "critical or distressing" information should be delivered in person (p. 200).

How'm I Doing? The Art of Receiving Feedback. Set a "feedback example" by genuinely and frequently asking people for feedback – act as if you value feedback and respect theirs. Ask questions, get clarification, and take the feedback on board, but don't let it get you down.

Effective coaches and players have the whole team in mind.

Effective feedback is "specific, honest, candid, focused."

Getting Creative With Feedback. Be careful using humor in feedback, but consider using role play or more creative leading questions to foster communication in feedback sessions. When being creative, don't lose track of the primary goal of your session.

Creating a Feedback Culture – From Blood Sugar to *Feng Shui*. When planning a feedback session, pay attention to everything from how your space is arranged and the lighting in the room, to whether or not you are hungry, to the time of day. Avoid giving negative feedback in public.

Key Concepts:

FEEDBACK DO'S AND DONT'S

Ask. Start by asking permission to give feedback. Asking creates a powerful psychological framework for helping make feedback effective (p. 105).

"Become friends with silence" (p. 225). In other words, people should reject the temptation to respond quickly for the sake of avoiding awkward pauses. Instead, periods of silence provide an opportunity to process the information provided and frame nuanced questions or explanations for any points that need clarification.

Seek clarification. If you do not understand or agree with the feedback, ask for clarification with phrases that invite further explanation. Some examples from the author include: "Now, tell me again what you're saying;" "Would you repeat that in a different way so I really get it? I want to fully understand what you're conveying here;" and, "How would you tell someone else about this feedback you're giving me – what would someone else hear you saying?" These types of phrases encourage the person to find different, hopefully clarifying, words to explain their feedback (p. 227).

More positives than negatives. There should be at least a 3:1 ratio of positive to negative feedback. Some benefits to a person or group brought by positive feedback include a wider attention span, increased creativity, improved immune function, greater resilience in adversity, and increased happiness (pp. 95-103).

Not personal. It is important to "take feedback seriously, not personally." This mindset will help a person grow from feedback rather than become self-conscious (p. 220).

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Calm and clear works best. Contrary to the old-school belief that effective coaching is frantic yelling designed to use fear as a motivation for improvement, feedback is effective when it is clear, calm, well thought-out, well-intentioned, and well-prepared (p. 41).

CONSIDER WHO IS RECEIVING YOUR FEEDBACK

Consider Age. "In this multi-generational workforce, a manager must know how to reach each age group with effective feedback" (p. 139).

Generation Y/Millennials – born between the mid-1980s and the early 21st Century. Millennials appreciate candor and honesty, are often multi-tasking, and are connected to others via the internet. Therefore, feedback sessions should be frank and straightforward, friendly but brief, and incorporate technology if applicable (p. 143).

Generation X – born between the mid-1960s and the 1980s. Still relatively young but also some-what experienced, forty-somethings believe they have the time and knowledge to achieve extraordinary goals. They believe in possibilities. Therefore, feedback to this age group should provide opportunities for back-and-forth dialogue, considering multiple options in addressing an issue (pp. 145-147).

Generation Jones – born between the mid-1950s and the mid-1960s. Many are considering difficult life decisions such as changing career paths or how to best pay off the mortgage. Feedback sessions should recognize these challenging decisions by bringing long-term career goals to the forefront of a feedback session. Make sure to offer menus of possibilities and incentives based on their stated goals (pp. 153-154).

Baby Boomers – born between the mid-1940s and the mid-1950s. They are individualistic, socially conscious, trendsetting, and not afraid to experiment. Because of their experience and propensity to try new ideas, they will want feedback sessions to include an interesting exchange of ideas about ways to improve the company. Therefore, it is important to tailor feedback that invites their creativity and ensures that they feel their opinion counts (p. 157).

The Veteran – born before 1942. This generation is sensitive, thoughtful, loyal, and hard-working. When giving feedback, avoid being condescending, recognize that they still want to contribute positively to the organization, and always treat them with the utmost respect (p. 160).

Consider Brain Type. Brain type (left or right hemisphere dominant) greatly affects how feedback is given and received.

Left Hemisphere: Mathematical, logical, literal, precise, detail-oriented.

Right Hemisphere: Imaginative, intuitive about ideas, big picture improvisational, enjoys the unusual, socially aware.

McLaughlin lost a great deal of business in the beginning stages of his career because he did not recognize how differently right- and left-brained people think. He explains that his conversations with engineering firms, manufacturers, scientific companies, and financial services would generally end without a proposal. Why? Because those companies were more detail-oriented, logical, and mathematical (left-brained), while McLaughlin was imaginative and creative (right-brained). They were speaking different languages.

Once he recognized this problem, the author found ways to incorporate more left-brained qualities into his business proposals to left-brained clients. The result is that nearly 60% of his business is from left-brained clients today.

Feedback can suffer from the same right-brain/left-brain problem. Co-workers using two different sides of the human brain can provide completely incomprehensible input to each other, becoming extremely frustrated. However, suppose co-workers realize there are different ways of thinking and learn to understand the other's mode of thinking. In that case, they can significantly enhance the quality of feedback by helping to identify each other's strengths and weaknesses (p. 111).

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WHEN AND WHERE TO PROVIDE FEEDBACK

Using sports as an analogy, the author explains that feedback should not be delivered in the middle of a task. "It is in the post-game review sessions, and the practice sections before the next game, that what the coach has seen is translated into effective, targeted feedback for the player(s)" (p. 47).

If feedback is delivered in the middle of a task, the person receiving feedback will be more focused on improving performance than completing the task, which ultimately hurts his performance in the moment.

The author explains that, unlike a fine wine, feedback does not get better with age (p. 71). Effective feedback is an ongoing conversation, not a one-time year-end review. It can also help to build relationships between co-workers.

Create a safe, comfortable physical place to provide others with feedback. When working with an intimidating District Attorney who was having trouble connecting with others, McLaughlin rearranged the DA's office by moving his big desk to the corner of the room for use as a writing desk only. In its place, he put a round table, which was more inclusive and encouraged dialogue, in the middle of the room. In addition, he brightened the room with additional lighting, flowers, and a bowl of jellybeans. The results: "Energy levels were high, creativity abounded, and he [the DA] was able to recruit and retain many of Denver's best and brightest, both young and seasoned attorneys" (pp. 258-259).

No matter who you are, "whether you're a team leader or a team member, you need to want feedback, and you need to create a mindset among your people where they want feedback too."

"Put on your oxygen mask" before providing feedback. In other words, do what you need to do to be in a good mood before delivering feedback. This can be achieved by meditation, caffeine, or even sugar intake (p. 105).
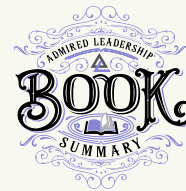
CREATING A "FEEDBACK REVOLUTION" CULTURE

McLaughlin quotes Jack Welch, who wrote, "There is nothing scientific about the process. You get candor, you reward it, praise it, and talk about it. You make public heroes out of people who demonstrate it. Most of all, you yourself demonstrate it in an exuberant and even exaggerated way, even when you're not the boss" (p. 74).

No matter who you are, "whether you're a team leader or a team member, you need to **want** feedback, and you need to create a mindset among your people where **they** want feedback too" (p. 249).

McLaughlin, Peter (2013). **Feedback Revolution:** How to Give and Receive Effective Feedback. Kentucky: Java Creek Publishing.

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