

IAN SAYS

THE TIGHTROPE OF GIVING FEEDBACK

FEEDBACK. Hearing that word alone sends a chill down my spine. Add the word “constructive” in front of it, and I’d be an emotional wreck for the next week or so. I would do whatever it takes to evade it as long as possible, hoping that the person, usually my boss, superior or even a peer, would somehow suffer amnesia and completely forget about it.

My experience of feedback sessions are mostly pleasant ones. But, subconsciously and consciously, I have dreaded every single one of them. Thankfully, being blessed with amazing mentors throughout the years has completely transformed my perception of feedback, and allowed me to experience firsthand how it can be a transformative tool.

This week’s centrespread by Sandy Clarke goes beyond our usual understanding of feedback, where it is more often than not a top-down approach. The introduction of 360° feedback is slowly but surely making progress, and an increasing number of organisations have implemented the approach.

It offers a more holistic approach of measuring an individual’s work-related competencies, and are given an evaluation from quite a few people, fluctuating from four to 12, including colleagues, managers, and sometimes customers. The philosophy is to provide the employee with an idea of how they are thought of through the lenses of others, leading to the providence of a number of key insights which are not easily observable, or what Johari’s Window would term as the blind spot.

Try This reinforces the central theme, with Louisa Devadason sharing a number of tips of how feedback can be given. One statement in particular stands out, reminding us to focus on the behaviour, and not the person. This factor alone could cause a feedback session to be an uplifting, transformative one, or swing it to the other end of the pendulum, resulting in a toxic cocktail of anger, doubt and negativity.

Andrew Lau in *Hard Talk* looks at how feedback is either growing or killing your organisation, and focusing on two particular areas: feedback in times of success, and feedback in times of failure.

In *Thought of the Week*, Peter Economy looks at the importance of withholding judgment, reminding us of the golden rule: if you don’t have anything nice to say, don’t say anything at all. It is a timely reminder, as it is human nature to arrive at premature conclusions before coming to a real understanding of where the individual we are judging comes from. The key to overcoming the desire to stem the tide of perpetual judgment would be simply this – empathy. It is the act of understanding the other person’s story.

Till then, have a wonderful weekend. May the pages ahead be as insightful and inspiring for you, as it has been for me.

Carpe diem,
IAN LEE
Editor
Leaderonomics.com

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■ *Louisa believes that healthy communication is key to fostering better work relationships. She is open to receiving feedback as she believes that will enable her to better herself. To engage with her, write to louisa.allycyn@leaderonomics.com.*

FEEDBACK AS AN ART

By **LOUISA DEVADASON**
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THE art of giving feedback is a pivotal but often tedious skill that everyone should cultivate. It isn’t just for leaders or managers; it is also for people who want to elevate and take charge of their work environment. Mastering this skill will lead to more positive, open relationships with your colleagues.

It is handy to be mindful that people generally respond more strongly to negative events than positive ones. Professor Andrew Miner and his team at the University of Minnesota conducted a study that showed employees reacting six times more strongly to a negative interaction with their boss than a positive one. This study highlights just how sensitive people are to criticisms and how important it is to give tactful feedback.

Prior to giving feedback, it is necessary to have good rapport with your employees and colleagues as this opens their minds to what you have to say. Starting a dialogue with someone who harbours negative feelings towards you may lead to a more passive-aggressive or defensive exchange.

Another important thing to evaluate before approaching someone is the opportunity costs of giving said feedback. Is the error inconsequential? Is it worth straining your relationship in favour of correcting this particular mistake? Was the mistake just run-of-the-mill human error? If feedback is needed, be mindful that the purpose of feedback is to improve their performance as a member of your organisation.

Consider these seven tips when giving someone feedback:

1 Encourage the individual to self-evaluate

Ask the receiver how they feel they have progressed in the issue and get their insight.

2 Reinforce positive attributes
Particularly before and after the feedback, reinforce the good work and qualities the receiver possesses.

3 Place focus on the behaviour, not the person

Try swapping statements like, “Your writing skills are underwhelming” with statements like “I think this draft needs more thorough editing and elaborating, here and here.”

4 Give evidence and provide a clear possible solution

Referring to the aforementioned example, you could enquire, “Have you referred to the following sources? They could reinforce some of the ideas you have shared.”

5 Use ‘I’ messages

Starting feedback with “you” can sound accusatory. Try “I” statements like, “I find this description vague” or “I think this needs to be expanded on.”

6 Give feedback ASAP

Try to address the matter immediately. Letting an issue go stale may make you seem like you are holding a grudge.

7 Deal with how the receiver responds, especially if the response seems defensive

Be open to the receiver’s response. They may immediately seem defensive, so try to stay objective and constructive while addressing this.

Feedback is a powerful means of personal development and should be a two-way street. A communal attitude of giving and receiving constructive feedback will make your work environment more resilient and productive than ever before.

The opinions expressed in this leadership guide are those of the writers or the people they quoted and not necessarily those of Leaderonomics.



LEVITY BOOSTS PRODUCTIVITY

WHILE fun and games very rarely go hand-in-hand with work, some very successful organisations like Southwest Airlines have found a way to balance hard work with fun easy-going employees.

It is said that fun enhances creativity, builds relationships and is good for health in the long run. So, give permission for your employees to be human. To set the tone, you can start by being open to giving and receiving humour (besides feedback) at work.

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