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Resolutions

Giving and Receiving Feedback with Finesse

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Meeting your Conflict Management Needs with Spirit and Strategy.

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Workshop Objectives

After participating in this workshop, you will be able to:

- Understand the benefits associated with giving and receiving feedback.

- Recognize the challenges of giving and receiving feedback.

- Self-regulate to remain assertive and empathic.

- Establish a process for receiving feedback well.

- Apply a step-by-step process for giving constructive feedback.

- Apply effective communication skills to manage defensive responses to feedback.

Personal Learning Objective

What do you want to learn to do more effectively – give feedback or receive feedback?

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Feedback

Feedback is:

- The process by which the output/impact of an action is returned to us (fed-back) to influence the next action.

- Learning about ourselves from people and experiences.

When given or received well, feedback can:

- Change and shift behaviour.

- Enhance relationships.

- Enhance development.

- Facilitate creativity while enhancing quality.

- Decrease stress and anxiety.

- Sends the message that you are open and confident.

- Help us support others.

- The vulnerability can create intimacy.

When given or received poorly, feedback can:

- Destroy relationships.

- Create intense negative emotions.

- Create conflict as it increases blame, judgment, and assumptions.

- Scare people into submission.

- Reduce productivity and contribution.

- Result in having to receive or give more feedback.

What is more important – how feedback is given or how it is received?

"A skilled giver is great, but mostly our lives are populated by everyone else, folks who aren't so skilled, have their own issues, or are too busy to really give us the time we need. If you're going to take charge of your own learning you've got to get good at learning from these people too. A skillful and thoughtful receiver can draw value out of any feedback – even off-base, poorly timed, or poorly delivered feedback. That's why the receiver is the key player in the exchange. If you wait around for the best teachers and coaches to arrive in your life, you could be putting your progress on hold for a very long time."

D. Stone and S. Heen: Thanks for the feedback: The science and art of receiving feedback

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Building Team

A sense of team is built through repeat interactions, conversations, disagreements and agreements. There is no short cut method to developing a team. We must all walk through the same process in order to have an effective team dynamic. When we don't follow a structured and collaborative process, we are likely to see the five dysfunctions of team emerge as outlined by Patrick Lencioni in *The Five Dysfunctions of Team.*

Dysfunction #1: Absence of Trust
This occurs when team members are reluctant to be vulnerable with one another, and are thus unwilling to admit their mistakes, acknowledge their weaknesses or ask for help. Without a certain comfort level among team members, a foundation of trust is impossible.

Dysfunction #2: Fear of Conflict
Trust is critical because without it, teams are unlikely to engage in unfiltered, passionate debate about key issues. This creates two problems. First, stifling conflict actually increases the likelihood of destructive, back channel sniping. Second, it leads to sub-optimal decision-making because the team is not benefiting from the true ideas and perspectives of its members.

Dysfunction #3: Lack of Commitment
Without conflict, it is extremely difficult for team members to truly commit to decisions because they don't feel that they are part of the decision. This often creates an environment of ambiguity and confusion in an organization, leading to frustration among employees, especially top performers.

Dysfunction #4: Avoidance of Accountability
When teams don't commit to a clear plan of action, peer-to-peer accountability suffers greatly. Even the most focused and driven individuals will hesitate to call their peers on counterproductive actions and behaviors if they believe those actions and behaviors were never agreed upon in the first place.

Dysfunction #5: Inattention to Results
When team members are not holding one another accountable, they increase the likelihood that individual ego and recognition will become more important than collective team results. When this occurs, the business suffers, and the team starts to unravel.

The Challenge of Feedback

Why is feedback difficult to receive?

- Inherent in the idea of 'constructive' feedback is the notion that you are not ok as you are *now*.

- There exists a clash between the human needs of growing and learning and being accepted, respected and safe just as we are *now*. The feedback can be so far from your reality and threatening to your well-being, your safety, or your sense of self that you become overwhelmed.

- It is brutally painful to see yourself through someone else's judgmental eyes, regardless of whether their perception is fair or unfair.

- Regardless of the feedback, there is something in the relationship with the giver that causes you to reject the feedback. You see the person as unfamiliar with who you really are, ungrateful for your efforts, unappreciative of all you do, lacking in their own expertise, and having bad motives; OR

- Too familiar with who you are. The relationship is so tight you expect them to overlook your challenges/deficits.

The result: The receiver no longer sees the feedback in its 'actual size'.

Why is feedback difficult to give?

- The receiver may not be able to receive it at either a cognitive or emotional level.
- It's not what you typically do.
- It's uncomfortable.
- You like the person.
- The person is critical to your own well-being.
- The feedback may be rejected/seen as distorted.
- You may not be liked.
- It's easier to let it go.

The result: The giver no longer sees the feedback in its 'actual size'.

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Cultivating the Environment for Feedback

- Consider: Are you in a reality distortion field? Are people catering to your happiness?

- See feedback not as a shared responsibility, but as your responsibility to request.

- Separate relationship from feedback.

- Determine your baseline. Ask people close to you:
  - What would it be like to give me feedback?
  - What is it like to give me feedback?
  - What do I do that might keep you from giving me feedback?
  - What could I do to receive it better?

- Make the feedback a normal occurrence in your week.

- Ask for the feedback instead of being caught off guard.
  - If you had to make two suggestions for improving my work, what would they be?
  - How could I handle my workload more effectively?
  - What could I do to make your job easier?
  - How could I do a better job of following through on commitments?
  - If you were in my position, what would you do to show people more appreciation?
  - How could I do a better job of prioritizing my activities?

- Replace insecurity with confidence.
  - State your intention: I want your feedback so I can get better. Tell me any time you see something that you think I could do differently.
  - Give examples of concerns others have raised to demonstrate that it is safe to share tough feedback with you. For example, you might say, "What can I do better? I've heard from Gail that I am often inaccessible. I am working on a plan to fix that. What else would you like me to do better on?" If you can quote feedback you've received in a way that shows you aren't threatened by it, you generate evidence for the giver that other issues might be safe as well.

- Embrace failure. Own it and recognize this is what growth comes from.

- Spend time informally with people who don't think like you so you can build their comfort with you and access their feedback.

- Take time to reflect.

How to Receive Feedback Well

If you are asking for the feedback:

- Prepare – what specifically do you want to know? What is your intention?

- Self-regulate – make sure you are ready to receive it.

- Watch your body language and tone of voice.

- Ensure you have set up the appropriate location for you and the giver.

- Provide context for why you are asking for the feedback.

- Express that you realize it is risky to give feedback and express your openness to receiving it.

- Ask for specific feedback in a digestible chunk.

- Pause and listen to the feedback.

- Request permission to clarify intentions, assumptions, or to explain your understanding.

- Ask any questions you need to ask so you fully understand the feedback.

- Acknowledge what has been said.

- Invite the other person to offer you suggestions to improve the situation (if needed). If you ask for suggestions, ensure you ask for digestible suggestions. "What are one or two things I could do differently?"

- Express your gratitude and ask to reflect on the feedback and get back to them. Invite them to consider anything else they may wish to share with you when you return.

- Once you have digested the feedback, return to the person to share where you landed.

How to Receive Feedback Well

If the feedback is unexpected:

- Self-regulate.

- Watch your body language and tone of voice.

- Ensure you are in a good place to receive the feedback (environment and emotionally). If not, state your openness to the feedback and ask to receive it at a different time/location.

- Express your appreciation that the person is taking the risk to offer feedback.

- Pause and listen to the feedback.

- Request permission to clarify intentions, assumptions, or to explain your understanding.

- Ask any questions you need to ask so you fully understand the feedback.

- Acknowledge what has been said.

- Invite the other person to offer you suggestions to improve the situation (if needed). If you ask for suggestions, ensure you ask for digestible suggestions. "What are one or two things I could do differently?"

- Express your gratitude for the feedback and ask to reflect on the feedback.

- Once you have digested the feedback, return to the person to share where you landed.

SHOULDERS FACING DOWNHILL, BODY STACKED OVER YOUR SKIS
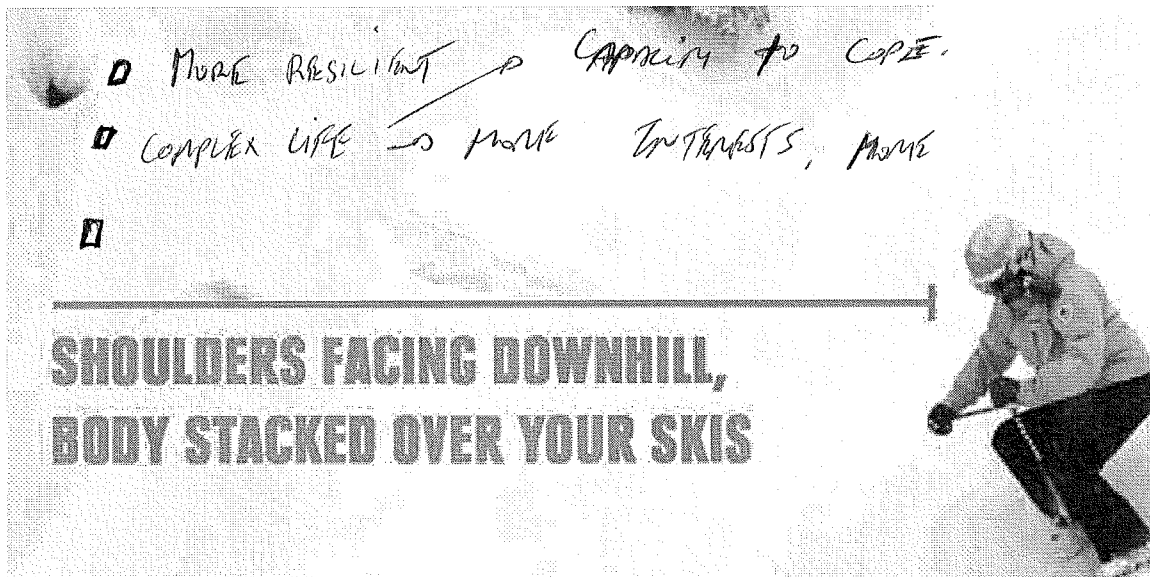
Self-Regulating

- Manage your self-talk:
  - Get curious about the other's point of view.
  - Remind yourself this will pass in no time.

- Manage your body movement:
  - Recognize and control any involuntary body movement.
  - Relax and straighten your posture.
  - Breathe.
  - Ground yourself into your chair or your feet into the ground.

- Listen and make sure you understand:
  - Give the other person air time.
  - Do not negate, contradict, argue, provide advice or give logical information.
  - Clarify what you have heard.

- Express your perspective if need be:
  - Clarify your intention.
  - Find out what the other person has heard from you.
  - Fill in any blanks.
  - Ensure your body language, para-verbal and verbal message are congruent.

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Giving Feedback: Eight Critical Mistakes

Check the mistakes that you tend to make when giving feedback:

❑ **Inadequate written feedback.**
The written feedback lacks specificity about observable behaviours, making it difficult to give specific feedback.

❑ **Lack of preparation.**
Not spending time upfront to think about how you want to engage in the feedback conversation.

❑ **Triggering.**
Becoming agitated, defensive, or shying away from the other person.

❑ **Glossing over significant feedback.**
Playing it safe by vaguely describing areas of concern. This includes hinting at problem areas in the hopes the other person will just get it.

❑ **Using the sandwich approach.**
Hiding the real feedback between two pieces of good feedback.

❑ **Arguing vs. listening.**
Showing the other person that you are right. This includes speaking over them, interrupting them, and/or justifying your feedback.

❑ **Ignoring the impact of the behaviour.**
Failing to outline the impact, either positive or negative, of the employee's behaviour on the organization.

❑ **Not offering specific suggestions for improvement.**
Leaving it up to the other person to figure out what they are going to do to fix the problem, or not addressing solutions at all.
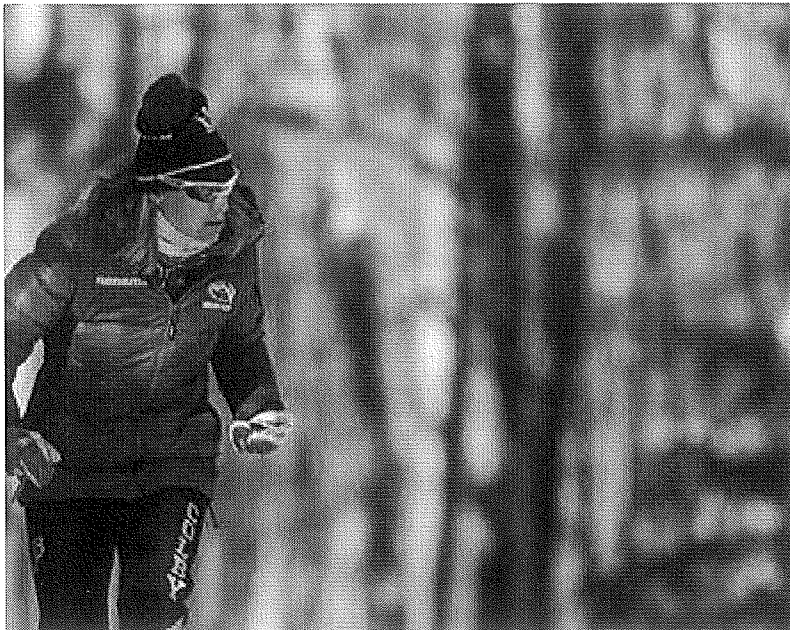
Giving Constructive Feedback

Do:

- Be clear on your reasons for giving the feedback.
- If it makes sense, ask permission to give the information.
- Be immediate - as soon as possible. Make sure it is well timed.
- Give information in digestible chunks.
- Be clear - descriptive rather than evaluative and specific rather than general.
- Encourage involvement - ask questions, listen well by paraphrasing, summarizing, and reframing.
- Be willing to ask for and receive feedback yourself. Own what is your responsibility.

Don't:

- Argue
- Blame
- Judge
- Threaten
- Avoid
- Sandwich

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Step-by-Step Process for Giving Feedback

Step One: Preparation

- What feedback do I need to provide? Be specific and descriptive. Give an example.
- What is my intention in providing this feedback?
- What information do I need to collect prior to approaching this person?
- What will I do if they get defensive?
- What will I do if I get defensive?

Step Two: Setting up the Feedback Conversation

- State that you would like to provide feedback.
- Neutrally name what you would like to provide feedback on.
- If it makes sense, ask permission to provide the feedback.
- State your intention behind providing the feedback.
- Set up a date, time, and location.

Step Three: The Feedback Conversation

1. Thank the person for attending the meeting.
2. State your positive intention behind providing the feedback.
3. Neutrally name the topic of feedback.
4. Deliver the feedback by describing the area(s) of concern. Be clear, specific, and succinct. Avoid generalizations and vague statements.
5. Express the impact of the behaviour on the workplace or on you. Focus on using "I" statements so you own what you see as the impact of the behaviours.
6. Stop and shift to the other person – give them a chance to speak, explain, clarify, or ask questions. Manage their defensive response. (This step may need to be interspersed throughout the conversation).
7. Re-focus to your feedback and your positive intention.
8. Formulate a plan of action or confirm mutual understanding of needs.

Skills for Dealing with Defensive Responses

- **Manage Para-Verbal Expression:**
  Attend to your speed, volume, rhythm, and tone.

- **Agree where you can:**
  "I agree that…"

- **Preface:**
  Name that what you are about to say may be difficult to hear and so you are going to just say it and then talk about how it lands.
  If you are receiving feedback, state that it is difficult to hear and therefore you need a moment to let it settle in.

- **Focus:**
  Ensure you repeatedly keep the conversation focused on the feedback and understanding it.
  "How is this connected to…?"
  "You are mentioning…because it is connected to the feedback in that…"
  "I am happy to talk about …. and for now I want to focus on…"

- **Acknowledge and Confront:**
  Point out the negative pattern you are noticing in the conversation.
  "This is a difficult situation. I am noticing that three times now you have said this is unbelievable. What do you mean by that?"

- **Alternatives:**
  Discuss what else needs to happen if the conversation is not successful.
  "What do you think is going to happen if we can't get through this conversation?"
  "Given that we can't get through this conversation, the next step is…"

- **Break:**
  "I can see you are very upset. I am committed to sorting through this with you. I would like to meet again tomorrow at 9 am to try and see if we can sort through this."

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Recommended Readings

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