FEARLESS FEEDBACK

Recognise Feedback For The Gift That It Is

BY SUMIT GUPTA

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Feedback and Fear?

What Has Fear Got To Do With Feedback?

"No passion so effectually robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning as fear."

— Edmund Burke

I will admit it. Feedback is a word which makes me uncomfortable. Research shows that giving and receiving feedback is one of the most disliked and challenging activities people do at work.

But it doesn't have to be so. Let us take an honest look at why feedback is hard, and why fear is often associated with feedback.

Fear limits our ability to think and act clearly, and make us see evil and bad intent when there is none. Fear has no role to play in our organisations if we want to continuously learn, grow and innovate. I hope this report will help you do that.

This powerful report goes into the value of feedback, and why I think feedback is a 'gift'. It will provide a framework to give and receive feedback and to remove the discomfort and uncertainty normally associated with feedback.

You might think feedback kills creativity, but you will find that it can also enhance it. You might think feedback destroys relationships, but you will find that it can also be the source of stronger connection and trust.

The Gift Of Feedback

Successful relationships are founded on honesty, authenticity and respect. The ability to give and receive feedback in a way that promotes growth rather than resentment is relevant across different companies and industries.

The ideas in this report can seem provocative but also insightful. If you are seeking a new perspective on feedback, and want to remove any association the word 'fear' might have with feedback, read on.

You will find a roadmap and clear steps for more courageous and authentic feedback conversations that will lead to personal growth, stronger relationships and positive change.

All of us swim in an ocean on feedback. This report is divided into 3 parts, and each part goes deep into an important aspect of feedback.

Part 1 - Seeing Feedback as a 'Gift', and Its Benefits You Never Knew

Part 2 - How To Give Feedback? What to do Before, During and After a Feedback Conversation?

Part 3 - How To Get the Feedback You Need? And What To Do With It?

Let's get started and see feedback for the gift that it is.

What Is Feedback?

What is Feedback? And The Benefits of Feedback You Never Knew?

"Don't be afraid of your fears. They're not there to scare you. They're there to let you know that something is worth it."

— C. JoyBell C.

Is it feedback season again in your organisation? Is it the end of the quarter, or the year? Are you ready to give and receive feedback?

Feedback is a word many people dread and it makes them uncomfortable, while for others it is a tool to reflect on and improve performance. Having been on both ends of the feedback spectrum over my career, let us see how feedback can benefit people as well as teams and organisations.

What is feedback?

Do you think feedback is an operational necessity which your organisation requires you to do? Do you think feedback is something "extra" you have to do in addition to your work? In the early days of my career I saw feedback as a distraction which keeps me away from "real" work.

I wanted to get done with the feedback cycles as soon as possible as it would make me anxious and nervous. After all, nobody ever told me the purpose of feedback, how to do it well and how to make it a tool in my development.

It was only through my own mistakes receiving and giving feedback (and a few trainings) that I realised that feedback is work itself and not something external to it. Feedback is as much a part of my (and everyone else's) work as any other task I consider essential.

Over time I came to see feedback as a tool to improve not just my own performance, but also of the people around me, and of my team/organisation as a whole.

Feedback can happen in a 'day to day' manner like any other task. It can be a simple comment on some work which was just completed, like :-

- You handled that really well. Thank you for thinking about that specific case.
- I loved how you presented your ideas in the meeting we just had.

OR,

Feedback can be a structured conversation with your manager or employee. For example:-

- I see you doing really well in ... , ...
- I would like to see you develop skills like ... , etc

The Benefits of Feedback You Never Knew

The most important and obvious benefit of feedback is that it shines a light on and reveals our blind spots. We all need feedback to reflect, learn and grow. It helps us become aware of our strengths and weaknesses.

Through feedback we can identify actions required to address our blind spots and improve performance. Timely feedback is essential to creating a loop where we are constantly reflecting upon what we did in the past and how we can do better in the future.

But apart from assisting in our own personal development, I believe feedback can be an important tool which can help our team / company in other ways. Some of these are :-

1. Better Relationships

A regular cycle of feedback, not just with our managers but also with our peers, helps us build better relationships at work. It helps us get comfortable with each other and develop friendships with our colleagues.

Having strong relationships at work not just impacts business results, but also results in more smiles and satisfaction from what we do. Giving and receiving feedback builds trust and helps create a safe environment where people can be themselves without any pretensions.

2. Clear Expectations

Having regular feedback conversations with people help clear expectations about what we expect from each other. It brings out our implicit expectations in the open and iron out any disagreements.

Doing this right avoids any future misunderstanding and conflicts, and even if they arise, are much easier to handle and resolve.

3. Positive Reinforcement

Giving appreciation for a task well done serves as a wonderful positive reinforcement for the kind of behaviours you want to nurture in your team and your organisation.

Giving people a pat on their back or an informal "whoop" or "cheers" can do wonders to their confidence, and sets an example for everyone else.

"There are two things people want more than sex and money… recognition and praise."

– Mary Kay Ash

4. Culture of Feedback

If people are comfortable giving and receiving feedback in a company, and if it becomes a part of people / teams working together, then you have what is called a "culture of feedback". This can be a tremendous asset for any organisation.

This culture lets your employees know that you care about them as people, and not just the business results they produce. The culture of feedback creates an environment which enables every team to take ownership and pride in going after and achieving their business goals, while also taking care of their personal well-being and growth.

To sum it up, the benefits of continuous feedback far outweigh the cost of having a culture of feedback and the little awkwardness everyone feels while giving and sharing feedback, which can be easily mitigated with proper training and guidance.

Having a culture of open communication and regular feedback empowers people to come to work and make a difference – to their own growth as well as to the company's purpose.

This brings us to the end of **Part 1** of this report.

Let's move to **Part 2 - How To Give Feedback? What to do Before, During and After a Feedback Conversation?**

How to Give Feedback Effectively?

How to Give Feedback Effectively? What to do Before, During and After a Feedback Conversation?

"Without fear there cannot be courage."

— Christopher Paolini

Giving good quality feedback is an important skill to have in any organisation. Doing so regularly with our peers gives everyone an accurate understanding of how they are doing at work, and what needs to change / improve.

However, I have always felt that the importance of feedback and how to effectively deliver it is something which is rarely stressed and communicated within companies.

In this article I want to share some of the best practices I have learnt from different people and mentors over the years about giving feedback.

Why?

The first step to giving good feedback is to realise the importance and reason behind doing so. I believe that the **only reason to provide feedback is to improve performance** while working together.

The purpose of giving feedback is never to measure performance, blame, to prove yourself right, to make others wrong or to put someone in his/her place. This is the most important aspect of feedback which we often miss.

Feedback is a 'gift' given from one person to another, with the only purpose of improving how they work together. When we see feedback as a 'gift', feedback conversations tend to be more natural and less awkward.

Now, let us look at **what to do before, during and after a feedback conversation.**

Before (Preparation)

Like most things in life, doing some groundwork before giving feedback is critical. Over time I have come up with a list of steps which helps me prepare for a feedback conversation.

1. The first step is to **collect data and evidence to back up your feedback**, and to make sure you have seen the situation from different angles and point of views. This might include gathering some tangible data like sales reports, code reviews, etc or validating your feedback with different sets of people.

2. Apart from remembering the why behind sharing the feedback, it is also very important to **have an open mind** going into the conversation. We must be willing to investigate / apologise if things turn out otherwise.

   If the person you are sharing the feedback with brings up new facts or information you weren't aware of, make sure to acknowledge them and take a time out to investigate rather than thrusting your feedback upon the person.

3. **Create a comfortable space** for providing the feedback. Allow enough time so that none of you feel rushed. Depending on the type of feedback, choose an appropriate setting for the feedback.

   For example – do not choose a place which is overly conspicuous, and never give negative feedback in public. If the feedback is on a trivial issue, you can do it while walking back from a meeting, or in a vehicle driving to another destination to make it less formal.

   If your conversation is more difficult, you might want to do it in a meeting room. The important thing to realise is that there is no one right place to deliver feedback, and you should choose based on the type of feedback.

4. **Sleep on it!** If you are feeling angry, upset or feel an urge to provide feedback; it is often better to sleep on it. Giving feedback at the wrong time can often do more

harm than good. Once your emotions are more settled and you have gathered your thoughts, you can then share the feedback as soon as possible.

"Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first four sharpening the axe."

— Abraham Lincoln

During (Process)

While you can do all the preparation you want, receiving feedback can still be a stressful experience for people (especially if it is critical). To ensure that the conversation goes smoothly you can follow a few guidelines :-

1. **Criticise in Private, Praise in Public.** Use this as a golden rule for any feedback conversation.

2. **Never attach adjectives to people.** Start by stating why you are providing feedback, which is always to improve performance (of the person, team, organisation).

   You demonstrate that by stressing on the impact of the person's actions (on the team and their performance) and not on the person themselves. For example – Instead of saying "you are a weak communicator", say "your communication style can be refined to make a better impact in team meetings".

3. **Be specific in your feedback**. Give examples. Do not be vague in your statements.

4. **Be aware of the other person's body language**. Notice if they are getting defensive, angry, upset and change course if necessary.

5. **Be prepared for an emotional reaction.** But do not react yourself. Do not get into a game of arguments and justifications. Stay silent and let people vent out their

emotions (if any).

6. **Listen and paraphrase** what you hear to ensure there is no confusion and misunderstanding. Understand the situation from the other person's point of view.

7. **Use non-conflicting language.** Use "I" instead of "you". For example – Say "I felt disappointed when you did that." rather than "You disappointed me by doing that."

8. **Don't Push** – When you push people, they will push back. Present your thoughts without trying to push them through. Give people a choice to accept or reject your feedback, as you cannot force them to your point of view anyway.

9. **Give more positive feedback than negative**, and always be sincere when giving positive feedback. Remember that there are always positives about people to acknowledge.

10. **Thank them for listening to your feedback.** End the conversation on a positive note, with the other person thinking about the next steps. He/she should see the feedback as a stepping stone, not as a stumbling block.

After (Follow Up)

To make sure that the feedback is serving its intended purpose, i.e., to improve performance, it is important to take a few follow up steps after the feedback conversation:-

1. **Send a brief summary** of your meeting if it was important and critical enough. Also summarise any action points both of you agreed in a follow up email.

2. The other person might need some time to process what you discussed. **Give them that space.** Follow up after a few days for any additional thoughts. Ask for feedback about how you provided the feedback. Anything they would like you to do differently the next time? Let your people know it is ok for them to give you useful feedback.

3. **Make sure to act on your action points**, or share your progress on them. If you don't walk your talk, you lose trust. If that happens, you have bigger problems to worry about.

4. **Follow up and ask for progress** on the other person's action points. Offer your support and help in any way you can.

5. **Thank the person** and commend him/her for any change in future behaviour. Remember you can never give enough of positive feedback.

To conclude, feedback sharing sessions, when done well, are an incredible tool to build healthy relationships and make teams stronger. By listening and working on feedback, people can learn about themselves (self awareness) and be more conscious about their choices and decisions (career development).

When you encourage people to give and share feedback, it helps create a culture of feedback, which eventually increases the strength and effectiveness of teams in your organisation.

This brings us to the end of **Part 2** of this report.

Let's move to **Part 3 - How To Ask And Get the Feedback You Need? And What To Do With It?**

How to Ask and Get the Feedback You Need?

How to Ask and Get the Feedback You Need Without Any Stress and Awkwardness?

"I want to give you some feedback."

If you are like most people, once you hear the above statement, your heart will start to beat a little faster, your palms might begin to sweat, and in certain situations, you might even begin to shake.

Feedback can make anyone anxious and stressed – not because there is something inherently negative or bad about it, but because most people have never been trained in giving and receiving feedback.

If you give and get feedback only once a quarter at work (even worse if it is once a year), and without any preparation, obviously it will be a strange conversation.

What I have learned over my career is that feedback can be an immensely valuable and insightful tool in our growth and progression, but only if we are ready and prepared to digest and use it for our benefit.

In part 3 you will learn the value of feedback, what is the best way to receive it, and what to do with it. I hope that after reading this report, instead of just waiting for feedback you will start asking for it.

If you are thinking why would anyone do that, let's dive right in.

Why Do You Need Feedback?

Feedback is one of the easiest and most insightful tools to uncover your blind spots. **A blind spot is anything that others know about you but you yourself don't.**

For example – if you think you are confident but others find you arrogant and cocky, how the hell do you figure that out if nobody ever tells you that?

Feedback is like a beam of light which shows you how others perceive you. It can be the simplest way to uncover your strengths and weaknesses, but it is often not easy to digest and process it.

Feedback lets you know how others perceive you and your talent, skills, behaviour and performance. And knowing them is a good thing.

When used correctly, feedback can be a very useful tool to move in the right direction, change course if necessary, and grow in your career (and in life).

"Criticism may not be agreeable, but it is necessary. It fulfils the same function as pain in the human body. It calls attention to an unhealthy state of things."

– Winston Churchill

How Do You Ask For Feedback?

Just like hearing feedback can be stressful for you, providing feedback can also be a stressful experience for the person on the other side. Below are a few ways you can make the feedback conversation a pleasant experience :-

1. The best way to make the process easier for both sides is to actively and explicitly ask for it. When you **invite feedback regularly**, it removes the formality surrounding the process and makes the conversation more "normal".

2. Explain that you see feedback as a tool to learn and grow, and that you **welcome any negative or uncomfortable feedback**. You can also go one step ahead and assure the person that the feedback will not have any negative impact on the relationship. Knowing this always puts the other person at ease and allows the conversation to continue more maturely.

3. Know what you are looking for in feedback. Feedback is not always critical. You should also **ask for acknowledgement or appreciation** for a task well done. Positive feedback will help you understand your strengths, and gives you the

confidence and assurance required to look objectively at your weaknesses.

4. **Be specific and ask for examples**. Don't let anyone get away with providing vague feedback. Always dig deeper and ask for specific events and evidence in support of the feedback you receive. Here are a few questions you can ask :-
   a. Can you explain what you mean?
   b. Can you give an example to support your point?
   c. Paraphrase the feedback and ask – Is that what you mean?

5. **Seek feedback from people all around you** and not just your boss. Ask people above, below and sideways in your organisational hierarchy. Multiple sources of feedback can eliminate any outliers and help surface any obvious blind spots immediately.

"Feedback is the breakfast of champions."

– Ken Blanchard

Powerful Questions To Invite Feedback

Whenever you are looking for some powerful and insightful answers, there are always corresponding powerful questions to go with them. Below are a few such questions you can ask to solicit deep and meaningful feedback about yourself :-

1. If I were to wow you with my performance, what would that look like?

2. What's one thing I could improve?

3. What would you have done differently had you been in my position?

4. What's your opinion about how I handled that conversation, presentation, task, etc?

5. What specifically can I do to handle that task, conversation, project better?

6. What is one thing you can always count on me for?

7. What is one thing you will never count on me for?

What To Do After Receiving The Feedback

The worst thing that you can do with feedback is to do nothing with it. **The feedback conversation is just the beginning on the road to learning and growth.** So once you are done with the feedback, you can take the following steps to make the most of it.

1. **Thank the person for providing you feedback.** Not only is feedback essential for your growth, it is also often a courageous step to provide it in the first place. Acknowledge the person for the conscious act of providing you feedback.

2. **Do not defend yourself** during a feedback conversation. Do not get into a game of blame and justifications. Respond to the feedback, not react to it.

3. If the feedback is critical, **take responsibility** (not blame) for what you hear. Let the other person know that you will evaluate the feedback and get back.

4. **Take time to introspect and evaluate the feedback**. Does it resonate with feedback from others? Can you gather more data or feedback to validate it? If not, explain to others how you see it. If yes, let them know what you will change. Make promises and then do what you say.

5. **Take all the positive feedback and put it into a "complements" document**. Often we tend to focus too much on the negatives and ignore what we are doing well. Visit this document regularly to give you motivation and positive reinforcement. Remind yourself of all the good work you have done. Sometimes reading one little positive feedback can make your day.

Following the above guidelines doesn't mean that your feedback conversations will be painless, but they will certainly go more smoothly. Once you see feedback for the powerful tool it is in your learning and growth, you will fall in love with it.

This brings us to the end of part 3. To conclude -

In Part 1 we saw feedback as a 'gift' and its benefits.

In Part 2 we looked at how to give feedback. And what to do before, during and after a feedback conversation.

And in Part 3 we learned how to get feedback and what to do with it.

The more you share and seek feedback, the faster you can move, learn, adapt and change course if necessary. **As feedback becomes the new normal, you will not associate feedback with the word 'fear' and instead with 'gift'.** For that is what feedback is - a gift.

What's Next?

Did you find this report useful?

If yes, then forward this report to someone who you think would benefit from it. You can send it via email, or share it on social media. The report itself can be found at

https://www.deployyourself.com/r/fearleess-feedback-report.pdf

Are you ready to Deploy Yourself?

Deploy Yourself is about understanding ourselves, developing our strengths, and acting in a way that allows our own unique light to shine upon the world, instead of following the path others have decided for us.

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