

Developmental Feedback

By Isabel McDougal

Feedback comes to us in many forms. In the work place, the common form of feedback is the annual evaluation, where accomplishments are measured against goals, future goals are established, and training plans are updated. This evaluative feedback may become the basis for salary increases or promotion and becomes a part of the employee's HR records. As important and necessary as this process is, it may not be enough to foster top performance.

Numerous studies and employee surveys have indicated that most employees are starved for feedback from their superiors. These studies have also indicated that today's employees want more from their job than just a paycheck. They are looking for fulfillment, a way to use their special gifts and talents.

An additional type of feedback can be helpful. The coach approach to feedback is the developmental approach, the learning approach, the nonjudgmental approach as opposed to the evaluative one. The intent of the coach approach is to increase **learning and fulfillment as well as performance**. This feedback may occur on a regular basis and/or after certain tasks. It is entirely confidential and cannot be accessed or used by any other party.

The object in developmental feedback is to create AWARENESS and RESPONSIBILITY or ownership of the work in the performer/learner, which in turn leads to increased self-trust and self-reliance.

The coach/supervisor creates awareness in the performer/learner (employee) by observing, reflecting and by asking open-ended questions that compel the performer/learner to engage his/her brain and get involved. S/he has to recollect and formulate his/her thoughts before s/he can articulate his/her responses. This is AWARENESS. It helps him/her learn how to evaluate his/her own work and thereby become more self-reliant. This way s/he owns his/her performance and his/her assessment of it. This is RESPONSIBILITY.

Instead of saying, "I thought the presentation went well (or not so well)," ask some questions to make the employee think. Some examples might be:

- What were the most effective parts of your presentation?
- What part felt good, natural, and even enjoyable to you?
- What were you doing when you knew that everything was going well?
- How did you use your gift for persuading others to your point of view?
- What would you do more of/less of next time?

You can then follow up on any of the employee's responses to continue to deepen the awareness. Focus on strengths, not weaknesses. Focusing on weaknesses is demoralizing and often leads to defensiveness. Help the employee recognize the core of his/her strengths and talents. Help him/her to affirm what s/he values about him-/herself.

Self-awareness in itself is an invaluable tool for change, especially if the need to change is inline with the person's goals, values, and natural inclinations.

After a few developmental feedback sessions, the employee will usually begin to give him-/her-self quality feedback. Feedback provided by the learner/performer is best because it

creates ownership and because accurate, high-quality internal feedback will get at the causal level for lasting change.

“Stars” or top performers know themselves well. Knowing their strengths and weaknesses and natural methodologies and approaching their work accordingly, was a competence found in virtually every star performer in a study of several hundred “knowledge workers” at companies including AT&T and 3M, says a study done at Carnegie-Mellon University.

The extent that developmental feedback is effective in prompting learning and performance is dependent on the relationship and level of trust between the two parties, the degree of openness and the skill of the two parties in giving *and receiving* feedback.

Best results come when those giving developmental feedback know how to do so productively and are encouraged or rewarded for doing so – and are open to feedback themselves on the quality of their feedback.

Process – Create AWARENESS and RESPONSIBILITY in learner/performer

DO:

- Create a relationship of trust
- Compel the learner/performer to get involved and think
- Help the learner/performer learn how to evaluate his/her own work and assessment of it
- Use descriptive, not judgmental, words
- Be encouraging – move from “I can’t” to “I will”
- Focus on strengths, not weaknesses
- Try to cover the results of the action and the action process itself
- Be open to feedback on the quality of your feedback
- Be sincere
- Ask (open-ended questions)

DO NOT:

- Create a relationship of expert/dummy
- Be judgmental
- Criticize the person or the product
- Be discouraging
- Give insincere praise
- Tell

Do you have a learner or judge mindset?

Feedback Examples – What style will create the most awareness and responsibility? Why?

Feed-forward – Same procedure, but it's for an activity the learner/performer is planning to do.

"To the extent that people can become clear about the purpose of their lives, the mission they believe they have been placed on this earth to accomplish, and the values they hold close to their hearts, they will have more fulfilling experiences, especially if they are able to connect those values and goals to their roles at work." – Thomas Crane

"Consider this: Every aspect of your life right now – your job, your relationships, your possessions – flow from where you place your attention. You take action to gain those things, and taking any action calls for focused attention. Perhaps the overall quality of your life simply reflects the way in which you choose to focus your attention." – Dave Ellis