

Receiving and Giving Feedback

How to Receive Feedback

Seeking feedback is a key way to increase self-awareness. We all have blind spots, aspects of ourselves that we can't see but others can. To see ourselves as we are, not just as we think we are, we must seek feedback. If we're really lucky, there'll be people in our lives who see our blind spots and have the courage to share them with us in a way that we can truly hear the feedback. We need to develop a crew of these people who are willing to hold up the mirror, who see our blind spots and care about us enough to skillfully let us know what's up. In order to find and keep these people, you need to be good at asking for and receiving feedback.

*Stone and Heen's book *Thanks for the Feedback* (2014) is a comprehensive and helpful guide to seeking, giving, and learning from feedback. One of my favorite chapters has to do with how to dismantle our distortions of feedback. Here, the authors recommend:*

Be prepared; be mindful. Consider how you typically respond to less-than-favorable feedback. Do you start by accepting it and then dismiss it with time? Do you get defensive? Do you blame, chatter, get very quiet? Ask yourself, *How do I typically react?*

Separate the strands: Feeling, story, feedback. It can be helpful to tease apart your emotions and interpretations from the actual feedback. Simply ask yourself, *What do I feel? What's the story I'm telling? What's the actual feedback?*

Contain the story. When we distort feedback, we tend to do so in predictable ways. Specifically, we generalize shortcomings to see them as overly personal ("I messed up" becomes "I'm a bad person"), overly permanent ("I messed up this time" becomes "I always mess up"), or overly pervasive ("I did this wrong" becomes "I do everything wrong"). Again, ask yourself, *What's the actual feedback?*

Change your vantage point. If our interpretation is distorted, perhaps we need to view the feedback from a different perspective—that of a friend or sibling, or ourselves 10 to 20 years in the future. Ask yourself, *How might my sister/my colleague/the future me interpret this feedback?*

Quick Guide for Receiving Feedback

- **Be prepared; be mindful**
- **Separate the strands: feeling, story, feedback**
- **Contain the story**
- **Change your vantage point**

How to Give Feedback

Sometimes we are called to offer feedback to someone else. If you work in education, chances are good that it's part of your job to give feedback—to students, to staff, to people you supervise. When it's your turn to offer feedback, you'll find it helpful to keep in mind your own challenges receiving and acting on feedback. It can also be helpful to distinguish among three types of feedback.

Quick Guide for Giving Feedback

- **Appreciation:** validate and share concrete affirmation
- **Coaching:** creating conditions for transformation through inquiry
- **Evaluation:** letting someone know where they stand

Before offering feedback, take a moment to check in with the recipient about the kind of feedback they are wanting or expecting. You might ask, "I'm intending to give you coaching; is that how you're hearing it? From your point of view, is that what you need right now?"

Appreciation. "I'm so glad you're on this committee. Your insight this afternoon really moved the discussion forward." Although this kind of feedback may seem to be the least helpful, it's essential to building relationships and creating inclusive learning environments. And let's be honest, it's often what we want when we ask for feedback. We all need appreciation and validation from time to time.

Coaching. "When you said that, it seemed to me you were feeling frustrated, and others in the group stopped listening. Is that what you saw?" Coaching can help us learn and grow by focusing our attention and energies. However, it requires that both parties be clear on the role of the person offering feedback. For example, well-intended administrators often offer coaching feedback following an observation, when teachers are expecting evaluation and hoping for appreciation.

Evaluation. "This assignment asked you to contrast two poems, but you analyzed only one. You'll have to redo it if you want a passing grade." Evaluative feedback tells us where we stand. Although this type of feedback can leave us feeling judged, if we *don't* receive a clear message on our standing, we go looking for it in appreciation and coaching feedback, which doesn't always give us an accurate reading on our performance.