



Chatsworth Consulting Group

Effective Feedback is a Gift

“There I was, representing the firm in front of the client, and I wasn’t really certain if I was presenting the ideas in the best way possible. In fact, I wasn’t really sure of myself at all!”

Have you ever felt this way? Wondered if your employees or coworkers might be feeling this way? Not being certain of one’s abilities and the best way to use one’s knowledge is all too common, and it can be the direct result of too little feedback.

When asked to describe the most frustrating thing about their work, many people answer “too little feedback.” “I have no idea how I am doing – I don’t know if something is off-base until the project, or my manager, blows up in my face,” “I don’t know if what I’m doing is great. I don’t know what really works for my boss or the company,” or “Sometimes I feel like I’m making it all up as I go along.” Comments like these are all too common.

Feedback is clearly something we crave. It’s human nature to want to know what others think of us – to need someone else’s opinion. In fact, feedback is extremely necessary to be successful, but it is not something that we easily ask for, or that we easily offer to others.

In our culture, we generally misunderstand what feedback is and how beneficial it can be. We often think that it shows weakness to need or ask for feedback. We are uncertain about how to give feedback to others. We do not see that feedback helps us to know and build on our strengths and to fortify our weaknesses. Basically, we do not understand the true nature of feedback, how it works, and what it can offer.

Effective feedback is both a communication tool and a developmental tool. Feedback helps us make certain that we are going in the same direction as others we work and live with and that we have the same understanding of what things mean and what is happening. It is also the only way we know if what we are doing, and how we are doing it, is effective.

We are often afraid to receive feedback because we fear seeing what is really “wrong” with us. But feedback says as much about the giver as the receiver. Any feedback we receive is truly just one person’s opinion or perception, and it is not necessarily “the truth.” And yet we often grit our teeth and close our minds – because we’re afraid of being hurt. If we can remember that it is only one person’s opinion, however important to us that person may be, perhaps we can begin to process whatever they offer...and then decide for ourselves how to use the information most effectively.



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Similarly, we are often afraid, or at least uncomfortable, with offering feedback to someone else.

Often a manager's most-dreaded task is to sit down with an employee and offer some constructive criticism. Such dread may mean that the conversation never happens, or that the topic gets glossed over so quickly that the employee leaves the conversation without an understanding that there is behavior that needs to be changed. Perhaps "negative" feedback is hidden in so much positive news that the employee leaves thinking they've just gotten a great review, and in reality, they were put on notice. Or the feedback gets "dumped" on them, leaving the employee completely demoralized – having heard only the "negative" things that were said.

In truth, effective feedback is a gift. When we are able to offer someone a glimpse into how their actions are being perceived and received, we offer them a chance to modify their behavior in order to be more effective. Similarly, if we want to succeed, it is important to get feedback from others as to how we're really doing. We simply need to learn how to give and receive feedback in such a way that it can work miracles.

To effectively deliver feedback, keep some simple guidelines in mind, a few of which are listed below:

- 1. Feedback needs to be specific.** Clearly describe the specific behavior and the direct result of that behavior. Generalizations do not work because they are easy to argue with and difficult to completely comprehend. Offer specific examples to ensure agreement as to what is being discussed.
- 2. It is important to own your feedback – to speak from the "I."** This makes the process work for three reasons. First, it is more difficult for the receiver to argue with your perceptions or feelings – you feel how you feel and you see what you see. Second, it is impossible to give feedback on something you have not seen or experienced yourself. Feedback is not hearsay. Third, when you speak from the "I," it puts both parties of the conversation on the same level. When you speak using "you," it is much more authoritative, or even parental.
- 3. Feedback needs to be timely.** Both positive and constructive feedback needs to be shared as quickly after the behavior as possible. If you wait too long to share feedback, the conversation will likely be an argument over what actually happened rather than a sharing of useful feedback.

It also needs to be the "right" time to have a feedback conversation. Both you (the giver) and the receiver need to be in the correct state of mind. If emotions are flying, or if other people are present, it is not the best time for a feedback conversation.

There are also guidelines for effectively receiving feedback, a few of which are listed here:

1. **Remember to breathe.** Many of us tense up when someone offers to “give us feedback.” When we get tense, we are less able to hear what they say – whether it is good or bad, helpful or not.
2. **Listen carefully to what is being said and make certain you clearly understand the meaning.** It is very easy to “assume” you know what someone means. However, unless you really clarify and confirm what you hear, you may be reacting to something that exists only in your own mind. Ask for specific examples.
3. **Give yourself time to digest what you have heard before you respond** – either positively or negatively. Even good feedback can be difficult to really absorb, and it is important to grant yourself the time you need before you decide whether it is something that you wish to consider.

Feedback can be an extremely effective developmental tool. It gives us necessary information – with it we know what we are doing that is working, and what and how we can improve. Effective feedback enables us to perform our jobs and present our ideas in the best manner possible. We need only remember that feedback is a two-way street – and to follow the guidelines that enable us to gather and share this information more effectively.

For more information on effective feedback, or to discuss receiving a formal 360° assessment, contact Lisa Kohn or Robyn McLeod at 877-405-7288 or info@chatsworthconsulting.com.

Chatsworth Consulting Group, based in New York and Pennsylvania, helps individuals and organizations articulate and realize their goals. By taking a holistic approach to consulting and coaching, CCG uncovers the often-hidden opportunities for success so that clients can move forward with greater focus and purpose. Learn more by visiting www.chatsworthconsulting.com or calling 1-877-405-7288.