

What They Really Think of You—Keys to Successful Feedback

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The odds are very high that regardless of how highly skilled and capable you are, there are ways for you to improve as a project manager, team member or leader. This is a significant opportunity for growth. But if you are not looking at your faults from the perspective of others, your ability to seize this opportunity is diminished.

Although feedback can be painful, it is important because it provides you the opportunity to improve your performance. That can only be done when you regularly and honestly examine yourself through the eyes of others.

There are several keys to get successful feedback:

Provide and seek feedback frequently. It is best to put feedback on a schedule, such as weekly or monthly, or tied to program milestones. When feedback is regularly scheduled, it becomes less stressful. And remember that feedback is not a one-way activity. When you offer others the chance to give you feedback, it gives you the opportunity to give them feedback as well. This can be critical in matrix organizations, or when you have no direct authority over people supporting you.

Seek direct and anonymous feedback. While one-on-one direct feedback with team members is very valuable, you might also choose to seek anonymous feedback as well. Both can be effective and work well together. Technology has made anonymous feedback easy to achieve at a low cost. There are dozens of providers of online surveys available, and a quick Web search will help you identify them.

Minimize criticism. Avoid criticism by focusing on what you and the reviewer can do in the future. Even though you are looking at the past, the context of your discussion should be on future behaviors. If the circumstances warrant criticism, then have a "facts-based discussion," not an emotional outburst.

Use feedback as a communication tool. Frequent feedback allows you to address any issues with the group and communicate your commitment to improve, where needed. Feedback also increases trust and provides greater opportunity for open dialogue and understanding. People often rally behind a leader that acknowledges imperfection, especially when they see a commitment to improve, and they become more forgiving of transgressions.

Don't overreact to your feedback. People often take for granted the positive and emphasize the negative. Allow time for the feedback to sink in to give it perspective and context. Do not discount the feedback your colleagues provide, because their perspective of you is very real to them. Most importantly, do not harbor resentment or retaliate against those who have provided negative feedback.

Brainstorm for improvement. Too many people want change to be an instantaneous process, but remember that it's a journey. Once you identify ways to improve, focus on the easiest or smallest areas first, and judge their effectiveness as the feedback process progresses over time. You will be surprised at how small adjustments can make tremendous differences.

Honesty is the best policy when it comes to improving your performance. Honestly looking at yourself (warts and all) requires effort. It is easy to go through life as leader without truly assessing your performance from the perspective of others. But if you are committed to personal growth and improvement, garnering honest feedback is a requirement. Systematically seeking feedback will make you a better leader today, tomorrow and in the future.



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