



ENCORE

Solutions - on Leadership...

Let's Try Feed-Forward

Among the essential skills we expect leaders to have is giving and receiving feedback. Everyone needs to know how they are doing, what they might improve, what they are particularly good at, etc. Feedback focuses on the past, and in particular on what you did recently. And, that's important in providing guidance on how you can do it better in the future.

Suppose that in addition to getting better at your current set of skills you also want to work on developing a new skill or competency. How do you get information on how you might go about doing that? Marshall Goldsmith, one of the best known executive coaches, in an article written in 2002, suggests a process for doing this which he calls *FeedForward*.

The FeedForward process begins with you selecting a behavior or skill that you want to develop. This should be something that will make a positive, significant change in your work and life. From there you begin to solicit input from others. You can do this on either an individual basis or as a group exercise with your team or even large numbers of people. For example, in a one-on-one conversation with an individual you respect for giving thoughtful advice, you might describe what you want to work on – for example, *“I want to learn to be a better listener to the single individual I’m conversing with when others are trying to get my attention.”* – and ask him or her for one or two suggestions that would help you become better.

And, then you repeat this process with enough other people to get a rich set of actionable suggestions. From these suggestions you can develop an action plan to get you started on the process of developing your new skill.

As noted earlier, you can also use this same technique as a group exercise in a small team meeting or even with larger groups. You give the group a few minutes of “I” time to each formulate and write down their statements of what they want to change, and invite them to begin to interact with each other in one-on-one conversations getting suggestions along the way. Goldsmith reports that in 10 to 15 minutes, each individual will have had the opportunity to talk with six or seven people and collect a rich set of suggested starting points.

When done in such a group setting, participants describe the exercise as helpful, energizing, useful, and fun.

From his use of this tool, Goldsmith has identified eleven reasons for trying FeedForward:

1. We can change the future. We cannot change the past. “By giving people ideas on how they can be even more successful, we can increase their chances of achieving success in the future.”
2. It can be more productive to help people be “right,” than prove that they were “wrong.” FeedForward focuses on solutions, not problems.
3. FeedForward is especially suited to successful people. “Successful people like getting ideas that are aimed at helping them achieve their goals.”
4. FeedForward can come from anyone who knows about the new skill. It does not require the two individuals to know each other.
5. People don’t take FeedForward as personally as feedback.
6. Feedback can reinforce personal stereotyping and negative self-fulfilling prophecies. And, too often feedback reinforces a feeling of failure.
7. Most of us hate getting negative feedback and we don’t like to give it either.
8. FeedForward can cover almost all of the things that can be covered in feedback. Rather than asking for feedback about a particular situation, ask for FeedForward.
9. FeedForward tends to be much faster and more efficient than feedback.
10. FeedForward can be a useful tool to apply with managers, peers, and team members.
11. People tend to listen more attentively to FeedForward than feedback.

Consider this to be a new tool that you can put in your tool bag for your personal use and for your teams. And, this week, give it a test run. Select some skill you’d like to develop or improve and use the tool to help you get started.