How excited do we get when someone tells us they want to give us some feedback?

For many of us, not very excited! No one ever feels like they are creating job security or strengthening relationships when they give feedback and thus don’t always provide the truth.

Dr. Marshall Goldsmith, an authority in helping successful leaders get even better, found that if instead of focusing solely on feedback, we should also focus on feedforward.

Feedforward is a process of gaining positive suggestions from others that are pertinent to improving performance in a specified area.

Why does feedforward work?

• When you make it clear to your stakeholders that you need their help in order to improve an area of development they become willing to share their ideas and thoughts on how to get better. They finally feel like they have a stake in the process.
• Feedforward is focused on sharing positive, future oriented suggestions.
• By following up on the suggestions you receive, you demonstrate your commitment to grow and your stakeholders develop an increased desire to help you and to share their thoughts.

How do I implement the process?

• Make it informal. You can ask for feedforward suggestions in person, on the phone or via email.
• Keep your conversations focused. The purpose of the feedforward conversation is to answer the question, “What can I do to get better in my area of development?”
• Keep the conversation very simple. “I am working on becoming a better listener. Can you give me a positive suggestion on how I can do this? What are some positive things you’ve noticed that good listeners do?”

Who should I ask to provide me with this information?

• The best people to help you are those that are in a position to give you accurate information about your behavior. They might be your supervisors, peers and/or direct reports.
• You need to make sure they feel safe enough to be completely honest with you.
• Will they fair in their assessment?
• Will they take a few minutes on occasion to give you their suggestions?
What are the major roadblocks to doing feedforward?

- What are the roadblocks that keep you from asking for feedforward?
  - It feels awkward.
  - I think it needs to be a formal process.
  - It is difficult to change culture; this is not a part of our culture.
  - I am so busy already, how do I fit it into my schedule.
  - I don’t know how to do it.
  - I don’t know who I should ask or how many people.

- How can I overcome these roadblocks? What are some of the best practices used to create success?
  - Don’t put too much pressure on yourself.
  - Make it an informal experience. Fit it into your regular conversations.
  - Create a reminder in Outlook.
  - Practice what you are going to say with someone.
  - Cast a wide net and include as many people as you possibly can.
  - Be quick – a 2 minute conversation may be long enough.

Important things to remember

- The recommendations you receive are accurate reflections of how you can improve from their perspective.
- The responses you receive are current indicators of your behavior.
- Feedforward is a way for others to support you in your goals and challenge you to reach your full potential.
- Remember to thank them for willingly helping you.
- Don’t spend time debating the responses. Just say, “thank you.”
- You do not need to implement every suggestion. Ask yourself, “What would happen if I implemented this suggestion?”

The magic of feedforward is that it’s a positive way to get many more ideas than one could probably use. Choose a few and try them out. You’ll be amazed at what will happen!

Adapted from “Peer Coaching Overview” by Andrew Thorn, Marilyn McLeod and Marshall Goldsmith. ©2007.