

# RECEIVING FEEDBACK WELL

Receiving feedback with grace and curiosity is a powerful skill to master. If you're truly going to succeed, you need to be able to listen closely and learn from feedback, even if you disagree with it. This is our guide to receiving feedback in a way that honors who you are and the person giving you feedback, and creates opportunities for success.

Receiving feedback well, doesn't just happen in the feedback meeting itself. In order to show up as a leader, it's important to consider these four stages:

1. Prepare for the feedback meeting.
2. Remain curious in the feedback meeting.
3. Prepare for a follow-up meeting.
4. Remain curious in the follow-up meeting.

Feedback is an opportunity to understand the impact that you have on others and to decide if it's the impact that you want to have. We'll be using our Leader in You® framework to walk you through these four stages.

## ① PREPARE

If you have a sense you're going to get feedback, particularly if it's going to be difficult to hear, it's important to prepare. Consider these things:

- **Pause.**  
Think about your goal for this meeting and set your intention to manage any reactivity that arises by reminding yourself of that goal.

If you get reactive, you can PAUSE and ask yourself, **"Is what I'm about to do or say in alignment with my goal for this meeting?"**

- **Reflect.**  
Consider what you're afraid of going into this situation and how you can be at your best. Then, guess at what the other person is likely afraid of in this situation and how you can help them be at their best.

When someone you care about or someone with power is about to give you feedback, it can seem like they aren't at all afraid, but don't believe it. As you know if you have ever given someone challenging feedback, it's scary and hard!

So make a guess to answer the question, **"What are they afraid of in this situation?"** This will help you understand their behavior and not take it personally.

- **Script.**  
It's always helpful to write out a script to support you in receiving feedback. Give some thought to how you want to respond as a leader versus react. If it's challenging feedback, think about how you'll remain curious and open in the conversation. If it's positive feedback, you may want to ask about the specifics so you clearly understand what you did that's valuable, and how it contributed to success.

## ② FEEDBACK MEETING

During the feedback meeting, it's important to **understand** what's being said and what's expected, so that you can consider the possibilities of how you might move forward. Using the work you did to prepare for this meeting, remember to pause and think of your goal, reflect on yourself and the person giving feedback, and pull from any scripting you wrote when not in the heat of the moment.

- **Remember the possibilities.**  
Enter into the discussion with a possibility mindset. As you're receiving feedback, you could think to yourself, "What would it look like for me to do things differently moving forward?" You may not necessarily be ready to discuss it yet, but it can be helpful to at least start thinking about the possibilities in this initial meeting.
- **Take ownership.**  
Listen with curiosity and without defending. This can be uncomfortable, but it's a critical first step to receiving feedback—you need to demonstrate that you can actually listen to the information that's being presented. Then, if you're confused or unclear, you can ask for clarity. And again, listen calmly. You'll be demonstrating that receiving clear feedback is important to you.
- **Focus on the "we".**  
No one likes to get bad information about their performance, and fewer people like to deliver it. Thanking the messenger is an important part of the conversation because it keeps you engaged in the moment and let's them know that it's important to you to find a way to move forward **together**. At this point, it's not the time to worry about whether or not the information is exactly true.  
  
Show that you can listen with an open mind and stay professionally engaged.
- **Take action.**  
Let them know that you plan to take the feedback and absorb it more fully. Also, be sure to schedule a follow-up meeting where you'll have prepared a response to their input that's not steeped in emotion.
- **Review and Refine.**  
In addition to the followup meeting, you'll want to let them know that it's important for your success that you have additional meetings on the calendar where you can discuss your successes, your challenges, and your suggestions for moving forward.

## ③ PREPARE AGAIN

The goal of taking the time to prepare for the next meeting is to be ready to seek clarity about those areas that you don't fully understand, as well as to give yourself the opportunity to consider your impact and note how you might go about changing that impact. So, as you prepare for the follow-up meeting, consider these things:

- **Pause and Reflect.**

As you reflect on the feedback given to you, write down the key points that you heard and any examples you were given. Then, sit down and read the feedback aloud. If there are examples, read those aloud too so that you have "heard" all the feedback in your own voice.

The goal here is to decrease your reactivity and hear the information for what it is—a snapshot of your performance as viewed through another's eyes. It's not *the* truth about who you are; rather, it's their experience of your actions and/or their experience of the effect of your actions on others.

- Whether or not it was your intention, can you imagine that you might have had the impact they described?
- Can you understand how others might have concerns about the behavior or impact described?

Remember, the goal is to see how someone might have had this experience of you so that you can learn from it. If you can understand your impact, no matter what your intention was, you can determine how you might have a different impact in the future by making different behavioral choices.

- **Script.**

After reflecting on the feedback you were given, think about some questions you might ask to give you additional clarity. For example:

- Can they provide you with examples of your behavior (if they haven't yet), so that you might better understand what others are seeing?
- If there is certain behavior that they want you to stop, what would the new behavior look like?

## ④ FOLLOW-UP MEETING

How you behave in the follow up meeting is critically important. Taking responsibility when it's yours, asking for more information when you need it, and demonstrating your investment in learning, are central to moving forward. Remember, as a professional or as a family member, you want to discuss the feedback while in "neutral" so that you can hear what's being said without an emotional charge.

The goal is to let them know how they've influenced you with their feedback and that you'd like to influence them with your thoughts and questions.

- **Talk about the possibilities.**

Let them know the pieces of feedback that you understand and how you plan to tackle the behaviors that have been seen as problematic.

For example:

*I've been reflecting on the feedback that I'm experienced as impatient and a bulldozer in meetings. I realized that I'm often running from one meeting to another and can seem impatient because I am to get to my next meeting on time. In light of this feedback, I realize that I need to create a time cushion around meetings so that I'm not zipping from one to the next. This will make it possible for me to slow down and work more collaboratively with the group.*

- **Take ownership.**

Again, let them know that both positive and negative feedback are important to you. Discuss any feedback that you don't understand or agree with. The goal here is to get more specific information that will help you understand better and allow you to determine how to respond. In most instances, they will readily describe examples or share a story about a time when the behavior was played out.

For example:

*This next bit of feedback is certainly valuable, and, it doesn't fit my experience. I'd appreciate some examples of the instances when this has been an issue. I'm not trying to dodge responsibility here, it's just that without examples, I'm not sure where to begin to adjust my behavior.*

Occasionally though, they won't have any examples to share and they will simply repeat the original feedback. This can be very frustrating. During these interactions, remember to Pause and Reflect so that you don't sound defensive.

For example:

*Without examples, it's tough for me to know how to change my behaviors. For my part, I honestly can't come up with any instances where this has been true but I will do my best to stay aware of this concern as I go forward. And, I would appreciate it if you would point it out immediately if you see it in action.*

Confirm that this is a reasonable request.

The most difficult response you can get in a follow up meeting—and the most surprising to most people—is when there are no examples to share but instead you are told, *It's nothing anyone can put their finger on, but people experience it when they're around you.* This type of feedback is vague and it requires that you get very serious, very quickly to determine the issue.

For example, if people feel "put down" around you or if they feel "uncomfortable" around you then you need to figure out what you're doing and make behavioral adjustments immediately. Vague feedback

about how people experience you is important because it often indicates that people are losing respect for you.

Whether you agree with this feedback or not, it's really important to try to get a better sense of this in an ongoing way, since without respect you lose credibility and that will undermine your success.

Pay particular attention to feedback that suggests either directly or indirectly that people are losing confidence in you. If the person providing the feedback is not helpful, it may make sense to talk with a colleague and get their perspective or work with a coach on how to move forward.

- **Focus on the “we”.**

Again, it's important to thank them for the feedback. Then, let them know that it's important to you that you find a way to move forward in a way that allows you and the team to both be successful.

For example:

*Thanks again for this feedback. This is how I'm envisioning my new interactions with X person/team... I'd love to hear your input on whether or not this sounds reasonable.*

- **Take action.**

At the end of the meeting, recap what you've heard, clarify what the next steps are, the new behaviors you'll be exhibiting, and ways that they can communicate to you in the moment if they see the old behaviors coming out.

- **Review and Refine.**

Remind them that, in order for you to be successful, it's important to check-in regularly. Before leaving this meeting seek to setup a cadence of check-in meetings where you'll discuss your successes, your challenges, any new feedback they may have, and your thoughts and suggestions for moving forward.

Getting difficult feedback can be hard and we'd encourage you to consider it a gift. It may lead you to change your behavior or to understand differently how someone you work with sees the world.

Most of the time, receiving feedback well will have a lot of benefits. But there are some situations where it doesn't matter what you do. The boss, team, or your spouse has already decided what they want and aren't interested in working with you around making a change. When that happens, it may make sense to think about whether or not it's the right team, company, or relationship for you.

The more effective you become at receiving feedback well, the more powerful you'll become.