



Feedback

"Feedback is the lifeblood of champions" so Daley Thompson the British Olympian once said. And I am sure that there have been many great people who have said similar things. This guide looks at feedback in great detail to really understand what makes for great and impactful feedback so to set us up as excellent feedback givers and hungry feedback receivers.

Overview

Feedback is a crucial part of being a compassionate leader as, in our desire to inspire commitment, we know that we have much to learn and are also keen to help others grow. We know that we won't always get things right, but, with the correct feedback, we can always do better.

"Securing the Best for All" demands that we need to know what *"All"* wants, and that can't happen without some feedback.

Feedback is all around us; it's a constant. Our mind and body are set up to receive constant feedback. It is nothing out of the ordinary. It is natural. You cannot move a muscle without feedback. An oven cannot work without feedback to regulate the temperature. The engine in a car needs constant feedback to operate. As you drive so you receive feedback all the while - "Am I going to fast"? Feedback is all around us. Feedback is a loop - it is never bad, it just is. How we give or receive it might be bad however!

Key questions

Here are some key questions in the rationale for using feedback as a compassionate leader.

Why is feedback important?

This is what I have learnt on my life's journey regarding why feedback is important:

- **To improve** - ourselves and the other - we grow through feedback. In fact, it is the only way we grow.
- **To share knowledge** - so that others can achieve, so that we can delegate, so that we can move on, so a team can perform. There are so many benefits in sharing knowledge.
- **To let others, know what you think / believe.** This is a fascinating one. People are looking for connection, approval and affirmation; it is a key part of relating and leading.
- **You give feedback to receive feedback?** This is brilliant and the theme I once heard a comedian expand on; to say, "I love you" is not a statement, but a question as really the (subconscious) response you are fishing for is "I love you too, Honey"!! When we encourage others, perhaps we are looking for encouragement ourselves!!
- **We feel good because we help others.** Altruism is a powerful drug and by definition feedback should be a compassionate act. As we know from earlier in our programme, we are motivated by self-interest (remember Aesop's fable about the apple tree)? It does make me feel great when I help other people grow and that in itself is a great "why" for feedback.
- **Others feel good too!**



- **Instil confidence** - in others and ourselves. Even when the feedback might be to correct a behaviour or an action, once having given the feedback the other person now feels more able to successfully try again.
- **Stop a decline in quality, behaviour or attitude.** Getting things wrong impact, us emotionally too, as we know. With brilliant feedback the rot stops.
- **To gain commitment** - for all the above reasons!
- **It's a constant** - BAU (Business As Usual). This should be the truth. We are constantly receiving and giving feedback even if we are not aware of it - consider the impact of Albert Mehrabian's work on the emotional contest of communication.

You may have noted a few less useful "reasons" why people give feedback

- **To assert authority** - from an unhealthy Ego driven position "I am the boss, I will give you feedback".
- **Because we have to like a performance management process** - it is a process rather than meaningful so creates a compliance not a commitment.

If we don't give or receive feedback or it is done badly, what is the cost to us, the people around us and the organisations and communities within which we serve?

Feedback is about growth for all. None or getting it wrong stunts that opportunity.

When to give feedback?

When it is needed - timely;

- Close enough to an event to be relevant.
- Far enough away for any emotion to be parked.
- Frequent minor "course corrections" is better than saving up a load of different feedback!
- When ready to receive it? Ensure a receptive response to feedback by ascertaining readiness. Create an "agreement" - a bit like delegation; *"When could we talk about ...?"* *"May we catch up to discuss ...?"*
- And the Notice period? *"May I see you next week to discuss ...?"* What's the impact? Will they prepare or lose sleep between the request and the feedback? We tend to think negatively and might fill in the gaps.

Where to give feedback?

- A "suitable place" is the best way to phrase this, being cognisant and compassionate about the needs of the other. Rarely a public place but you can use the maxim "Praise in public" - but even that needs compassionate reasoning; some people are embarrassed with public praise.
- An "agreed" place - if it is agreed, then it is suitable.
- Suitable;
 - Emotionally - be aware of what emotions there may be and be compassionate.
 - Physically - comfortable, private, safe?
 - Time - don't rush it as, in reality, you don't know where it will go and how long it will take.
 - Distractions - remove them. Shut your laptop, turn off your phone, clear your diary and ask not to be disturbed.



On what can we give feedback?

There is only one thing that we can give feedback on and that's the truth.

Truth Telling - we can only give feedback on what we observe. We can share our feelings, but we must not judge others. We can share our intent, but we must not assume on others. Consider the Iceberg Theory - we can only feedback on what's above the water as we don't know what is beneath the surface. We can give feedback on hearsay, if we frame it as such.

To say "You don't like me because you were late" is not feedback, it is an emotive assumption and judgement. The fact that the person was late is all we can give feedback on. Why they were late is for them to reveal to us.

To whom can we give or receive feedback?

There is no hierarchy in feedback. It is omnipresent. The answer is **Everyone**.

There is a "*sphere of feedback*" with you at the centre; up, down sideways; we can receive feedback from all quarters and, by applying the rules above, can give feedback to all too.

Ourselves - we must apply these rules to our own self-feedback. You can always give yourself feedback - "Nice one Manley" or "You fool, you really messed that one up"

This also implies that if we "give" feedback to anyone, then we can "receive" it from anyone too!

If we can give or receive to and from anyone then who is the instigator of feedback? Anyone.

Receiver - I want feedback, I grow from it, so I will ask for feedback.

Giver - I can instigate, but should ask permission so transferring ownership.

To summarise there are just. Few simple guides to brilliant feedback and the journey of growth for all.

The acronym **NEST** springs to mind. A nest is a safe haven of growth!

When? Whom? Where? What

Needed **E**veryone **S**uitable **T**ruth

How to give feedback

A few simple guidelines on the how would be;

- **Ask permission.** "May we have a chat about ...", "I would like to talk with you, would Tuesday morning be OK"? "May I share my thoughts on ..."?
- **Start with a "Check-in"** - you know the power of Check-In's by now that allow all to be truly present. Especially important where emotions may come into play and that is likely with feedback
- **Storytelling?** We can use our knowledge of storytelling. Linking your feedback to the "higher story" gives is purpose and direction
- **"It's not what you say, but how it lands that counts"**. Be compassionate in your choice of language when giving feedback; its not about you
- **Compassionate; be a compassionate leader** - "empathy with positive action" which means you need to understand the other person first and then act positively



The mindset needed for brilliant feedback

For you to receive feedback with all of its benefits, what needs to be going on in your mind?

To receive

We need to set ourselves up to be ready to give or receive feedback.

- **Open and non-judgemental.** To me this means that we can receive feedback from anyone as we do it without judgement on where it comes from. Regardless of their intent, we have a choice to receive. All feedback is a gift.
- **Growth Mindset.** *"I want to improve"*. Recognising that feedback is about growth. We discussed what it means to have a "growth mindset" way back in the first week of this programme.
- **Questioning?** Always asking questions. A natural curiosity. "Could I be better"? Questioning with intent to understand
- **Adult to adult.** We will be studying Transactional Analysis in the masterclass programme, but, in essence, in this context we mean be aware of your emotions, park your ego, make conscious choices
- **Trusting.** That the person giving the feedback has your best interests at heart and that there is gold in every comment
- **Understanding.** Trying to understand what is said and what is behind it. Consider their intent and motivation.
- **Honest.** With yourself. It is easy to fall into the trap of "denying" feedback and intellectualising a different truth. Be honest with yourself and accept feedback graciously.
- **Emotionally aware - of self and other.** What emotions might be rising within you as you hear the words? What emotions do you notice within the other? Be compassionate.
- **Respect the feedback and the feedback giver,** no matter your personal relationship with them
- **It's part of who we are - our culture.** It's BAU and a step along our journey of growth
- **There is a purpose to it.** It is relevant. It is about growth and development and opportunity.
- **Ego-less.** Park your own Ego and understand theirs

We can shorten the list to;

Growth mindset - Emotionally aware - Respect

To give

It does not take long to work out that the mindset is actually the same. All the same mental and emotional awareness is required to give as to receive. Brilliant feedback occurs when there is a mental and emotional alignment. Knowing there is only one mindset then feedback can occur in either direction.

To give feedback is to receive feedback and to receive is to give and the only thing in the way is ourself - our ego and our chimp.

Feedback can fire our "Chimp" - we must believe it is a gift, not a threat. When the amygdala takes over we stop being rational, we stop listening, we stop trying to fulfil self-worth, we just try to protect.



“I don’t trust/like/respect the person giving me feedback” - Even someone aggressively gesturing at you as they drive past you is still feedback. It is your ego blocking feedback.

The core skills

These are all skills of a compassionate leader.

Feedback is a communication exercise and brilliant feedback is when we replace the word “communication” with our preferred word of “dialogue”.

The core skills then are;

Communication, by which we mean dialogue and there are 2 sides to that;

- Talking - clear and precise. Don’t waffle. Don’t mumble. Don’t try to fill in silence. Brevity is clarity.
- Listening - we must listen with intent to understand and without judgement.
 - Listen with your whole body - 55% visual!
 - Listen to what is not being said - remind yourself on the Four levels of listening; levels 3 and 4 please!

Compassion

- To truly understand and then act on that knowledge with positive intent

Also, a quality is to be knowledgeable to give feedback. You need to know what you are talking about though only to a degree. You can only give feedback on Truth - observation - so you do need to know that. But specific subject matter knowledge? Potentially. It depends on what you are giving feedback on.

If I am critiquing a surgeon at work, my ignorance of how much blood there should be only dulls the depth of the feedback if the surgeon adopts a defensive mindset. It may be that my ignorant observations prompt the surgeon’s own questioning about how much blood there should be, and that’s not a bad thing!

There is no hard border between feedback and coaching. What started as feedback could lead to coaching. Knowledge can get in the way of effective coaching.

Developing the culture of feedback in your organisation

You can give brilliant feedback throughout your organisation, no matter your position; brilliant feedback is not a hierarchical broadcast of opinion, it is an opportunity for growth

There has been much research recently on the efficacy of performance management. It does not stack up as often it’s not timely or event led, it’s one-way top-down, it can be based on opinion not fact and is often used as a tool to rate performance rather than promote growth and development

With the organisations that I am involved with I encourage dropping the scheduled formal Performance Management in favour of Continuous Performance Feedback - CPF whereby ownership of the feedback sits with both parties and is instigated when needed. If all is going swimmingly well, then catch up informally regularly - there should be no surprises in appraisals!



The best way to develop a culture that all feedback is positive, is for the leadership group to ask for feedback, before giving it!

Rather than say “You mucked up there let’s talk about it”, you could start with “What could I have done better to have made that better”? And so, you will prompt some great feedback for you and a reflective discussion with the other on their own performance with them owning the feedback session. Much more powerful!