



OnGrowing

Asking for Feedback

“Receiving feedback sits at the intersection of these two needs—our drive to learn and our longing for acceptance.”

Douglas Stone & Sheila Heen

If you wake up excited to ask for feedback, you are a rare bird. The human ego is masterful at finding ways to avoid anything that might feel painful or increase self-doubt, and most of us assume that feedback is going to do just that.

So, a typical day passes without us inviting another person to offer input on our work or leadership, and POOF — there goes an opportunity to grow.

But each day offers another chance to remember that development is natural and necessary, *and* that every aspect of you is welcome. As Anais Nin says, “Perfection is static, and I am in full progress.”

Rather than waiting for feedback to come to you, we encourage you to ask for it, to welcome growth with arms wide open. It’s a move that not only yields benefits for individuals, but also for teams. When asking for feedback becomes an organizational habit, teams make better decisions and adapt and change more quickly. *(See links below, in the Deeper Dive)*

Below we’ll define some important terms, highlight an example, and offer a concrete way to begin.

What is Feedback?

Feedback is **information about how a person or group is doing in their effort to to reach a goal**, offered with the intention to improve performance.

We distinguish between two types: **positive feedback** (which offers reinforcement), and **constructive feedback** (which catalyzes change).

Positive feedback is overlooked and under-practiced in the workplace, despite offering tremendous benefits related to retention, profitability and productivity. A couple of tantalizing data points:

- Employees who receive feedback on their strengths turn over 14.9% less frequently than those who don't.
- When managers are given feedback on their strengths, teams perform 8.9% more profitably, and with 12.5% greater productivity. ([Gallup](#))

As for constructive feedback, we encourage you to ditch the terms “negative” and “critical” feedback, since those words tend to increase people’s resistance to feedback and signal that feedback is bad. By contrast, “constructive” connotes building; ideally, constructive feedback helps someone build their skills and effectiveness.

Growth-Oriented Leaders Invite Feedback

One of our clients, “Rose,” came to coaching because she had been recently promoted to a leadership role within a small organization. Overnight, she shifted from being “one of the gang” with her colleagues to being in a position where she supervised them.

During a coaching session, she spoke energetically and her eyes sparkled. She was excited about visions for the future of this little company, which she had just been entrusted to shape.

And, she felt worried. She had noticed that the easy give and take of ideas with her colleagues had dropped significantly due to the shift in power dynamics. The flow of feedback that used to be natural had turned dry.

Rose realized that she now needed to *invite* feedback. After deliberating, she landed on asking the question: *What ideas do you have about how I could improve as a collaborator?* **Notice that her question is singular, specific, and focused on something in her sphere of control.**

With her question ready, she considered who to ask, when, and how. She decided to

ask face-to-face and keep the conversations **brief, simple, and undramatic**... like they used to feel.

Over subsequent months, Rose continued to ask specific questions, soliciting both constructive as well as positive feedback. ("I've been working on keeping our key goal front and center. When have you seen me do this? Is it making a difference in our work?").

Rose noticed two shifts: people started offering input without her asking, and employees were asking one another for feedback more regularly — both *laterally and vertically*! A culture of feedback was forming, and the business was thriving. That year, not a single employee left, the company posted their best production numbers in history, and the company earned B-Corp status.

When we choose to move past our natural resistance to asking for feedback — recognizing that avoidance is just the ego's way of protecting us — we invite growth. It may not be easy or natural, but practice can yield positive results for us personally and collectively.

A Practice



Asking for Feedback

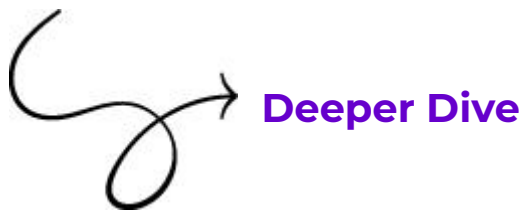
- **Formulate a single, specific question** you care about to solicit either positive or constructive feedback. A few examples:
 - How could I have improved my delivery in the presentation I made this morning?
 - In the presentation I made this morning, what did you experience as the most impactful moment, and why?
 - How reliable have I been in the last couple of weeks in my work with you?
 - What's working well for you in our weekly 1:1 meetings?
 - What is one action that I could start or stop doing to improve our team meetings?
- **List 1-4 people you want to ask** this question, then reach out and request a 10 minute live feedback conversation (and stick to the time limit!)
- **Prepare your mind, heart, and body** before each conversation. Do what works to help you feel open and ready to listen. Maybe this looks like taking a couple of breaths where your exhale is twice as long as your inhale. Maybe this means uncrossing your arms and legs and leaning back. (Even when we ask a question to solicit positive

feedback, our bodies naturally tense up, so we have to consciously prepare and calm ourselves.)

- **Let the other person know what to expect.** Let the person know you'll ask just one question, really listen, reply only with "Thank you" right now, and circle back later.
- **Really listen.** Ask your question. Resist the urge to take notes or distract yourself. Just keep breathing and drinking in what the other person offers. Once they finish (hopefully providing honest, candid feedback), **offer a sincere thank you — nothing else!**
- **Later, close the loop.** Share with them what you did or didn't do; let the person know the impact of their feedback.

If you're serious about your personal development, or if you're in a position to develop a whole culture of continuous improvement with a team or organization, asking for feedback is a straightforward, potent practice you can begin today.

"Developing a culture of asking for feedback may be the most cost-effective way to develop healthy, ever-evolving work cultures."



- [Using Neuroscience to Make Feedback Work and Feel Better](#) by David Rock, Beth Jones, and Chris Weller
- [The Most Effective Feedback Is the Kind You Ask For](#) by Chris Musser

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ONLY TO GROW

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[Cyndi Gueswel](#) and [Ellen Robinson](#) co-create a monthly newsletter primarily for our coaching clients, past and present. Through this joint venture, we continue conversations about your growth, relationships, and leadership.

- Because **you matter.**
- Because **how you are in the world matters** to those closest to you.
- Because **all the spheres you influence**, knowingly and unknowingly, **matter.**