

“Are you ready to listen to good feedback?”



“Feedback” is very much an in-word at the moment. In this context feedback means getting meaningful information or data from others regarding your goals, image, skills, positioning, performance or other relevant attributes. This data can be used strategically to enhance your career success or satisfaction. This is a suggested next step in your efforts to enhance your credibility in your current position, or as you look for that next step in your career ladder whether inside or outside your current organisation.

The more you seek feedback about your career goals, the more you will learn, grow, change, and even succeed. However, to do so you'll need to listen to comments that may temporarily be at variance with your own views or illusions about yourself.

For example, you may believe that you are well equipped for a higher-level role or job. However you may have a totally different view of your capabilities from those who could “influence” this hoped for move. If this is so, will they be candid and tell you what's erroneous or missing in your skills or professional style? To prevent this it's up to you to make it comfortable for them to tell you the truth. So if you deliberately put aside any ego considerations that may occur when you hear what they have to say, you can really learn from their feedback and probably accelerate your success.

Getting Started: According to research, the best way to get feedback is to ask for it from people you trust and respect, so here are some guidelines that will make it work in your best career interests:

- Welcome feedback, positive and negative, and accept it in the spirit it is given, even though it may hurt your feelings.

- If you proactively seek out feedback, you won't be surprised, or taken aback by something negative, and you will soon learn how to deal with any such comments.
- Accept that anyone may have good ideas about your strengths and weaknesses even though they probably will not have the fully appreciate the background.
- Understand that everyone has a right to his or her impressions or feelings about you as a person, as well as how you behave and how you communicate with others.
- Be open to changing if you hear something particularly meaningful that could alter your thinking on a potential career move.
- Avoid getting defensive by trying to justify your position on anything negative, as the worst thing you can do is to start arguing and end up with a damaged relationship.
- Remember that, in the final analysis you don't have to agree with it anyway, so try to ensure that they will not be afraid to give an honest.

Don't get side tracked: Now let's take a look at some sensitivities that could hamper your receiving honest appraisals of your work. Look at the following questions and if the answer to any is “yes” then I would suggest that you should develop an action plan to deal them:

- Am I often hesitant to ask for feedback because of embarrassment or fear of what might be the outcome?
- Am I inclined to be defensive in listening because it threatens my self-esteem?
- In all honesty, do I sometimes consider listening to feedback as giving other people undue power?
- Even when it's positive, do I find feedback too vague to be of any real value, or else do I discount it as a form of flattery?

- Even if I think the feedback is true, am I really ready to change or to act upon it?

So identifying a few trusted colleagues who will give you good, reliable and honest feedback, and then collecting, reflecting and utilising the information gathered are essential marketing tools for advancing your career.

Remember it is both positive and negative feedback that can increase your learning, insight, and professional competence and put you well on the road to success. However wouldn't it be much better to hear it from friends than to hear it at that appraisal interview or that job interview when it is too late to take corrective action?

I believe that we are entering the culture where the emphasis will be increasingly placed on this type of communication for people at all levels of management. A more sophisticated, structured and all embracing management tool is "executive coaching" but this is the subject for another day. The issue to be addressed today is to honestly answer the question "Are you ready to listen?"