Feedback – A Catalyst to Performance

Feedback is an integral tool that nourishes both professional and personal growth. In business, it can also stimulate process improvements and positive client outcomes. Therefore, knowing how to communicate feedback effectively is a key leadership skill. When delivered successfully as a motivational tool, the person on the receiving end is driven to start, stop, or continue behaviors that are affecting their performance. On the other hand, ineffective feedback can cause irreparable damage to a working relationship, preventing productivity, meaningful collaboration, and team performance. In addition to accomplishing its direct purpose, an effective feedback message is a broader self-development tool for the receiver, often having added benefits for other members of the team. Only when a leader has mastered the art of giving feedback themselves can they coach their team to do the same.

THE COMPONENTS OF FEEDBACK

When you're in the position of giving feedback, remember the following:

- **Be timely –** Ensure the receiver is ready to receive feedback. Give your feedback at the appropriate time and recognize that the receiver may not immediately respond.

- **Intend to be helpful –** Don't give feedback just for feedback's sake. It should be within the control of the receiver and meaningful to the performance of both the organization and relationship.

- **Highlight positive behaviors –** Talk about what you want the person to do, rather than what you don't want them to do.

- **Make your feedback specific, clear, caring, and constructive –** Be courageous with your feedback by eliminating filler language that makes it difficult to understand. Don't mix positive and constructive feedback.

- **Cross-check your understanding –** Promote an open dialogue and discussion to clarify understanding. A good follow-up question before ending the conversation is, "What is one thing you are taking away from our conversation?"

- **Be a mirror, not a hammer –** Leave the receiver free to determine their own solution and corresponding behavior. Feedback is not about control, but rather shaping behavior over time. In instances where critical performance improvement is needed, additional leadership tools would be used.

- **Use "I/We" vs. "You" language –** Using "I/We" statements opens the dialogue and prevents others from becoming defensive during the conversation. Instead of saying, "You were supposed to submit this report to me and now you are holding up the entire project," say, "I needed that report to present our findings to the board and acquire funding."

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THE FOUR DIMENSIONS OF PERFORMANCE

When implemented correctly, the Four Dimensions of Organizational Performance (as seen below) will have the effect of igniting talent, innovation, and functional execution within your business. For them to work as a larger system, they must each be serving their intended purpose in the organization.

In addition to its broader company-wide value, this model can also be used by leaders when preparing to give feedback, by discerning which of the four dimensions is lacking in an individual or team.

ALIGNMENT

The collective alignment to a clear strategic vision and defined priorities is key to employee productivity, purpose, and execution.

EMPOWERMENT

The process of self-empowerment and the support of people, enabling them to fully maximize resources and competencies and to own their role with the appropriate level of decision-making.

COLLABORATION

The utilization of differentiated organizational expertise to achieve a greater outcome than any one entity could obtain in isolation.

ACCOUNTABILITY

The collective responsibility and authority that propels consistency and high levels of execution.

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INTENT VS. IMPACT

We tend to judge ourselves by our intentions, but others by the impact they have on us. The Intent vs. Impact Model is a communication tool that helps leaders align their intentions with their impact on others, as well as gain a general understanding of what that impact looks like. It can also help identify how they are affected by others, past and present.
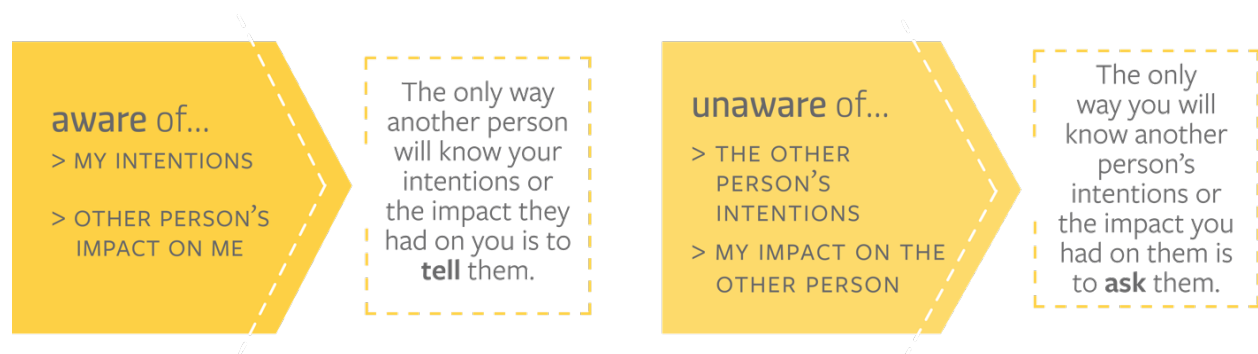
Intention refers to the meaning we want to convey through conversation or action with another person.

> For example, you sit down with a direct report to explain a new process. Your intention is to convey what the new process is and to explain it in a way that is easy to understand.

Impact is what the other person experiences through your conversation or action.

> Using the same example, let's look at how the other person received the information you gave. You may have felt that you were extremely eloquent in your delivery of this new process, but for some reason the person you were delivering the information to seemed frustrated. You had the opposite impact of what you intended.

This is where the Intent vs. Impact model becomes an integral part of the conversation.
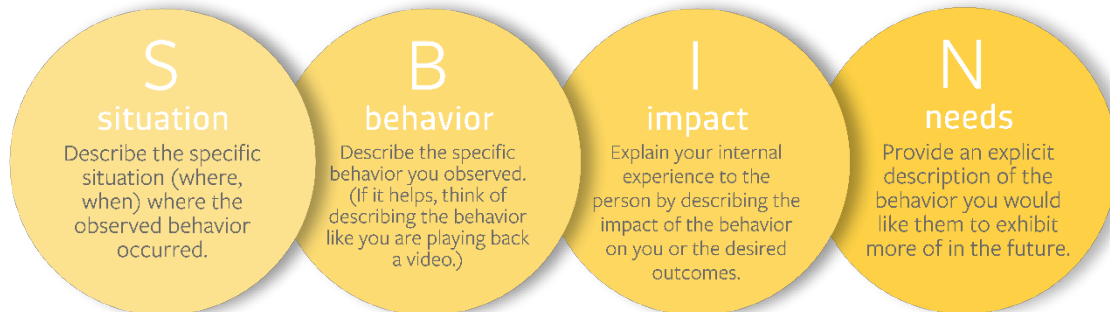
aware of…
> MY INTENTIONS

> OTHER PERSON'S IMPACT ON ME

The only way another person will know your intentions or the impact they had on you is to **tell** them.

unaware of…
> THE OTHER PERSON'S INTENTIONS

> MY IMPACT ON THE OTHER PERSON

The only way you will know another person's intentions or the impact you had on them is to **ask** them.

Let's look at how you could implement this to avoid the misunderstanding from the example above:

> "Susie, thanks for coming in. I'm not sure if you've heard but we have a new process we need to follow. My intention today is to teach you this new process so that you can begin implementing it. Please let me know if my explanations are working for you."

In disclosing your intentions and asking for her to share the impact you had on her, you are creating a communication loop that will help you both achieve understanding.

The opposite is also true. On many occasions, you will find yourself the receiver of information and the impact could be both positive and negative. In these moments, just as you started the conversation disclosing your intentions, you need to take a minute to disclose what the impact was on you.

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S situation — Describe the specific situation (where, when) where the observed behavior occurred.

B behavior — Describe the specific behavior you observed. (If it helps, think of describing the behavior like you are playing back a video.)

I impact — Explain your internal experience to the person by describing the impact of the behavior on you or the desired outcomes.

N needs — Provide an explicit description of the behavior you would like them to exhibit more of in the future.

Above is a model for how to give great feedback, whether you are reinforcing positive behaviors or identifying opportunities for growth. The more specific you are in each step, the more clearly your words will be interpreted, giving the receiver a better chance of shaping behaviors that create change.

Here is an example of how to use each step to have a great feedback conversation:

Step 1: Capture the situation: "Yesterday morning in the staff meeting…"

Step 2: Describe the behavior: "…you had several side conversations during my presentation."

Step 3: Deliver the impact: "When you were talking to others while I was presenting, it was very disruptive to the process of building alignment across the team."

Step 4: Identify the need: "In any future meeting or group interaction, I would appreciate you demonstrating behaviors that increase engagement, thoughtfulness, and respect to the group. This would help me see you as a partner in our leadership efforts."

SEEING FEEDBACK AS A GIFT

Feedback often gets a bad rap. Most of us have received feedback that has made us feel bad about ourselves and/or others. Sometimes, we internalize negative feedback and brand it as an attribute of ourselves ("I'm not a conscientious worker.") However, it is possible to flip the script on feedback.

One way to think about feedback as a gift is to consider the act of gift-giving and relate that to your feedback approach. For example, you usually purchase a gift for a reason, find something specifically for the person you're buying for, and ensure they are open to receiving a gift before giving it. Remember, feedback is the gift of time, energy, and knowledge provided to help someone grow in an area that hasn't yet been mastered. It's a way to help others understand their impact. It's also having someone's back so that they repeat the positive and change the negative.

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When we view feedback in the following ways, it becomes an opportunity for growth:

- It's neutral – not good nor bad – but is another data point for me to consider as I navigate my environment and the people in it.
- It's a way for me to learn from others who have different experiences and expertise than me.
- It provides me an opportunity to know how I affect others and change if I want to.

To ensure a culture of feedback within your team:

- Make it a habit. Give and seek out positive and opportunity feedback regularly.
- Frame it positively. When providing feedback, talk about what you want to see – the desired behavior – rather than what you don't want to see.
- Provide it immediately. Don't wait until you are frustrated to give feedback. Give feedback as close to the situation as possible, even when giving praise. This allows someone the opportunity for context and potential change.

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