

How to receive feedback to maximize its value

Most of us appreciate receiving feedback from our managers. After all, we want to know how we are performing. We need to identify areas to improve and we appreciate positive reinforcement for the things we are doing well. There is meaningful research that says feedback from the boss is very important to most of us.

There are two ways to look at feedback. *Evaluative feedback* looks at the past; it talks about how we did. It's the kind of feedback we receive during a performance appraisal. It's critically important and valuable.

When we think about coaching, we think in terms of *developmental feedback*. Developmental feedback looks to the future. It identifies ways to improve, ways to get better, ways to grow. When you receive feedback in a coaching session it will be developmental.

So how do you maximize the value of the experience? The key is to be open-minded. Yes, open-minded. That means we encourage you to do the two things that we believe demonstrate open-minded behavior.

1. Listen to what is said
2. Try to find value in what you hear

The tendency for most of us is to get defensive. That doesn't mean we demonstrate defensive behavior, but we think that way. We want to explain our actions or justify what we did. We want to clarify our position. We may not say it, but we think it. That is human nature.

An alternative approach is to ask yourself—how can I benefit from this? How will it help me? Is the change in behavior or approach that my manager is suggesting that significant? We tend to resist change—sometimes it's valuable to embrace change.

Now we have been discussing areas of improvement. Those are the most challenging pieces of feedback to hear. But a coaching session begins by reinforcing the positive. Great managers will always do whatever they can to ensure that their people know what they are doing well, why it's important to continue that and how they demonstrate those behaviors.

Again, we need to think about how to react to this kind of feedback. It feels good, but it also makes us uncomfortable. Too often our tendency is not to take it as seriously as we can. We want the manager to finish reviewing the positives so they can focus on the negatives.

We will encourage you to approach this differently as well. Don't look at the positives as an attempt on the manager's part to "sugar coat the bad news." As we teach in our *Consultative Selling Skills* Program, we do many things in an unconsciously competent way. Part of the manager's job is to make us more conscious of the things we do well so we do them by choice and do them more often.

Now, this doesn't mean you can't push back. If you disagree, you need to explain that to your manager. They may have misinterpreted what they saw or what you did. But push back in an effort to learn, not to discount the feedback. Managers plan their coaching sessions, so when they identify areas for you to improve, it's probably worth listening.

When you reach agreement regarding how to get better, work with your manager to develop a way to attack the issue. And when you are asked to commit to action, be honest and direct about what you can and cannot do. And then of course, follow through. Remember, it's for your benefit.

Finally, if you are not being coached or getting feedback, ask for it. Sometimes time and geographic issues make it difficult. But you deserve it and if you are not getting it, you have every right to request it.