



The Best Type of Feedback Develops Self-Awareness.

Description

We all can agree that feedback is helpful. However, the method of feedback helps determine its effectiveness. The most effective feedback occurs when one is self-aware to the point that they spot their areas of strength and success as well as their areas of potential improvement. This means they are able to provide an overall assessment of their performance and a review of situations they're involved in.

Self-awareness is so critical that I made it the subject of chapter one in my book *The Busy Leader's Handbook*. I am self-aware that this is an area I need to improve on!

When we provide the person we're giving feedback to the chance to go first, it helps them hone their self-awareness. Also, the process is much more telling than when we start out with our own impressions. When the supervisor goes first, it limits learning how well the person can assess themselves and the situation. It may also cloud the conversation with our own perceptions, which limits the person's willingness to share.

I find most people have a fairly good idea of how they are doing. However, this is not always true. Think about people you have worked with and/or led who have not done well. I bet one of the big issues is the person just lacked self-awareness. Even when provided direct evidence, they likely did not adjust their performance. Sadly, this lack of self-awareness impacts their understanding of why they are not successful.

A question I received on a podcast this past week was about the steps to build self-awareness. A tool I have shared in the past is the self-review. It's comprised of several questions an employee answers, then shares their responses with their supervisor. These questions include: *What do you feel your strengths are? What are some wins you've experienced so far this year? What areas do you feel you can help others in? What areas would you like to learn more about or improve upon?* I find most people do very well on this self-review, and it makes the development conversation flow naturally.

Twice this week I used the approach of starting conversations by asking for a self-assessment (versus my natural tendency, which is to start with "Here is what I think"). To follow is a quick description of one of those occasions.

Rachael Gillette was just named president of the Studer Community Institute. She asked me what I felt should be her focus in her expanded role. I had the self-awareness to pause and ask what her thoughts were. She proceeded to do a great job sharing her impression of where she feels SCI is, talking about what she would like to do short-term and long-term, and discussing an area in which SCI can do better. This showed me that she is a great fit for the role and has a very good grasp on what needs to be done to continue to have a positive impact.

During the upcoming week I am facilitating a session for the top eight leaders of a very large company. While there is plenty of data to review, each participant is completing a survey that will help guide the conversation. Some of the questions are: *What do you feel the biggest opportunities are in the next 12 months? What are the biggest challenges? What keeps you up at night?* Then some have the leaders rate responses on a one to ten scale, with ten being the best. For example: *How consistent do you feel the organization is with employees and customers? How well is your current staff and leader development working to help achieve the desired outcomes?*

There are ten questions in all. When we meet, we will share both the overall results and the breakdown on the ten questions. For example, in the consistency question, people's answers may vary, which leads to a great discussion. Starting with a self-assessment helps in many ways.

Another useful exercise for building self-awareness and generating self-feedback is to have people view—in person or via video—those that are achieving better results than they are, and then share what they learned. Two groups this works well with are teachers and physicians.

For example, a video was made of a teacher whose students showed excellent growth over the years. Teachers with similar students who were not experiencing the growth viewed the video. Very quickly, the teachers pointed out things they would now incorporate into their classroom. Teachers are smart; they just don't often have the opportunity to view others in action. This experiment showed once they had the opportunity to see a better approach, their self-awareness took over.

The same is true of physicians. An organization showed video of those physicians who had better results in patient experience. Physicians that did not do as well in this area viewed the video. In a matter of weeks, every physician was doing well. This is another group that does not often have the opportunity to view others. When people see what *right* looks like, they will adjust to that.

There are many ways to help people acquire the skills to improve their own self-awareness and self-feedback ability. The key to the best feedback is asking the individual to go first. This also builds their self-confidence. Most of us know more than we realize we do. Helping others discover that truth is one of the most rewarding parts of leadership.

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