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Dear Reader,

In the complex world we are living, surrounded by ever evolving technological devices that we are challenged to master, there are a few simple things that have been around for thousands of years which we still haven't mastered. For example how to talk to each other and communicate effectively. This month, we shine the light on giving feedback, one of our communication challenges.

Enjoy the reading!

Isabel Rimanoczy  
Editor

Quote of the Month

*"If we could convert half of our conversations into requests and offers, we would be able to eliminate much of our frustrations."*

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# LIM NEWS



*20 YEARS developing your leaders while they develop your business*

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## FEEDBACK

By Isabel Rimanoczy

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines feedback as "the transmission of evaluative or corrective

information to the original or controlling source about an action, event, or process". This reminds me of an unfortunately popular approach to feedback in organizations, where people use this familiar term to make accusatory statements. "Let me give you some feedback!", the phrase starts, and often all it does is to serve as a warning to the receiver to set up his physical and emotional defenses. The reaction often is "And now, let ME give YOU some feedback!"

I have never seen any positive consequence of this approach. It is not that people don't hear what is said to them, and ultimately they may even ponder the critical feedback received, but often at the cost of damage to the relationship with the other person.

### **What is the purpose of feedback?**

Communication is the #1 challenge of human interaction, and giving feedback is an essential component, that aims at helping people become aware of the impact of their behaviors on others, and, if they are interested, in changing them.

Feedback can help us to compare what we wanted to achieve — feelings, reactions, thoughts — with the reactions we actually triggered in others. Other peoples' responses to what we do will be the basis of their behaviors towards us. Therefore, to analyze the gap between the desired outcome and the actual outcome helps us to steer our behavior and thus better achieve our desired goals.

Experience has shown us that people are puzzled when they don't achieve the outcomes they expected, but only rarely does anyone stop to reflect on what in their behavior may have contributed to the results they got.

When we give feedback we are helping others become aware of how their own behaviors impact others (or at least, how they impacted us), which can be a very valuable contribution to improving the communication, the interaction and even a step in their self-development.

### **How to make it work well?**

In order to avoid the feedback "squash game" described above, we can pay attention to some criteria for useful feedback:

- **Descriptive rather than evaluative.** By describing one's own reaction, it leaves the individual free to use it or not to use it as she/he sees fit. By avoiding evaluative language, it reduces the need for the individual to react defensively.
- **Specific rather than general.** To be told that one is "dominating" will probably not be as useful as to be told that "just now when we were deciding the issue, you did not listen to what others said and I felt forced to accept your arguments or face attack from you."
- **Directed toward changeable behavior.** Frustration is only increased when a person is reminded of some shortcoming over which she/he has no control.
- **Solicited rather than imposed.** Feedback is most useful when the receiver has expressed the interest for it, or when it was requested.
- **Well-timed.** In general, feedback is most useful when given at the earliest opportunity after

the behavior in question, depending of course, on the person's readiness to hear it.

- **Ensure clear communication.** One way of doing this is to have the receiver try to rephrase the feedback s/he has received to see if it corresponds to what the sender had in mind.
- **Not always change focused.** Feedback is a way of increasing one's self awareness, clarifying one's identity and answering "How am I been perceived?" Feedback does not always lead to change although it can be a corrective mechanism for those who want to behave in a way that better matches their intentions.

## A Feedback Formula

When people struggle in dealing with behavior that they find unsettling, we recommend a simple feedback formula called "W.I.W.I."

This formula helps phrase the feedback in a way that meets the criteria we shared above. It is a means of giving the other person feedback on how what they did or said impacted us.

This feedback formula is based:


- (1) on a concrete event, statement or behavior;
- (2) on the feeling that this elicited in me;
- (3) on the resulting effect on me; and
- (4) on how the other person can change what or how h/she behaved so that I and s/he can have a better understanding in the future.

The formula W.I.W.I. goes like this:

- **W**hen you ... (Said that..... Closed the door during our meeting.... Remained silent... etc.)
- **I** felt that.... (You were angry with me.... You wanted me to take me into your confidence about..... You didn't feel comfortable enough to talk with me ...etc.)
- **W**ith the result that.... (I hesitated to share my thoughts with you... I felt uncomfortable at being forced into becoming your accomplice....I stopped being interested in talking openly with you.... etc.)
- **I**t would be helpful if.... (You could tell me openly what upsets you.... You could clarify why you are giving me information about this issue.... You could tell me if you just want to reflect in silence or if you have a different opinion...etc.).

The W.I.W.I. formula is centered on one's own perception. It is not an attempt to blame others, but is a way to tell them how their behavior impacted us. It is a way to be heard without generating defensiveness, to share feelings, to acknowledge that it is MY personal perception, and to offer suggestions for improved communication and relationships with others.

It also provides "instructions" in the form of a request on how I can be best handled, what would be more helpful in order to get positive responses and cooperation from my side. "I" messages reflect accountability and are usually very welcome.

Human beings are a complex mix of hard- and software. Unfortunately we don't come with a User's Manual or a 1-800 number where others could get help when they don't know how to treat us to get the best out of us. The feedback formula allows us to give others these "basic instructions" of how we function. This is clearly in the best interest of both parties. 

*Source: The LIM Leader-Coach Toolkit, 2000.*



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