Building better people
how to give real-time feedback that sticks

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Why I made this

Feedback is essential for people to grow — yet many people are intimidated by giving feedback, have excuses, and look at feedback as something that could ruin relationships, not build them.

I'm hoping this slide deck helps give readers the tools and approach to no longer fear giving feedback and understand feedback is actually a way to build relationships and level up everyone around them.

I believe everyone should embrace a culture of giving real-time feedback to anyone who could receive benefit from feedback.

Feedback is a culture

Everyone has to buy-in. If managers don't, then feedback won't be practiced for fear of repercussion.

A feedback culture is about

- Being a Self-healing organization.
- Anyone can give feedback to anyone
- Helping people grow
- Taking responsibility for others performance, not just your own.
- Being brave
- Learning to communicate better

Giving feedback is a skill itself.

- Work on it, like any other skill
- Practice [Radical Candor](#)
- People are hungry for feedback because it helps them succeed.
- Synthesizing feedback is hard.
  - Brainstorming with others about how you are going to communicate feedback is really valuable to help organize your thoughts into concrete problems, impacts & solid examples
- The receiver should feel like they just got something awesome
- When you achieve mastery with this skill then giving feedback should be effortless, regardless of who feedback is given to: their role, established relationship or not, etc.

Our goal with giving feedback is to achieve

Shared Understanding

Both people work to seek to understand.

The feedback must be valuable, actionable and understandable. It must be given in a helpful manner, usually given close to real-time.

Anyone should be able to give feedback to anyone. Giving feedback should feel great.

The Shared Understanding Framework

1. Social Contract
2. Communicate the **Problem**
3. Share **Impact**
4. Check **Understanding**
5. Agree on **Resolution**

1. Social Contract

Giver & Receiver are both responsible for feedback being valuable

Giver: Ask to give feedback   **Receiver:** choose to receive feedback

- Be clear you are asking to give feedback, use the word **"feedback"**
- Ask Receiver to agree to getting feedback to establish social contract: "Are you open to me giving you some feedback?"
- Ask when is good: "I have feedback for you that I think can help you grow, when is good?"

- Maybe another time is better, coordinate appropriately: "Sorry i've got a customer demo in 30 minutes, can we speak at 3pm?"
- Receiver can say NO. good opportunity for giver to seek to understand. Are there bigger problems?

1. Social Contract

Giver Responsibilities

- You are trying to help the other person grow
- You are open to your own understanding being wrong.
- Be direct - it must be clear you are giving feedback
- Only give feedback that can be beneficial to receiver
- Communicate in a non-violent, non-judgemental manner
- Give feedback in real-time or as close to it as possible

Receiver Responsibilities

- Ensuring they set up a time and method to receive feedback that is best suited to developing their understanding
- Seeking to understand and asking clarifying questions
- Communicating their understanding in their own words
- Communicating a resolution plan
- Not getting flustered or having negative emotional reaction

1. Social Contract

Example pattern:

"Thanks for taking the time.

I have feedback I wanted to give you...

I'm not that good at giving feedback so please ask me to pause at anytime to clarify something...

Ok then, let me share with you what I saw..."

Attributes:

⟹ Set tone of kind and open conversation

⟹ Be clear you're giving FEEDBACK

⟹ Let others know you're trying your best, and want feedback on how you're giving feedback

⟹ Share your observations, not judgements

2. Communicate the problem

- **You have to synthesize your feelings / needs / emotions into problems & impacts. This isn't easy.**
  - You know someone did something wrong. But you can't put your finger on exactly what it is….
  - Brainstorm with others to get help synthesizing how to frame what you are feeling into a valid problem
- Avoid making this about your emotions, feelings, etc.
- Avoid generalizations, use concrete examples

Bad problem statements:

"I don't feel good about what you did."

"You're not being a team player"

"It's hard to get what I want from you"

Good problem statement:

"The problem with what you did is that it will make our customers less confident in our approach…"

2. Communicate the problem

BAD: generalizations

"On calls we shouldn't be defensive to clients…"

"We should be careful with accuracy, it's something we value and my feedback to you is you need to focus on it."

- *Who is we?*
- *What did I even do?*

GOOD: concrete examples

"On the call you said 'no, we won't help you'…"

"When you sent over the project plan you used the old price, not the new one we agreed on…"

2. Communicate the problem

Bad: Feedback sandwich: "You are really great, the things you do are great...

... but this isn't so great ...

And just a reminder you are really great!"

Takeaway:
What did I just hear?
What did I do wrong?
What do I need to change?
Why couldn't they be more clear? They don't trust me?

Good: "Here is some feedback I think can be helpful for you to grow... [then gives the feedback concisely]"

Takeaway:
Ok, this is feedback, so I need to ensure i'm focused on understanding, coming up with a resolution and not getting flustered...

3. Share Impact

- Is the problem really a problem?
    - If you can't be clear why, you can't expect receiver to gain understanding.
    - Teach the receiver why the problem is a problem, explain the impact

Bad impact statements:

"I don't feel good about what you did. The impact is I'm upset."
"You're not being a team player. The impact is what I just said, you're not being a team player."

Good impact statement:

"The problem with what you did is that it will make our customers less confident in our approach, and if they're less confident the impact is it adds unnecessary risk into our ability to win our next project…"

3. Share Impact

Real example:

Biz dev person:

"The problem is I asked you for an architecture and you pushed back"

⇨

Solutions Architect

"I didn't push back, I told you it's too early to define the architecture."

Problem:

No impact, no understanding

"Ok let me try again, the problem is we need to include architectures in our proposals for the next phase"

⇨

"If we put the architecture in before we even know all the problems we're just misleading the customer… I won't do that."

Still no impact. Starting to see missing shared definition for "architecture"

"Let me think about this… Ok the problem is we need to include architecture in our proposals because that's what the customers expect because our competitors do it. We need to match their buying process, and provide an architecture **direction that we can change later.** If we don't do it, the impact is we really have no chance of winning the project."

⇨

"Oh I understand the problem now… ok so how do we define an architecture and ensure the client knows it's going to change?

Success!
Problem/Impact lead to shared understanding, now they'll work on shared definition for "Architecture"

4. Check Understanding

- Always do a comprehension check
- "Tell me, in your own words, what you understood."
- This can require a few rounds of communication, as people tend to lack a common vocabulary or have different definitions for the same words.

Bad:
"I heard you say you don't like how I talk"
"I heard you say do exactly as you said or i'll get in trouble"

Good:
"What I understand, in my own words, is that when I speak in that way it makes our customers question our professionalism and the impact is that they'll find someone else they don't need to worry about, we will lose business…"

5. Agree on Resolution

Ask receiver to own the solution.

BAD:
"So now that i've told you the feedback, I want you to do X…"

- This removes their ability to **own** fixing the problem.

GOOD:
"How will you fix this next time?"
"What is your plan?"

"Next time I want to reschedule a meeting first I'll do X, Y, Z so that we don't run into the problem we did this time…"

They may not have a good solution, this is where you step in and provide coaching

5. Agree on Resolution

Design a measurement:
- Ask how you'll know if the receivers solution worked?
- Ask receiver to think of ways to measure their plan

Bad:
"You will shadow all my calls and decide if i'm doing it good enough for you."

- Don't use this arbitrary measurement.

Good:
"In two weeks you will ask the client about my responsiveness and they will rate me >8 of 10."

What if...

What if... someone reacts poorly to feedback?

Social contract: They agreed to get feedback; this means if they react poorly to feedback, they're not holding up their end

Tools for **giver** to adjust the conversation:

- Restate you're trying to help
- Restate receiver's responsibility to try to understand what you're sharing, dig in
- Step back to define common vocabulary together
- Try to find another time

Tools for **receiver** to adjust conversation:

"I'm sorry I'm trying to understand but I'm just not right now. I want to reflect on what you've shared so far and lets try to discuss this again so that I understand what you wanted to share."

What if… someone reacts poorly to feedback?

If the giver genuinely tried to give beneficial feedback and the receiver reacts poorly, then:

- GOOD: We just got more information about a behavior we need to provide feedback on
- We clarify our expectations for how people receive constructive feedback
- We try again
- We escalate to managers if we're not able to succeed.

Being able to receive feedback well is a skill we measure people on and train explicitly.

Reacting poorly to feedback means the team can't be self-healing; this is a case where managers will need to step in to provide further coaching or escalate as needed.

What if… I don't have complete feedback?

If you have incomplete feedback that can help the receiver, do not wait to give it. Use this to start the conversation.

Only wait if the feedback cannot (yet) benefit the receiver. Collect more information, and synthesize it into something actionable.

Example: "This is just based on what I saw, I know this isn't the full story. I wanted to share this in case it could help. Can you tell me what you saw as well?"

What if… [excuses for not giving feedback]

- I don't really know them…
- They won't take it well, so why should I give it…
- They're my boss…
- They're not in my department…
- I don't know how to approach it…
- Let's wait until our retro next week…

**These are an indicator YOU need to work on your feedback skills.
Get help and coaching from others around you.**

What if... the person doesn't improve?

Giver: Your responsibility, in a self-healing team, is to to make sure the person gets the feedback and that you and them develop a shared understanding. This means you don't just tell them what they did bad, they are wrong, you also seek to understand. Once the receiver says in their own words the shared understanding, it is up to them to fix the performance issue.

Escalation: If they're unable to fix the performance issue but understand the problem, this is when managers step in to support and handle next steps — ultimately you are not responsible for their performance, you are responsible for ensuring they got the feedback and shared understanding.

Here's a real example

What follows are excerpts from a response one of our teammate's sent after receiving feedback. What I liked about it:

* The person understood
* Owned the solution
* As a giver of the feedback, I was no longer concerned, just needed to ensure follow through.

If we can all give feedback that elicits such reactions and respond as graciously when receiving feedback, we'll be on the right track.

Continue for excerpts...

Thank you very much for this feedback. I find it super helpful, and appreciate all of you helping me grow as an engineer and a consultant. I can tell you took a lot of time putting this together.

I know it can be nerve-racking to confront others with critical feedback, but I think I have gotten to a point where I really crave it. It's rare that my ego gets in the way with these things anymore. So thank you! Really. I appreciate the concern and care that you put into this, and look forward to improving myself with your guidance.

My understanding of what feedback was communicated in my own words:

1. Communication: My commit messages. This whole "communication" category this time is about writing professional commit messages.

Verbose commit messages that explain the problem and provide context for future code spelunking: ✓
Commit messages that could come across as passive aggressive, irrelevant, contentious, or juvenile: 🚫

XXXX is our biggest client, and XXXX is the most visible XXXX project we work on. We've worked hard to earn their trust, and we want to demonstrate to them that we deserve it. If we're committing unprofessional messages into the code they own, it jeopardizes that high level of trust.

Continued....

2. Reliability My unreliability has resulted in the team being behind schedule, and in my teammates working nights and weekends. I confess I hadn't made the connection between my own unreliability and their working overtime, which now that it's been pointed out to me seems so obvious that my prefrontal cortex is trying to amend my memories of my own perceptions to make me seem less stupid.

I've also missed meetings! With no warning. Any of this constitutes a fireable offense, and I'm grateful that you're giving me an opportunity to improve before doing so.

We need to stop scrambling all the time, and me shipping at capacity is a key part of that.

Continued....

The specific steps I will take to address this feedback:

1. I set a reminder for every weekday at 9am telling me to check my Calendar and open Chat.
2. I've been mindful this past week of how long tickets are estimated to take, and have been pushing myself to ship them in that timeframe.
3. If anything seems at-risk, I will communicate so early.
4. The team re-instituted daily async standups in Slack this morning. In addition, I sent an end-of-day standup message just to Fede. I plan to continue this until he tells me to stop.
5. I will download the Extreme Ownership audiobook this evening, which I think I'll be able to get through faster than a paper book. Expect me to have lots of opinions about this! In general, I think the disposition of Extreme Ownership comes naturally to me

Me: Wow, this is great!

Thank you!

Any feedback on this? Would love to hear.

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Other great resources:
http://www.dein.fr/2016-12-02-negative-feedback-antipatterns.html