

Getting the Feedback You Require

You own your development but others can help support your agenda. Here are four things you can do to accelerate the learning curve.

By Peggy Baumgartner

About the author

Peggy Baumgartner is

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QSB Insight

LEARNING TO ASK FOR AND ACCEPT FEEDBACK is essential for your own development. Research tells us that, over time, approximately 10 percent of a person's development will come from "formal learning" (time spent reading or in a classroom), 20 percent will be from feedback or observation, and 70 percent will come from "real" experiences. In order to truly learn, these experiences cannot just involve doing more of what you are currently doing; rather it's about challenging yourself to do something new or to do something familiar in a different way. As we create our own plans for development, we need to keep in mind the power of aligning training, experience, and feedback.

Many people are good at finding workshops or courses to attend, and they are also getting better at spotting opportunities for real experiences. What is often lacking—and has the power to really accelerate you up the learning curve for any skill—is adequate feedback.

Giving feedback is a skill that many people spend time focusing on as they learn and grow as managers. *Seeking* feedback in a manner that ensures you get the information you need to develop, on the other hand, is a different story. Research we have conducted with more than 600 managers across Canada indicates that 59 percent of managers do not believe they receive adequate levels of feedback.

Here is the hard truth: it is up to you to get the feedback you need. Feedback doesn't come automatically. As you build your development plans, you need to figure out how you will seek it, stay open to hearing it, and then build upon the insights that come. If you want to benefit from feedback, here's what to pay attention to:

1. SEEK FEEDBACK

To start with, you will need to seek feedback regularly from a variety of people. The goal of feedback is to help you improve. So, who might know what you need to get better at? Who might have some ideas on how to improve?

Make it easy for others to give you the feedback you need. One way to do this is by letting people know specifically what kind of feedback you would value. For example, perhaps you are not happy with your one-on-one staff meetings, or you want to improve the

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way you delegate work assignments to your team. When asking for feedback, you make it easier for them if you frame it as follows: “I want to do a better job of _____. Based on your experiences, can you give me one idea on how I could improve this?”

2. ACTIVELY LISTEN

Once you ask for feedback, you need to actively listen. Keep in mind that the goal of listening is to understand what the person is *really* telling you, not to judge it or defend it or debate it or come up with a witty response. Just understand what they are saying.

Suspend judgement as you actively listen so that you can learn about yourself and how your actions are interpreted by others. This may involve asking clarifying questions, probing for details, paraphrasing what they are saying to check your understanding, or summarizing at the end to make sure you have it. You need to make sure that you understand what behaviour it is that they are suggesting you need to change.

Now, this sounds incredibly simple, but people often give us their *interpretation* of our behaviour without being specific about the behaviour itself. For example, if you get feedback that you are “not approachable,” what would you then go and do? You could run in a thousand different directions that may or not be helpful. In order to adjust your behaviour effectively, you need to ask questions that get to the level of “what is it that you see me doing or hear me saying that makes me appear unapproachable?” Then, and only then, are you able to truly work on changing the underlying behaviour.

You could, for example, end up realizing that it is as simple as beginning meetings or conversations by asking how people are doing before jumping right to business. Now you have information to work from — and it will save you a lot of wasted time and effort relative to playing a guessing game around what “approachable” means. The better you are at active listening, the more people will open up and share the information you need to improve with you.

3. Say Thank You

It’s not easy to give feedback, so show your appreciation by saying thank you. Let them know specifically what you appreciated or found valuable in what they had to say.

You want to thank them in the moment because they want to know if they have been helpful. You don't have to agree with what they are saying. You may need to think about it, but you can still respond with "thank you, you have given me something to think about." They will be looking at how you respond to their first overtures to determine what, if anything, they will share with you in the future.

In addition, you may also thank them later after reflection. If you are going to put one of their suggestions for improvement into action, let them know what you are doing and ask for continued feedback as you put it into practice. For example, if they gave you a great idea for improving your one-on-one meetings, let them know that you are going to incorporate that into your meeting format and would appreciate it if they could continue to give you feedback on how effective they find the change.

4. Reflect and Plan for Action

After you have heard from others, it is your chance to step back, reflect, evaluate the information/ideas given, and consider what specific actions you will take. Remember that feedback is just information. It gives you a chance to see opportunities for change. Ask yourself: "If I take action on the ideas given, will it move me in the direction I want to go? Does it support my development?" You have to decide. Knowing that you will make this decision afterwards will free you up to just listen in the moment when feedback is being delivered. It will also allow you to gain some perspective on the information.

You own your development but others can really help to support that development if you tap into their insights. As you build your development plans, take stock of the above and make sure you aren't one of the 59 percent who doesn't feel they have the feedback necessary to improve. It's in your control.

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