



Paper PD04

## The Importance of Feedback

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### ABSTRACT

Feedback is an essential tool in affecting change, engaging with people and helping them to achieve their personal and business goals. When done in the right way at the right times with the right intentions feedback can have tremendous results. However, done badly it can have completely the opposite affect and leave people upset, alienated and demoralized. Therefore, giving and receiving effective feedback is a vital skill for us all to practice and improve so that any programmer at any level (whether you manage staff or not) can help to:

- keep everyone on track;
- avoid mistakes caused by mis-communication by creating a clear and honest communication flow;
- form better relationships;
- motivate people to do a good job and boost their performance;
- strengthen their operational voice;
- be more engaged in the work process;
- promote personal and professional growth; and
- create a healthy, friendly, work environment.

Something that I hope you will feel better equipped to do and more inspired to try once you have read this paper. So that you can transform your feedback and leadership from good to great and have the IMPACT that you desire.

### INTRODUCTION

What is feedback?

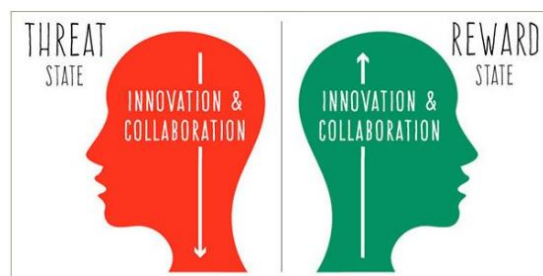
Feedback is the planned and specific giving of information, often requested, with the aim of improving performance and motivation.

And what is it not?

Criticism, i.e. one person's unplanned or unsolicited judgement of the actions, behavior or result of another.

Two very different messages that can trigger two very different reactions.

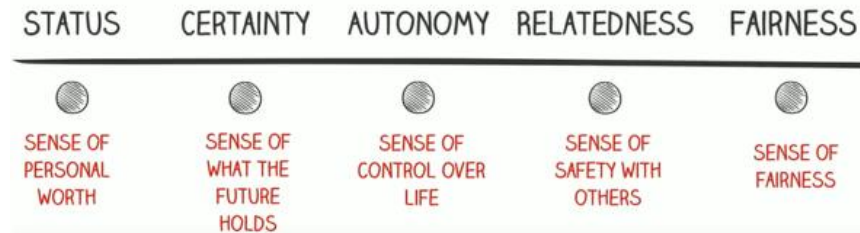
One of the very basic functions of our brain is to distinguish when to approach or avoid something. An evolutionary response that has helped humans to stay alive, (think cavemen and sabre tooth tigers). We are all motivated to move away from perceived threats and/or towards perceived rewards. The word "criticism", or "constructive criticism" (because it has the word "criticize" in it) can set an initial barrier and is often perceived as a threat. While feedback is frequently described in training material as a "gift" or "reward". A deliberate attempt to encourage a more positive emotion that will inspire you to act, innovate and collaborate.





## THE SCARF MODEL

The SCARF model is an easy way to remember the five stimulus that drives this response in our brains to minimize threats and/or maximize rewards. SCARF stands for:



### STATUS

As humans, we are constantly assessing how social interactions either improve or reduce our status. Research shows that when people realize that they might compare unfavorably to someone else the threat response kicks in, which may cause a person to become defensive to avoid the perceived pain of a drop in status.

### CERTAINTY

If the surroundings or activities are uncertain, then the person's brain activity increases and creates a stress response. This can hinder the ability to make effective and balanced decisions.

Creating a perception of certainty by sharing information, being transparent and articulating how decisions are made are all strategies to create more certainty.

### AUTONOMY

Autonomy is about how much control we have in a situation. For some, the less autonomy they experience the more the situation is treated as a threat.

### RELATEDNESS

Our basic human instinct is to identify friend or foe. Building trust is critical to becoming a friend.

### FAIRNESS

When a person thinks something is unfair the brain automatically reacts with the avoid response and goes into a defensive stance.

Stimuli which are important for us to recognize, understand and then address with emotional intelligence whenever we are preparing to deliver or receive feedback.

## EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Emotional Intelligence (EQ) is the capacity to be aware of, control, and express one's emotions, and to handle interpersonal relationships thoughtfully and empathetically. It is a set of emotional and social skills that collectively establish how well we perceive and express ourselves, develop and maintain social relationships, cope with challenges and use emotional information in an effective and meaningful way. EQ requires:

1. Perception: the ability to detect and decipher emotions in faces, pictures, voices and cultural artefacts. It also includes the ability to identify one's own emotions (how to read someone).
2. Implementation: the ability to harness emotions to facilitate various cognitive activities, such as thinking and problem solving.
3. Emotional understanding: to comprehend emotion language and to appreciate complicated relationships among emotions.
4. Management: the ability to regulate emotions in both ourselves and in others.

It doesn't just drive success in our personal lives. It applies to the workplace too. Where you will invariably need to work in a team of people with a variety of different personalities, skills, strengths and emotions to achieve your business goals. Intelligence (IQ) will get you so far, IQ and EQ will get you further.

A vital message not just for leaders but anyone who wants to be successful in the modern work place where we are frequently required to work in virtual teams and need to overcome the obstacles of distance, language and culture.



So, now that you understand what EQ is and why it is important, where can you get some? Or what can you do to boost what you've got. You will be pleased to learn that there are many ways that you can boost your EQ. Here are a few ideas. You can:

- Stay calm in stressful situations, i.e. respond, don't react;
- Be direct and assertive when communicating your needs and opinions while still respecting others. You have voice, use it. Don't be a wall flower, a common "programmer" stereotype;
- Actively listen, i.e. listen for clarity and not just for when you will have an opportunity to speak;
- Be motivated;
- Practice self-awareness to know how your behavior impacts others;
- Take critique without being offended or defensive;
- Empathize with others;
- Be approachable and sociable; and
- Be positive and feel better about yourself. An attitude that provides a nice segue to my next point.

### POSITIVE INTENT

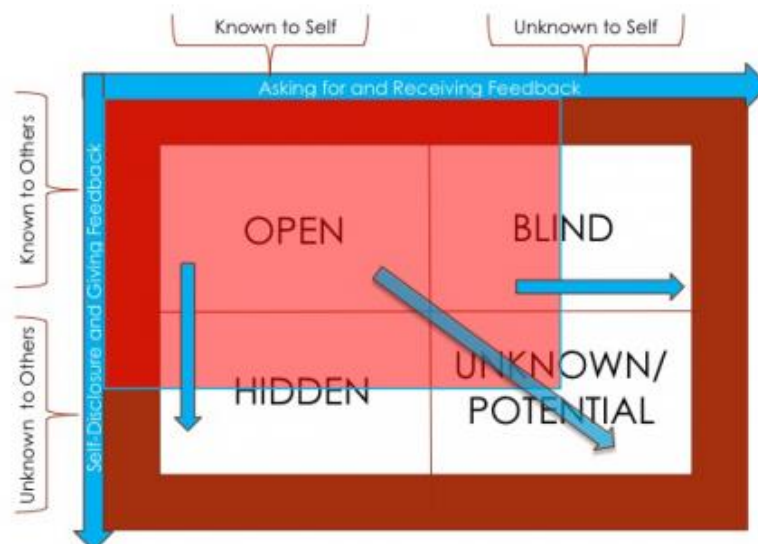
One of the most important parts of giving feedback is your intention. People don't care what you know until they know that you care. If your intention is to not to genuinely help someone to develop then you should not be the one giving feedback. Untrained managers are frequently criticized for judging while calling it feedback. Don't wait in ambush. You will undermine productivity. You need to give feedback every day. Even if it is just a thank you. If you give positive feedback 365 days of the year and negative feedback every now and again it will come across as balanced and fair. Not just looking at faults.

Another way to demonstrate positive intent is to ensure that you understand why feedback is SO important.

### THE JOHARI WINDOW

The Johari Window is a technique that helps people to better understand their relationship with themselves and others and to illustrate why feedback is important. It is laid out in a four-square grid, like a window with four panes. Where each of the panes represents the information known or unknown by the person, and whether the information is known or unknown by the group or team. The four quadrants are:

1. What is known by the person about him/herself and is also known by others, the OPEN area.
2. What is unknown by the person about him/herself but which others know, the BLIND area.
3. What the person knows about him/herself that others do not know, the HIDDEN area.
4. What is unknown by the person about him/herself and is also unknown by others, the UNKNOWN/POTENTIAL area.





The standard presentation of the window shows each quadrant being the same size. However, they are not always this way. Disclosure, plus giving and receiving feedback can increase the size of the OPEN area, reduce the HIDDEN private area, increase self-awareness (i.e. reduce the BLIND area) and in doing so help you to uncover UNKNOWN talents and start to achieve your POTENTIAL to be the best statistical programmer, line manager, team player, process coach, data wrangler...etc. that you can be.

A very compelling reason to (a) give feedback; and then (b) make it effective. The topic for the next section.

## THE AID MODEL

AID is a simple feedback model that can be used for both positive moments and those that need corrective action. Where AID stands for ACTION, IMPACT and DEVELOPMENT, i.e.

### ACTION

- What actions were observed?
- Describe observed behavior. Focus on the facts and not on your interpretations, judgment, their intentions, personality or character.
- Link back to expected standards to highlight where behavior needs to change.
- Select one or two actions to discuss, focusing on too many actions can dilute your message and demotivate.

### IMPACT

- What impact or outcome did their actions have on achieving the expected standards?
- Consider the result and the process to get to that outcome.
- Include why the impact was positive or negative and solicit the other person's perspective on the factors that contributed to the resulting outcome.

### DEVELOPMENT

- How can they improve in the future? The goal of feedback is to enhance performance and to motivate change.
- Emphasize what was missing versus what was wrong. Build on strengths and solicit their opinions on what happens next. How can they correct the mistake, improve the process or continue to make something better?

Once you have captured the situation "in yesterday's team meeting...". You then describe the behavior "... you interrupted constantly". The impact "This forced your colleagues to shut down. Consequently, we were not able to discuss their ideas and arrive at a team-based solution to our problem." While for the development you have two choices:

1. Tell the person what you want them to know.
2. Ask them to self-assess and consider what has happened.

Which option you take will depend on the individual and the situation. For example, you may find that you initially tend to tell rather than ask. However, the more you ask the more your team will be able to self-assess and improve their own performance. An option that gives them personal ownership of the resulting action, development.

Here are a few more examples of AID:

- A. When you create a table without proper headings.....
  - I. People will struggle to understand it, even if it is simple
  - D. Could you add this to your checklist of things to look out for in future?
- A. When you rush the analysis of the data.....
  - I. You can miss some very obvious anomalies.....
  - D. Could you in future make sure you allocate enough time for the analysis?



## CONCLUSION

Feedback is important. It is not something to be frightened of and AID (i.e. action, impact and development) provides a simple, very easy technique to make your feedback effective. So why don't you give it a try? Not just in December at end of year review, NOW! As the only way to improve is with exercise and a great way to build trust and achieve your potential is with openness and feedback. So, thank a colleague or team member for their efforts and/or results. Respond to the all staff climate survey requesting your feedback. If someone asked for your comments and/or opinions, share them. They want your opinion. And remember:

- Approach feedback with the right mindset and positive intent;
- Think about timing to ensure that your feedback has the right impact;
- Ask for, as well as give feedback – build trust;
- Make sure your feedback is factual, specific and constructive. AID = **A**ction, **I**mpact and **D**evelopment;
- Provide balanced feedback;
- Feedback might be given formally or informally, if it is not valuable – don't give it;
- Listen, without applying the filter of your own experience, judgement, value and needs; and
- Be SMART. Make sure that your desired development task has **S**pecific **M**otivational **A**chievable **R**ealistic **T**imebound actions that align with business objectives.

So that your feedback affects change, achieves results and has the IMPACT that you desire.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## CONTACT INFORMATION

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