



Thanks for the Feedback

The Science and Art of Receiving Feedback Well (even when it is off base, unfair, poorly delivered, and frankly, you're not in the mood)

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

We get feedback every day of our lives from friends and family, bosses, colleagues and customers. We know that feedback is essential for healthy relationships and professional development — but we dread it and often dismiss it. That's because receiving feedback sits at the junction of two conflicting human desires: we want to learn and grow, but we also want to be accepted just as we are right now.

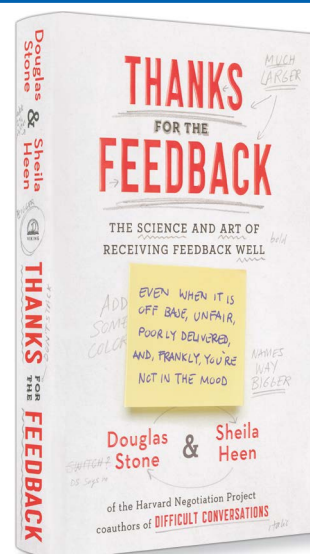
Thanks for the Feedback is the first book to address this tension head on. It explains why getting feedback is so crucial yet so challenging and offers a powerful framework to help us take on life's blizzard of off-hand comments, annual evaluations and unsolicited advice with curiosity and grace.

The business world spends billions of dollars and millions of hours each year teaching people how to give feedback more effectively. Authors Douglas Stone and Sheila Heen argue that we've got it backward and show us why the smart money is on educating receivers — in the workplace and in personal relationships as well. It's the receivers, after all, who interpret what they're hearing and decide whether and how to change.

With humor and clarity, the authors blend the latest insights from neuroscience and psychology with practical, hard-headed advice.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to identify truth, relationship and identity triggers that block learning.
- How to separate appreciation, coaching and evaluation.
- How to dismantle distortions and draw boundaries in the face of unrelenting criticism.
- How to uncover blind spots to see hidden impacts of our behaviors.



by Douglas Stone and
Sheila Heen

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THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: THANKS FOR THE FEEDBACK

by Douglas Stone and Sheila Heen

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Introduction

We swim in an ocean of feedback. Feedback includes any information you get about yourself. In the broadest sense, it's how we learn about ourselves from our experiences and from other people — how we learn from life.

In today's workplace, feedback plays a crucial role in developing talent, improving morale, aligning teams, solving problems, and boosting the bottom line. And yet, 55 percent of respondents in one recent study said their performance review was unfair or inaccurate, and one in four employees dreads their performance review more than anything else in their working lives.

Something isn't working. So organizations are spending billions of dollars each year to train supervisors, managers and leaders on how to *give* feedback more effectively. When feedback meets resistance or is rejected outright, feedback givers are encouraged to be persistent. They are taught how to *push* harder.

We think we have it backwards. If the receiver isn't willing or able to absorb the feedback, then there's only so far persistence or even skillful delivery can go. *The real leverage is creating pull.*

Creating pull is about mastering the skills required to receive feedback well and drive our own learning. It's about how to recognize and manage our resistance, how to engage in feedback conversations with confidence and curiosity, and even when the feedback seems wrong, how to find insight that might help us grow. It's also about how to stand up for who we are and how we see the world, and ask for what we need. It's about how to learn from feedback.

Receiving feedback sits at the intersection of our drive to learn and our longing for acceptance. These needs run

deep, and the tension between them is not going away. But there's a lot each of us can do to manage the tension — to reduce anxiety in the face of feedback and to learn in spite of the fear. We believe that the ability to receive feedback well is not an inborn trait but a *skill* that can be cultivated. It may be fraught, but it can be taught. The rewards are great, and the stakes have never been higher. ●

THE FEEDBACK CHALLENGE

Three Triggers

Not all feedback is difficult. Most of us do just fine with positive feedback. Then there's the tougher stuff — the feedback that leaves us confused or enraged, flustered or flattened. This kind of feedback triggers us: Our heart pounds, our stomach clenches, our thoughts race and scatter. We usually think of that surge of emotion as being "in the way" — a distraction to be brushed aside, an obstacle to overcome.

But pushing our triggered reactions aside or pretending they don't exist is not the answer. Triggers are obstacles, but they are also information that can help us locate the source of the trouble. Understanding our triggers and sorting out what set them off are the keys to managing our reactions and engaging in feedback conversations with skill.

Because feedback givers are abundant and our shortcomings seemingly boundless, we imagine that feedback can trigger us in a googolplex of ways. Actually, there are only three: Truth, relationship and identity triggers.

1. Truth Triggers are set off by the substance of the feedback itself — it's somehow off, unhelpful or simply



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untrue. In response, we feel indignant, wronged and exasperated.

2. Relationship Triggers are tripped by the particular person who is giving us this feedback. All feedback is colored by the relationship between giver and receiver, and we can have reactions based on what we believe *about* the giver or how we feel *treated* by the giver. Our focus shifts from the feedback itself to the audacity of the person delivering it.

3. Identity Triggers are all about *us*. Whether the feedback is right or wrong, something about it has caused our identity to come undone. We feel overwhelmed, threatened, ashamed or off balance.

Our triggered actions are not obstacles because they are unreasonable but because they keep us from engaging skillfully in the conversation. Receiving feedback well is a process of sorting and filtering — of learning how the other person sees things; of trying on ideas that at first seem a poor fit; of experimenting. And of shelving or discarding the parts of the feedback that in the end seem off or not what you need right now.

And it's not just the receiver who learns. During an effective conversation, the feedback *giver* may come to see why their advice is unhelpful, and both parties may understand their relationship in a clarifying light. But it's nearly impossible to do this from inside our triggers. And so we make mistakes that cause us to put potentially valuable feedback into the discard pile, or just as damaging, we take to heart feedback that is better left at the curb. ●

TRUTH TRIGGERS

Separate Appreciation, Coaching and Evaluation

Sometimes, when receiving feedback, we feel grateful and energized. At other times we feel hurt and defensive. Our responses don't always hinge on the skill of the giver or even what is being said. Rather, they're based on how we are hearing what's said and which kind of feedback we think we are getting.

Three Kinds of Feedback

When we use the word "feedback," we may be referring to any of three kinds of information: appreciation, coaching and evaluation.

Appreciation: Appreciation is fundamentally about relationship and human connection. At a literal level, it

says "thanks," but it also conveys "I see you," "I know how hard you've been working," and "You matter to me." Appreciation motivates us — it gives us a bounce in our step and the energy to redouble our efforts.

Coaching: When you ask your boss for more direction, you're asking for coaching. Coaching is aimed at trying to help someone learn, grow or change. Coaching can be sparked by two different kinds of needs. One is the need to improve your knowledge or skills in order to build capability and meet challenges. In the second kind of coaching feedback, the giver is identifying a problem in your relationship: Something is missing; something is wrong. The giver wants the situation to change, and often that means they want *you* to change. The "problem" the coaching is aimed at fixing is how the giver is feeling or a perceived imbalance in the relationship.

Evaluation: Evaluation tells you where you stand. It's an assessment, ranking or rating. Evaluations are always in some respect comparisons, implicitly or explicitly, against others or against a particular set of standards. They align expectations, clarify consequences and inform decision making.

Beware Cross-Transactions

One of the key challenges of feedback conversations is that wires often get crossed. There are two ways this happens:

1. A receiver may want a different type of feedback from the type given.
2. A giver may have intended one kind of feedback, but the receiver interprets it incorrectly.

Once crossed, these wires are tough to untangle. Then add this complication: There is always evaluation in coaching. On the receiving end, we constantly funnel the advice we're given into either evaluation or coaching slots. How you hear your girlfriend's suggestion to "call your mother" depends on your relationship (was she reminding or chiding?).

Often, feedback offered as coaching is heard as evaluation. ("You're telling me how to improve, but really, you're saying you're not sure I'm cut out for this.") So what helps? Two things keep us on track:

Get aligned: Know the purpose and discuss it: Cross-transactions happen when the giver and receiver are misaligned. The fix? Discuss the purpose of the feedback explicitly. Be explicit about what you think the conversation is about, and be explicit about what would be most helpful to you. Then discuss, and if you each need something different, negotiate. Remember: Explicit disagreement is better than implicit misunderstanding.

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Separate evaluation from coaching and appreciation: The bugle blast of evaluation can drown out the quieter melodies of coaching and appreciation. The evaluation conversation needs to take place first. We can't focus on how to improve until we know where we stand. ●

First Understand

We don't want to take feedback that's invalid or unhelpful, and so, quite reasonably, we screen for that. We listen to the feedback with this question in mind: "What's wrong with this feedback?" And as it turns out, we almost always find something.

Why is wrong spotting so easy? Because there's almost always *something* wrong — something the feedback giver is overlooking, shortchanging or misunderstanding. And givers compound the problem by delivering vague feedback, making it easy for us to overlook, shortchange and misunderstand what they are saying. But in the end, wrong spotting not only defeats wrong feedback; it defeats learning.

Understanding Is Job One

Before we determine whether feedback is right or wrong, we have to first *understand* it and move beyond vague feedback labels (e.g., "Don't be so selfish"; "Act your age."). In part, this is because the giver and receiver interpret the label differently. For example, the coaching feedback "Be more confident" can be heard as "Give the impression that you know things even if you don't," but what was meant was "Have the confidence to say you don't know when you don't know."

To clarify the feedback under the label, we need to be specific about two things: 1) where the feedback is coming from and 2) where the feedback is going. Feedback givers arrive at their labels in two steps: they observe data, and they interpret that data — they tell a story about what it means. Feedback givers rarely share the raw observations behind their labels because they simply aren't aware of them. It's up to you to help them sort it out. Your goal is to not ignore or dismiss the interpretation. Data is crucial, but so is interpretation.

Once you know where the feedback is coming from, you need to figure out where it is going. Is it advice from coaching feedback? Or is it consequences and expectations from evaluative feedback? It's up to the receiver to ask the necessary questions in order to move the conversation forward. ●

See Your Blind Spots

There is always a gap between the self we think we present and the way others see us. We may not recognize ourselves in others' feedback, even when everyone else would agree that it's the conventional wisdom about who we are and how we are.

Three Blind-Spot Amplifiers

Others observe things about us that we literally can't observe about ourselves. Our blind spots are their hot spots. But differing observations are only part of the blind-spot disconnect. There are three dynamics that amplify the gap between how we see ourselves and how others see us.

Emotional Math: We subtract certain emotions from the equation: "That emotion is not really who I am." But others count it double: "That emotion is *exactly* who you are."

Situation Versus Character: When something goes wrong and I am part of it, I will tend to attribute my actions to the situation; you will tend to attribute my actions to my character.

Impact Versus Intent: We judge ourselves by our intentions, while others judge us by our impacts.

What Helps Us See Our Blind Spots?

Instead of dismissing the feedback or the person giving it to you, use these thoughts as a blind-spot alert. When you notice yourself wondering, "What's wrong with them?" make sure your next thought is "I wonder if this feedback is sitting in my blind spot?"

Ask the feedback giver, "What do you see me doing or failing to do that is getting in my own way?" If you respond with genuine curiosity and appreciation, they'll be able to paint you a picture that is clear, detailed and useful.

Other important skills are looking for patterns ("Where have I heard this before?") and getting a second opinion from another person by asking, "Here's feedback I just got. It seems wrong, but I wonder if this is feedback in a blind spot? Do you see me doing this?" When you invite others to be an honest mirror, you're able to see yourself in the moment and see the blind spots.

RELATIONSHIP TRIGGERS

Don't Switchtrack

We are often more triggered by the person giving us feedback than by the feedback itself. In fact, relationship

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triggers may be the most common derailers of feedback conversations.

When a person offers feedback that trips off a relationship trigger for the other person, that person then breezes past the feedback and instead talks about how he feels. This creates a situation where two people are giving feedback, and no one is receiving it. The conversation gets smoothly shifted, as if by railroad switch, from one topic to two. Soon we are each heading in our own direction, moving farther and farther apart. A key part of the dynamic here is that the person receiving the original feedback is unaware that they are changing the subject.

Switchtracking has two potential impacts. The potentially positive impact is that the second topic being put on the table may be important — sometimes more important than the feedback that triggered it. The negative impact is that because we now have two topics, the conversation gets tangled. With switchtrack conversations, we don't *realize* there are two separate topics, and so both get lost as we each hear the other person through the filter of our own topic.

To get better at managing our impulse to switchtrack, we have to get better at understanding the relationship triggers that create these impulses: Two key kinds of relationship triggers include what we think about the giver (Are they credible? Do we trust them? Did they deliver our feedback with good judgment and skill?) and how we feel treated by the giver (Do we feel accepted? Appreciated? Like our autonomy is respected?).

Relationship Triggers: What Helps?

There are three moves that can help us manage relationship triggers and avoid switchtracking. First, we need to spot the two topics on the table. Next, we need to give each topic its own conversation track (and get both people on the same track at the same time). Third, we need to help givers be clearer about their original feedback, especially when the feedback itself relates to the relationship. ●

Identify the Relationship System

A system is a set of interacting or interdependent components that forms a complex whole. A relationship is a system, a team is a system, and an organization is a system. When something goes wrong in a system, we each see part of the system (and some things the other doesn't), and these observations are not randomly distributed between us.

Systems insight number one is that each of us is part of the problem. Systems insight number two is that each of

us sees only part of the problem (the part the other person is contributing).

If we're going to have better conversations about feedback, we need a better handle on the ways that the giver and receiver (and often others) are contributing to the problem under discussion. This helps us move beyond blame and defensiveness and toward understanding, and it also produces more durable solutions.

Take Three Steps Back

Let's look at systems from three different vantage points — from close in, medium range and wide angle. Each view enables us to see different patterns and dynamics in our relationship systems.

- **One Step Back: You + Me Intersections.** From here, we see the interaction of you and me as a pair. What is the particular you + me combination that is creating a problem, and what is each of us contributing to that?

- **Two Steps Back: Role Clashes.** This view expands our perspective to look at the roles each of us plays. Roles are often a crucial but largely invisible reason we bump into each other.

- **Three Steps Back: The Big Picture.** From this frame of reference we can view the entire landscape, including other players, structures and processes that guide and constrain the choices we each make and the outcomes we get.

The Benefits of a Systems Lens

There are a number of advantages to understanding feedback through a systems lens.

- **It's More Accurate:** Systems thinking corrects for the skew of any single perspective.

- **It Moves Us Away from Needless Judgment:** Systems thinking eases the temptation to treat other people's contributions to the problem as *automatically* "bad" or "wrong" or "blameworthy."

- **It Enhances Accountability:** A systems approach helps you clarify your choices and actions and how they created the outcomes you got. Then when you say you're accountable, it actually means something.

- **It Helps Correct Our Tendency to Shift or Absorb:** A systems perspective helps us fight the tendencies of the blame absorber (it's all my fault) and blame shifter (it's not my fault) in ourselves, and understand them in others as we talk about feedback.

- **It Helps Us Avoid "Fixes that Fail":** When we don't understand the system that produces the feedback, we often make the mistake of trying to adjust just one component of the system and expect that to solve the

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whole problem. We're often tempted to solve a short-term problem without taking account of the long-term cost. ●

IDENTITY TRIGGERS

Learn How Wiring and Temperament Affect Your Story

People respond differently to feedback due to their wiring — their built-in neural structures and connections. Our wiring affects who we are and how intensely feedback affects us. A lot goes on in both your brain and body when you experience mood-altering feedback. Your “reaction” to feedback can be thought of as containing three key variables:

- **Baseline** refers to the default state of well-being or contentment toward which you gravitate in the wake of good or bad events in your life.
- **Swing** refers to how far up or down you move from your baseline when you receive feedback. Some of us have extreme reactions to feedback; we swing wide. Others remain on an even keel even in the face of disquieting news.
- **Sustain and Recovery** refer to duration, how long your ups and downs last. Ideally, we want to sustain a boost from positive feedback and recover quickly from a negative emotional dip.

Wiring Is Only Part of the Story

The danger when talking about brain wiring and temperament is that we take our wiring as fixed and assume it is destiny. While aspects of our temperament are inherited, there is ample evidence that they are not fixed. Wiring changes over time in response to our environment and experiences.

And perhaps more important, our wiring — whether fixed or not — tells only part of the story. About 50 percent of our happiness is wired in. Another 40 percent can be attributed to how we *interpret* and respond to what happens to us, and about 10 percent is driven by our circumstances. If we're going to get better at handling tough feedback, we have to understand how emotions interact with and distort the stories we tell about what the feedback means. How you *feel* in a particular moment has a big impact on the story you tell yourself. If you're already in a dark mood, you'll tell a darker story. Similarly, our thoughts impact our feelings — a dark story leads to a dark mood. What this means is that we can change our stories by working to change either our feelings *or* our thoughts. ●

Dismantle Distortions

One of the biggest blocks to receiving feedback well is that we exaggerate it. To understand and assess feedback, we need to dismantle distortions. This means finding ways to turn down the volume on the ominous soundtrack playing in our minds so that we can hear the dialogue more clearly.

To learn from upsetting feedback, we need strategies to counter the distortions that we bring to it, whether during the feedback conversation itself, beforehand (in preparation) or afterward (in reflection). Here are five strategies:

Be prepared, be mindful: Recognize your feedback footprint — your reactive behavior in response to criticism. Your footprint will show up strongest when the feedback is toughest. Think through in advance the worst that could happen, try it on emotionally, and reason through the possible consequences. This activity reminds you that whatever the outcome, you'll be able to manage.

Separate the strands: feeling/story/feedback: Pull apart the different threads of the conversation so you can see each element clearly, and observe how each is affecting the other. Ask the following questions: “What do I feel? What's the story I'm telling (and inside that story, what's the threat)? What's the actual feedback?” The goal of untangling everything is to see what you've woven in that does and doesn't belong. The more clearly you see that, the better you can keep the feedback in perspective.

Contain the story: When we think about the consequences of feedback, the goal is not to dismiss them or pretend they don't matter. The goal is to right-size them, to develop a realistic and healthy sense of what might happen and respond in line with these reasonable possibilities.

Change your vantage point: Anything that helps you see a dark situation from a different point of view is beneficial. Try to imagine you're an observer to the situation, or try looking back on your life from the vantage point of 10 or 20 years from now.

Accept you can't control how others see you: We care how others see us, but we have to accept that how others see us is something we can't control. Don't dismiss others' views of you, but don't accept them wholesale either. Their views are *input*, not *imprint*. ●

Cultivate a Growth Identity

Feedback can contradict or undermine the story we tell about who we are, or it can confirm our worst fears about ourselves. Learning profitably from feedback is not only

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about how we interpret the feedback; it's also about how we hold our identity.

Identity is the story we tell ourselves about ourselves — what we're like, what we stand for, what we're good at, what we're capable of. Our ability to metabolize challenging feedback is driven by the particular way we tell our identity story. Some people tell their identity story in ways that cause their identity to be brittle, while others tell their identity story in ways that allow it to be robust. Those in the latter group are predisposed to treat feedback not as a threat to who they are but as a core aspect of who they are.

We can all *learn* to hold our identity in ways that make us more resilient. We can't control the feedback that life throws at us, but we can make some specific shifts in assumptions that can improve our ability to take it in, stay balanced and learn from it. Two shifts are crucial:

Give up simple identity labels, and cultivate complexity: While our identities are built from the endless complexity of our life experiences, we tend to hold these identities as simple labels, such as "I'm competent, I'm good, I'm worthy of love." Simple labels are simple because they are all or nothing. All-or-nothing identities present us with this choice: Either we can exaggerate the feedback, or we can deny it. To accept being realistically complex, keep in mind that you will make mistakes, you have complex intentions, and you have contributed to the problem.

Move from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset: Do you consider your traits and abilities fixed and finished? Or are they always evolving and capable of growth? Researchers argue over the precise degree to which various traits are fixed or elastic. But the bottom line is this: People do get better when they apply themselves, and people apply themselves when they believe they can get better.

Move Toward a Growth Identity

Here are three practices to cultivate a growth identity:

- **Sort toward coaching:** As feedback receivers, we are always sorting feedback into coaching and evaluation bins. While identity is easily triggered by evaluation, it is far less threatened by coaching. Hear coaching as coaching and not as evaluation. You'll notice your identity reaction is diminished or gone.
- **Unpack judgment from the evaluation suitcase:** As we figure out how to take in evaluation, it's helpful to break evaluation itself down into three constituent parts: assessment, consequences and judgment. Accurate assessment is valuable, and the consequences are

important to understand. Others' judgments? You may find certain judgments illuminating; other judgments you'll rightly dismiss. It's one person's interpretation, and you've got other interpretations, including your own, to weigh it against.

- **Give yourself a "second score":** Let's imagine you get a negative evaluation. Imagine that there is an invisible second evaluation. After every low score you receive, give yourself a "second score" based on how you handle the first score. Even when you get an F for the situation itself, you can still earn an A+ for how you deal with it. In the long term, the second score is often more important than the first. A strong second-score identity can help you deal with even the most challenging life events. ●

FEEDBACK IN CONVERSATION

How Good Do I Have to Be?

Is it okay to not only turn down feedback but to say, "I don't even want to *hear* it"? It is. In fact, being able to establish limits on the feedback you get is crucial to your well-being and the health of your relationships.

Being able to say no is not a skill that runs parallel to the skill of receiving feedback well: it's right at the heart of it. If you can't say no, then your yeses are not freely chosen. You need to make your own mistakes and find your own learning curve. Sometimes that means you need to shut out the critics for a while so you can discover who you are and how you are going to grow.

Three Boundaries

Rejecting feedback can be as easy as saying no thanks or walking away or simply saying nothing. But sometimes it's more complicated. You say no, but the unwanted feedback keeps coming. It's not just bothersome, but destructive. This is when it helps to be explicit about boundaries.

Here are three kinds of boundaries to consider:

I May Not Take Your Advice: I'm willing to listen. I'll consider your input. But I may not end up taking it.

I Don't Want Feedback About That Subject, Not Right Now: You are not only establishing your right to decide whether to take the feedback, you're establishing your right to be free of the topic altogether.

Stop, or I Will Leave the Relationship: If you can't keep your judgments to yourself, then I will leave the relationship or change its terms.

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Turning Away Feedback with Grace and Honesty

The biggest mistake we make when creating boundaries is that we assume other people understand what's going on with us. In setting up boundaries, you want to reject feedback clearly and firmly while at the same time affirming the relationship and showing that you appreciate the intention. Be specific about three things:

The Request: What, exactly, are you asking of them?

The Time Frame: How long is the boundary likely to be in place?

Their Assent: Don't assume that they understand you or agree. Instead, ask.

Finally, it's only fair to let them know what's at stake. You need to let them know what happens if they can't or won't observe the boundaries. ●

Pull Together: Feedback in Organizations

Just as there are no perfect learning people, there are no perfect organizational feedback systems. Anyone choosing and implementing a particular system must grapple with the inevitable tensions and tradeoffs associated with it.

Leadership and HR are typically the ones expected to "do something" about the problem of performance management. They're the most visible and likely to have their hands in the design. Here are three things they can do that help:

Don't just trumpet benefits; explain tradeoffs:

When selecting or implementing an organizational system, provide the following to employees at all levels: clarification of the various goals of the system; explanation of why this system was chosen over others; transparency about potential costs as well as benefits; description of the costs of half-hearted participation; and an invitation for ongoing discussion, suggestions and feedback.

Separate appreciation, coaching and evaluation: A single performance management system can't effectively communicate all three kinds of feedback. Each requires different qualities and settings to be effective.

Promote a culture of learners: If you want learning to be valued, it has to be embedded in what is talked about with admiration, what is highlighted as important in the war stories that are told, what matters when it comes to visible projects and key promotions.

What Team Leaders and Feedback Givers Can Do

What can one manager or team leader do to improve an organizational culture?

Model learning; request coaching: In many ways, the manager *is* the culture: If they're good learners, they set the tone for a learning culture. Hold people accountable by showing them how you hold yourself accountable. Ask for coaching and help, not only from those above you but from peers and subordinates.

As givers, manage mindset and identity: As you think about whether and how to give feedback, factor in the long-term consequences for the receiver as well as your own short-term identity discomfort.

Be aware of how individual differences collide in organizations: Part of the challenge of feedback in organizations is due to differences in temperament and wiring. Our sensitivity to feedback can affect not only how we receive feedback but also how we give it.

What Receivers Can Do

Regardless of context or the company you keep, you are the most important person in your own learning. Your organization, team or boss might support or stifle feedback. Either way, they can't stop you from learning. You don't have to depend on your annual review or your boss's willingness to mentor. You can watch, ask questions and solicit suggestions from coworkers, customers, partners and friends.

Like the tension between learning and acceptance for each of us as individuals, the tensions at the heart of organizational feedback are a permanent condition. The ideas presented can help manage these tensions and get us talking to one another. But while learning is a shared responsibility, in the end, it comes down to you. ●

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked *Thanks for the Feedback*, you'll also like:

1. ***Coaching for Breakthrough Success* by Jack Canfield, Peter Chee.** Canfield and Chee offer a practical guide of 30 principles that every coach needs to succeed.
2. ***How to Say Anything to Anyone* by Shari Harley.** With her clear and specific roadmap in hand, Harley enables you to create the career and business relationships you really want.
3. ***The 7 Hidden Reasons Employees Leave* by Leigh Branham.** Branham translates the needs and desires of employers and employees into a common language.