

**THANKS FOR THE FEEDBACK:
THE SCIENCE AND ART OF RECEIVING FEEDBACK WELL
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Chapter One: Three Triggers

- Understanding our triggers and sorting out what set them off are the keys to managing our reactions and engaging in feedback conversations with skill.
- Truth triggers are set off by the substance of the feedback itself – it is somehow off, unhelpful, or simply untrue.
- Relationship triggers are tripped by the particular person who is giving us the gift of feedback.
- Identity triggers focus neither on the feedback nor on the person offering it. Whether the feedback is right or wrong, wise or witless, something about it has caused our identity to come undone. We feel overwhelmed, threatened, ashamed, or off balance.
- Feedback comes in three forms: appreciation, coaching, and evaluation
- Know what kind of feedback you want, and know what you are getting. The match matters.
- In the context of receiving feedback, understanding what the other person means, what they see, what they are worried about, what they are recommending is hard.
- We are not only blind to certain things about ourselves; we are also blind to the fact that we are blind. Yet, gallingly, our blind spots are glaringly obvious to everybody else.
- Relationship triggers produce hurt, suspicion, and sometimes anger. The way out is to disentangle the feedback from the relationship issues it triggers, and to discuss both, clearly and separately.
- As receivers, we take up the relationship issues and let the original feedback drop. From the point of view of the person giving us the feedback, we have completely changed the topic – from their feedback to us to our feedback to them. The topic of “who” defeats the topic of “what” and the original feedback is blocked. We call this dynamic switchtracking.

Chapter Two: Separate Appreciation, Coaching and Evaluation

- When people complain that they do not get enough feedback at work, they often mean that they wonder whether anyone notices or cares how hard they are working. They do not want advice. They want appreciation.
- Types of Feedback – Giver’s purpose
 - Appreciation: To see, acknowledge connect, motivate, thank
 - Coaching: To help receiver expand knowledge, sharpen skill, improve capability; or, to address the giver’s feelings or an imbalance in the relationship
 - Evaluation: To rate or rank against a set of standards, to align expectations, to inform decision making
- When evaluation is absent, we use coaching and appreciation to try to figure out where we stand.
- Three qualities are required for appreciation to count.
 - First, it has to be specific. This is tricky; most of us offer both appreciation and positive evaluation in grand strokes like “good work!” or “You were fabulous!” or “Thanks for everything!”
 - Second, appreciation has to come in a form the receiver values and hears clearly.

- Over time appreciation deficits set in. And these often become two-way: I think you do not appreciate all I do and all I put up with, and you think I do not appreciate whatever it is you do. Call it Mutual Appreciation Deficit Disorder (MADD), and you have the ingredients for a troubled working relationship.
 - Some need appreciation expressed financially, other public recognition, others promotion and titles, and others for the feeling we get from knowing we are a trusted adviser or indispensable player.
- Third, meaningful appreciation has to be authentic.
- Cross transactions happen when the giver and receiver are misaligned. Discuss the purpose of the feedback explicitly.
 - What is my purpose in giving/receiving this feedback?
 - Is it the right purpose from my point of view?
 - Is it the right purpose from the other person's point of view?
- Explicit disagreement is better than implicit misunderstand. Explicit disagreement leads to clarity, and is the first step in each of you getting your differing needs met.
- Feedback is really three different things with different purposes
 - Appreciation – motivates and encourages
 - Coaching – helps increase knowledge, skill, capability, growth, or raises feelings in the relationships
 - Evaluation – tells you where you stand, aligns expectations, and informs decision making
- We need all three, but often talk at cross-purposes.
- Evaluation is the loudest and can drown out the other two. (And all coaching includes a bit of evaluation.)
- Be thoughtful about what you need and what you are being offered, and get aligned.

Chapter Three: First Understand; Shift from “That’s Wrong” to “Tell Me More”

- Many shapes and sizes of wrong
 - Literally incorrect
 - Different planet wrong
 - It used to be right
 - It is right according to the wrong people
 - Your context is wrong
 - It is right for you, but wrong for me.
 - The feedback is right, but not right now.
 - It is unhelpful.
- Labels always mean something specific to the giver, but may not mean the same thing to the receiver. Once you are looking for labels, spotting them is easy; what is hard is remembering to look.
- If we strip back the label, we find that feedback has both a past and a future. There is a looking back component (here is what I noticed), and a looking forward component (here is what you need to do). The usual feedback labels do not tell us much in either direction.
- The difference between the giver's data (what they observe) and their interpretation (the meaning they make from what they observe). Data leads to interpretation – to label – to advice/consequences
- People do not typically offer their raw observations as feedback. They first interpret or filter what they see based on their own past experiences, values, assumptions, and implicit rules about the world.

- It is said that all advice is autobiographical, and this, in part, is what is meant. We interpret what we see based on our own life experiences assumptions, preferences priorities, and implicit rules about how things work and how one should be. I understand our life through the lens of my life; my advice for you is based on me.
- The process of moving from data to interpretation happens in the blink of an eye and is largely unconscious. While computers are organized around managing and accessing data, human intelligence is organized around stories.
- As receivers, we should not use our views to dismiss the giver's views, but neither should we discard our own. Working to first understand their views does not mean we pretend we do not have life experiences or opinions. Instead, we need to understand their views even as we are aware of our own. And that is almost impossible to do unless we make a key shift away from "that is wrong" and toward "tell me more: let's figure out why we see this differently."
- We are engulfed by information, far too much to take in, and so we select small samples to pay attention to and ignore the rest.
- "Wrong spotting" is so much more compelling than "difference spotting." Being aware of what another sees that we do not is just not as delicious as listening for how they are wrong.
- Others seek data that confirm their preexisting view of us, whether that view is good or bad. It is human nature.
- These biases can make difference spotting tougher still since we each feel it is the other who is biased. In fact, we are both biased, and we each need the other in order to see the whole picture more clearly.
- One of the primary reasons we interpret data differently is that we have different rules in our heads about how things should be. But we do not think of them as our rules. We think of them as the rules.
- We are not using the word "right" to mean some final determination about objective truth. We mean it more as a mindset: What makes sense about their feedback, what seems worth trying, how you can shift around the meaning in some way that gives them the benefit of the doubt in terms of how the feedback might be helpful.
- The evaluation we give people is a reflection of our own (or our organization's) preferences, assumptions, values, and goals. They might be broadly shared or idiosyncratic, but either way, they are ours.
- Feedback is delivered in vague labels, and we are prone to wrong spotting.
- To understand your feedback, discuss where it is
 - Coming from – their data and interpretations
 - Going to – advice, consequences, expectations
- Ask: What's different about
 - The data we are looking at
 - Our interpretations and implicit rules
- Ask: What is right about the feedback to seek out what is legit and what concerns you have in common.
- Working together to get a more complete picture maximizes the chance you will (both) learn something.

Chapter Four: See your Blind Spots: See How You Come Across

- If we circle on our map the things I am aware of and the things you are aware of, it turns out that my behavior is in your awareness and mostly not in my awareness. We all know this about human interactions, and yet somehow it comes as a surprise that our own behavior is largely invisible to us.
- Gap Map
 - My thoughts and feelings (my awareness)
 - My intentions (my awareness)
 - My behavior (their awareness)
 - My impacts on them (their awareness)
 - Their story about me (their awareness)
 - Their feedback to me
- Our attention can focus on only one thing at a time, so we focus on our intentions – figuring out how to say what we are trying to say. We focus on our thoughts and intentions, not on our behavior and tone.
- Emotions play a huge role in the gap between how others see us and how we assume we are seen. 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.
- When we are angry, we are focused on the provocation, the threat. And it is the threat that we remember later. For our colleague, our anger is the threat. It is not just part of the story, it is the heart of the story. Your anger is integral to how your colleague sees you and interacts with you.
- Strong emotions can seem as if they are part of the environment rather than part of us. It is not that I was angry, we think, it is that the situation was tense. But situations are not tense. People are tense.
- 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.
- We judge ourselves by our intentions, while others judge us by our impact.
- We should talk about intentions and impact separately: I have been working hard to be more patient. And yet it sounds like that is not the impact I am having. Let's figure out why.
- When you notice yourself wondering “What was their agenda?” and “What is wrong with them?” make sure your next thought is I wonder if this feedback is sitting in my blind spot.
- Ask yourself, “Where have I heard this before?” Is this the first time you have gotten such feedback, or have you heard similar things from other people over the years?
- Her colleagues did not want her to seem respectful; they want her to feel respectful. She can either discuss her true feelings – explain why she is frustrated with her colleagues, where her expectations come from, and what would help; or work hard to change her feelings – not how she comes across, but her genuine underlying feelings.
- We all have blind spots because we
 - Cannot see our own leaky faces
 - Cannot hear out tone of voice
 - Are unaware of even big patterns of behavior
- Blind spots are amplified by
 - Emotional math: we discount our emotions, while others count them double.
 - Attribution: We attribute our failure to the situations, while others attribute it to our character.
 - Impact-Intent Gap: We judge ourselves by our intentions, while others judge us by our impact on them.
- To see ourselves and our blind spots, we need help from others.

- Invite others to be an honest mirror to help you see yourself in the moment.
- Ask: How am I getting in my own way?

Chapter Five: Don't Switchtrack: Disentangle What from Who

- Sometimes the second track in a switchtrack is not out in the open, but runs underground. Our reactions remain locked in our heads, silently shouting objections while we resentfully endure criticism.
- Treat trust and content as separate topics, because they are separate topics.
- Intentions are invisible. They are locked up in the giver's head, where even the giver may not be fully aware of them. We care deeply about others' intentions but we simply cannot know them.
- While we all need to feel accepted as we are, we also need to hear feedback – particularly when our behavior is affecting others.
- At the point at which you realize there are two topics running simultaneously, say that out loud and propose a way forward.
- We use the guise of well-intended coaching to instead offer a selection of “tips.” But we are not really offering coaching for the other person's benefit. We are hoping they will change for our benefit.
- We can be triggered by who is giving us the feedback
- What we think about the giver. Are they credible? Do we trust them? Did they deliver our feedback with good judgment and skill?
- How we feel treated by the giver: Do we feel accepted? Appreciated? Like our autonomy is respected?
- Relationship triggers create switchtrack conversations, where we have two topics on the table and talk past each other. Spot the two topics and give each its own track.
- Surprise players in the feedback game:
 - Strangers
 - People we find difficult
- People we find difficult see us at our worst and may be especially well placed to be honest mirrors about areas where we have the most room to grow.
- Listen for relationship issues lurking beneath coaching.

Chapter Six: Identify the Relationship System – Take Three Steps Back

- Our own preferences, tendencies, and traits can sometimes be outside our awareness: how we manage uncertainty; how we experience novelty; what makes us feel safe; what recharges or drains our energy; how we experience conflict; whether we are detail or big picture oriented, linear or random, volatile or stable, optimistic or pessimistic.
- Taking one step back means stepping outside your own perspective to observe the system as your father-in-law does. Instead of focusing on what the other person is doing wrong, notice what you are each doing in reaction to the other.
- Accidental adversaries are created by two things: role confusion and role clarity.
- Seeing feedback in the system
 - One step back: In what ways does the feedback reflect differences in preferences, assumptions, styles, or implicit rules between us?
 - Two steps back: Do our roles make it more or less likely that we might bump into each other?

- Three steps back: What other players influence our behavior and choices? Are physical setups processes, or structures also contributing to the problem?
- Circling back to me: What am I doing (or failing to do) that is contributing to the dynamic between us?
- You cannot take meaningful responsibility for causing a problem until you understand the combination of factors that actually caused the problem. A systems approach helps you clarify your choices and actions, and how they created the outcomes you got. Then when you say you are accountable, it actually means something.
- The first common feedback profile is the blame absorber. When things go wrong, you point the finger at yourself, now and forever. Carrying all the weight of fixing relationships and projects by yourself may feel noble, but it obstructs learning just as surely as rejecting responsibility altogether.
- Blame shifters: You might think this stance would be relaxing; after all, feedback simply bounces off you and nothing is ever your fault. But the experience is ultimately exhausting. Shifters find themselves constantly assaulted by everyone else's incompetence or treacherousness. They are victims, powerless to protect themselves.
- We are often tempted to solve a short-term problem without taking account of the long-term cost.
- I take responsibility for my part, and we are both contributing to this.
- Here's what would help me change. You are asking them to change, but you are casting it (legitimately) in service of helping you change.
- When you first realize that a Me + You intersection is in fact a Me + Everybody intersection, you might feel a bit disheartened. But there is good news here, too. Me + Everybody systems can actually be fairly simple to change, because when one of you changes (i.e., you), the whole system improves. It is a rare life circumstance where so much is within your control.
- Seeing systems creates possibilities.
- To understand the feedback you get, take three steps back:
 - One step back: You + Me intersections. Are differences between us creating the friction?
 - Two steps back: Role clashes. Is this partly a result of the roles we play in the organization or the family?
 - Three steps back: Big picture. Are processes, policies, physical environment, or other players reinforcing the problem?
- Looking at systems:
 - Reduces judgment
 - Enhances accountability
 - Uncovers root causes
- Look for patterns in your feedback. Is this a You+Everybody intersection?
- Take responsibility for your part

Chapter Seven: Learn How Wiring and Temperament Affect Your Story

- Your reaction to feedback can be thought of as containing three key variables: Baseline, Swing, and Sustain or Recovery
- 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.
- Sustain and recovery refers 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.

- Responses to threats and unpleasantness are faster, stronger, and harder to inhibit than responses to opportunities and pleasures.
- Wiring matters
 - Baseline, Swing, and Sustain/Recovery vary by as much as 3,000% among individuals.
 - If we have a lower baseline, the volume will be turned down on the positives, and up on the negatives.
- Emotions distort our stories about the feedback itself.
 - The Google bias magnifies the negatives and collapses the past and the present.
 - One thing becomes everything and everyone.
 - The forever bias makes the future look bleak.

Chapter Eight: Dismantle Distortions: See Feedback at “Actual Size”

- When someone levels an unfair attack at you or has spent a lifetime withholding approval, compassion is not the first response that comes to mind. And yet empathy can have a profound effect on how we see another person and hear their feedback.
- Before we can decide what we think of the feedback we get, we need to remove the distortions:
 - Be prepared, be mindful – recognize your feedback footprint
 - Separate the strands – of feeling/story/feedback
 - Contain the story – what is this about and what isn’t it about?
 - Change your vantage point – to another, to the future, to the comedy
 - Accept that you cannot control how others see you
- Don’t buy their story about you wholesale
- Others’ views of you are input, not imprint.
- Reach out to supportive mirrors who can help you see yourself with compassion and balance.

Chapter Nine: Cultivate a Growth Identity: Sort Toward Coaching

- You will make mistakes, you have complex intentions, and you have contributed to the problem. Accepting these is a lifelong project, but working on them makes hard feedback easier to take in.
- When we receive negative feedback about our intentions, without exception we take exception.
- Not uncommonly people have this insight: Wow, I over-sort toward evaluation way more than I realized. Whether you do that only one out of ten times or eight out of ten times, each of those over-sorts is a potential meltdown that did not need to happen, and the feedback you could have been learning from. There are enough real challenges in life. You do not need to create imaginary ones.
- Whatever else you do to cope, imagine that there is an invisible second evaluation. After every low score you receive, after each failure and faltering step, give yourself a second score based on how you handle the first score.
- If you find yourself unable to sleep and fighting bouts of anxiety and loneliness, then handling it well means having the courage to admit that you need help and asking for it.
- Our ability to take in and metabolize feedback is affected by how we tell our identity story Shift from:
 - Simple all or nothing to realistically complex.
 - Fixed to growth – so that you see challenge as opportunity, and feedback as useful information for learning.
- Three practices help:
 - Sort for coaching. Hear coaching as coaching, and find the coaching in evaluation.
 - When evaluated, separate the judgment from assessment and consequences.

- Give yourself a second score for how you handle the first score.

Chapter Ten: How Good Do I Have to Be? Draw Boundaries When Enough Is Enough

- Do they attack your character not just your behavior?
- Unhelpful feedback is useless; relentless unhelpful feedback is destructive.
- Boundaries: The ability to turn down or turn away feedback is critical to healthy relationships and lifelong learning.
- Three kinds of boundaries:
 - Thanks and No Thanks: I am happy to hear your coaching...and I may not take it.
 - Not Now, Not about That: I need time or space, or this is too sensitive a subject right now.
 - No Feedback: Our relationship rides on your ability to keep your judgments to yourself.
- When turning down feedback, use “and” to be appreciative and firm.
- Be specific about:
 - The request
 - The time frame
 - The consequences
 - Their assent
- If you are not changing, work to mitigate the impact on others.
 - Ask about the impact
 - Coach them to deal with the unchanged you
 - Problem solve together

Chapter Eleven: Navigate the Conversation

- If there are problems to be solved, but you put them off, the glow of understanding will soon fade, and you will wonder what all that talking actually accomplished.
- Triggers and Internal Voices
 - Truth
 - That is wrong
 - That is not helpful
 - That is not me
- Relationship
 - After all I have done for you
 - Who are you to say
 - You are the problem, not me
 - Identity
 - I screw up everything
 - I am doomed
 - I am not a bad person – or am I?
- Talk to your internal voice. Acknowledge and appreciate it. Remind it that understanding does not equal agreeing. Negotiate it toward real curiosity. Give it an assignment. I need you to be intensely curious about what they are saying. Help me dig in and understand. What is right about what they are saying? Why is it that they see things differently?
- Listen to understand.
- The two of you are building a puzzle together. They have some of the pieces, and you have some of the pieces. When you do not assert, you are withholding your pieces.

- Super-communicators had an exceptional ability to observe the discussion, diagnose where it was going wrong, and make explicit process interventions to correct it. It was as though they were functioning in two roles at once: They were not just players in the game, they were also referees.
- Positions are what people say they want or demand. Interests are the underlying needs, desires, fears, and concerns that the stated position intends to satisfy. Often interests can be met by a variety of options, some different from what anyone sees at the outset.
- Listening for the underlying interest gives you more room to maneuver
- When you are at an impasse, when what a giver suggests is difficult for you or even unacceptable, ask about the underlying interests behind the suggestion.
- We often skip a crucial last step in conversations: figuring out what we have agreed to and what to do next. If we are not explicit, we often end up disappointed by the lack of progress, or confused about the other person's lofty expectations.
- Rather than finding solutions when frictions are not going away, we should often be looking for strategies – new ways of working around each other's foibles and failures, forgetfulness, or fiery tempers.

Chapter Twelve: Get Going – Five Ways to Take Action

- Workers who seek out negative feedback – coaching on what they can improve – tend to receive higher performance ratings. Perhaps showing an interest in learning does not highlight what you have to learn. It highlights how good you are at learning it.
- Some forms of coaching can come only from your subordinates.
- You might consider establishing reverse mentor relationships, in which you take on one or several coaches from different levels of the organization so that you can see the world, and yourself, through their eyes.
- We all have a few things in the back shed, and we could all use some help in figuring out what to do with it. Letting someone in there, just past the garden, is what takes courage. That is where intimacy grows.
- Venting is natural and cathartic; turning the sting of the moment into the latest “get this” story for friends and coworkers helps us connect with others and regain our balance. But too often we stop there. We miss the opportunity to also ask them to help us sift the feedback itself for anything we might learn.

Chapter Thirteen: Pull Together: Feedback in Organizations

- Systems will always be imperfect. The greatest leverage is helping the people inside the system communicate more effectively, and as between giver and receiver it is the receiver's skills that have the most impact.
- Coaching is a relationship, not a meeting.
- The point is not that you have to have an appreciation system in place; rather it is about having a cultural norm of appreciation that encourages everyone to notice the genuine and unique positives in the work of others, and how each team member hears appreciation and encouragement so that it can be best expressed to that person as an individual.
- What many superstars are actually doing well is learning.
- Part of what defines an organizational culture is the stories and myths about it – the courage or genius or endurance displayed in the face of impossible challenges. These stories tell us what kind of place we work at and what is expected of us.

- Track 1 structures include performance management systems, mentoring programs, trainings, etc. Track 2 activities are even more crucial to learning. These include the informal coaching conversations among friends, peers and mentors; the stories of success and failure; discussion of best practice and skills that did or did not help; and even an exchange of favorite books
- Cialdini argues that talking about negative behavior often has the unintended effect of reinforcing it as the social norm.
- Highlighting good norms does more to change disliked behavior than calling out bad norms.
- In many ways, the manager is the culture; if they are good learners, they set the tone for a learning culture.
- While learning is a shared responsibility, in the end, it comes down to you.