



March, 2020 In The Know Summary

Thanks for the Feedback

The Science and Art of Receiving Feedback Well—Even when it's off-base, unfair, poorly delivered, and frankly you are not in the mood.

Douglas Stone, Sheila Heen

Facilitator: [Janice Shack-Marquez](#)

The book [Thanks for the Feedback](#) fills an important gap. Instead of focusing on how to *give* feedback (as so many other resources do, it provides guidance on how to *receive* it—and what to do with it. The book talks about how some feedback is not presented well, and people are simply not good at giving feedback, but yet often there is still useful info in the feedback. Learning how to receive it can help us make the most of it—even when it's poorly delivered.

Feedback – Overview

- Benefits of being a “good receiver” of feedback: It helps you be a lifelong learner, it improves relationships, and people who solicit feedback tend to get higher evaluations at work than people who don't.
- We are wired to enjoy learning. At the same time we have a strong need to be accepted just as we are, to be respected, and to feel safe. That is why feedback can be threatening. The notion of constructive feedback suggests that we are not okay the way we are. It can be painful to see ourselves the way others do.
- Receiving feedback does not mean you need to take it or agree with it. It does mean engaging so you can decide what to do about it.
- The 3 Types of Feedback
 - Appreciation: Motivating, encouraging. “So helpful that you did this thing...”
 - Coaching: Helps increase your knowledge, skills, capabilities.
 - Evaluation: Helps you see where you stand, align your expectations, make decisions about what you do next.

The 3 Triggers

When you are giving someone feedback, you have time to think about what you will say, but the receiver does not have time to think about how to respond. We are all triggered by feedback. (You can find something wrong with just about any feedback we get!) This book helps you see how/why people get triggered, so that we can have tools for managing our reactions.

Truth Trigger: You receive feedback, but don't agree to what is being said. As a feedback giver, assume people are going to have truth triggers. You can ask – “How do you see things?”

- Marcus Buckingham: Feedback says a lot about the person who is providing the feedback, and sometimes less about the person receiving it. We have to figure that out. What is this feedback telling me about the person giving the feedback?

Relationship Trigger: Feedback is clouded by some strain or pattern in the relationship. You reject the feedback based on who is giving it, not based on what they are saying. You could be thinking any number of things, including,

- “They could be ungrateful, not appreciative.”
- “She has questionable motives.”
- “He has no credibility.”

Identity Trigger: We can feel overwhelmed by feedback because it threatens our sense of how we imagine others see us. It is easy to exaggerate and think, “Now I am not going to get that promotion, or that bonus.”

- “I missed another deadline.” = “I can’t do anything right.”
- “My coworker is frustrated.” = “Everyone thinks I am incompetent.”

How to Respond to Feedback

Follow these steps:

- Figure out your triggers: How do I tend to react to things?
- Separate or sort thoughts/feelings: What do I feel? What is the story I am telling myself? What was the actual feedback I received?
- Have a ‘Script’ ready: You may think, “Are you kidding me?” Practice saying instead, “Wow, I see things differently. Tell me more.”

When you receive feedback that is difficult to absorb, the first step is to try to contain the story. Say you receive feedback that a colleague is disappointed with quality of a report you created. Consider what the feedback is NOT about:

- This is not about the past/future reports.
- This is not about project management skills overall.
- This is not about being a bad colleague or teammate.
- This is not about the WHOLE report; the feedback is just about a few aspects of the report.

Ask, “What were you expecting instead?” and “Why?” Such questions can help you SHRINK the feedback back down to ACTUAL size.

Setting Boundaries

- Receiving feedback does not mean you have to accept it. You can set boundaries, such as:
 1. I am willing to listen, but I may not do things differently
 2. I am not willing to listen right now
 3. Stop, or I will leave the relationship
- Saying NO to feedback: You can always decide there are people whose feedback you will not listen to.

Practical Application

- Coaching application: One participant shared that he had a client who was very negative, about his boss and wife. He asked the coaching client to write down the things that were positive about the boss and wife. This exercise helped change the conversation.
- How to build a culture of feedback in an organization?
 - Have managers start requesting feedback. It will teach people to become comfortable with feedback. Start with having the boss ask for input, such as:
 - **Stop** – What’s getting in the way of my being a good boss?
 - **Start** – What can I start doing to be a better boss?
 - **Continue** – What’s working?
 - As a boss, go to your staff and say, “I want to be the best boss I can be. I need your feedback.” Do it with regularity. After time, the team will realize boss wants the feedback. The first few times they may not give a good answer because they don’t know how the boss will react to it. Then they will learn over time. This also opens a channel for the boss to give the team feedback. (“Wait! What about me?”)
 - When a leader receives challenging feedback...Have the leader sit down with team and say: “I got this feedback from you. I don’t see it. I need you to help me.”
- Pre-mortems (Risk Management from PMP) – Use 3 minutes at the end of weekly project meetings to share lessons learned. Rotate speakers. This is a great way to focus on quality, success stories, changes. (And ultimately for these stories to circulate in the organization and help shape the culture.)
- Agile approach – What went well? What is not going well? Who can help me? This turns problem-solving into a team solution.

Resources

- Laura Mendelow’s [blog](#)
- Sheila Heen’s Ted Talk, [How to use others' feedback to learn and grow](#)

*The Chesapeake Bay Organizational Development Network (CBODN) Book Club is a monthly session, open to all learners. Each month, a presenter shares highlights from a book related to leadership, business, or coaching. There’s no obligation to pre-read the book. The session summary is intended to provide a recap of the conversation at Book Club, rather than serve as a thorough book summary. [Register here](#) for upcoming events. For a listing of Book Club summaries, [click here](#).