



Dear Friend,

**NO!!!**

You see the person headed your way. There's nowhere to hide. Eyes meet. You hear your name being called. And then comes that dreaded question, "May I give you some feedback?"

Tell the truth. Haven't you just wanted to scream "NOOOOOO!!!" at the top of your lungs and high-tail it in the other direction? (Okay, maybe it's just me in all of my strangeness.)

I think one of the reasons we break into a cold sweat at the thought of receiving feedback is that it's frequently given poorly. All too often, we walk away from a feedback session feeling more attacked and chastised than we do feeling grateful for valuable input from a different perspective that will aid in our growth. While some of the onus certainly is on the feedback receiver, the manner in which the commenter approaches the situation has a huge impact on both the tone and the take-away.

So, join me for Part II of our discussion of effective feedback. This month's **EA Insights** takes a look at four keys to providing insight that will prove to be truly useful to those around you and even perhaps to you.

All the best,

*June*

June Melvin Mickens  
Executive Advantage, LLC

## Overcoming the Feedback Angst (Part II: Making Feedback R-A-T-E Well) June Melvin Mickens Executive Advantage, LLC

Few of us like to talk just to be talking. Few of us like to feel as if we're providing input just for the heck of it.

No, we want our words, our involvement, to matter. That's especially true when it comes to offering feedback to someone in the workplace. We want what we have to share to make a meaningful difference, right?

Last month we began this series with a look at what *feedback* actually is. (If you missed that **EA Insights** issue, [click here](#) for Part I.) We continue now by exploring the "How". That is, how can you make the feedback you offer count for more? Let me offer four facets of feedback that should help it to R-A-T-E better with your receivers and, ultimately, for you.

### Make feedback **Relevant**.

Assume Tony's knee deep in work to lead the team's preparation for an audit that begins tomorrow morning. He just learned that key documents are missing, and he's sent out an all-hands-on-deck plea to scour the office to find them. Suddenly, you call him into your office and, once there, you proceed to give him input about the conference room set up for the auditors. Tell me, how much of your conference room critique is Tony likely to hear? (By the way, if you responded, "None!", you're correct.)

Feedback becomes *relevant* when it provides input about matters of significance. In the example above, what's most significant right now? It's finding those missing documents before the auditors descend in the morning! That doesn't mean that there isn't value in having a comfortable, functional conference room set up for the team that will be reviewing the records. However, in the grand scheme of things, floor plans don't rank very high on the list of matters to be tackled. Your intent should be to offer insight that is pertinent to the situation and for the person.

So, when offering feedback, make sure that you're dealing with a matter that is *relevant*.

### Ensure that feedback is **Attached to a Standard**.

Have you ever said, "That *wasn't* good. Do it over." or "Everything's okay. Keep it up."? Think about it. What type of instruction do statements like those really give the receiver about her performance? She knows that what she did somehow didn't cut the

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### "Quotes"

*"One of the great things ... is that you receive this feedback from people. It is easy to see how sincere people are. It's nothing fake or jive. They're giving sincere appreciation. And it's not that easy to express."*  
~John Astin

*"We made some real significant progress here today. [They] gave us some positive feedback on what they liked and what they didn't like and that's what this is about -- to refine and improve what we have."*  
~Brett Bodine

*"We always welcome the feedback and the level of interest."*  
~Rich Dalrymple

*"E-mail offers the advantages of speed and efficiency. But the message should match the medium. Phone conversations allow individuals to share ideas and feedback with the benefit of vocal inflections, which reduces the potential for confusion or miscommunication. Meeting in person adds yet another dimension as participants can respond to facial expressions and body language."*  
~Diane Domeyer

*"I think the job of any board of trustees is to bring ideas, bring feedback, work with the other [s]...to make it a better university."*  
~Frank Hancock

*"I know that the work is good and they're excited...and it's getting some really good feedback."*  
~Josh Holloway

*"We need a little time to digest what we've been through, talk to*



mustard or that things seem to be working. Unfortunately, she's got no clue why! And, because she has no specifics, she doesn't know exactly what to change or what to leave alone.

The best feedback is *attached to a standard*. When coaching a supervisor regarding communication with a staff member about performance or conduct, my first question usually involves the standard by which the person's being measured. What's someone at this career stage, or in this role, or at this site *supposed* to be able to do? In other words, what is the desired outcome, conduct, knowledge, etc.? Once the standard is defined, especially in your mind as the commenter, then you can assess what actually occurred -- good, bad, or ugly -- and provide feedback that compares the *actual* to the *desired*. By using a standard, the receiver of the feedback also benefits because she now can get a clear sense of the ideal and, thus, knows what to work toward or what to continue doing.

### Give feedback that is **Timely**.

It's bold statement time. Here goes: Feedback that's unreasonably delayed is feedback that's probably best not given at all. (*Ooh!*)

Picture a staff member walking into an annual performance review with you. All year long you've been smiling at her in the hall, passing along new assignments, giving her the sense that everything is copacetic. Now, you invite her to sit down, slide the review document across the table, and low and behold, she sees in flashing neon lights a rating that indicates that she's not meeting expectations! (*Cue the Twilight Zonemusic because, surely, you both have just entered it.*)

Consider that scenario in the context of a how-to on feedback. If you want to provide meaningful feedback, please make it *timely*.

When possible, tell a staff member in the moment why the customer service he just provided was exceptional, or point out the aspects of his work that could use improvement. Granted, sometimes real-time feedback isn't appropriate, like when the person is at the counter with the customer. (*No, resist doing the "teachable moment" thing when it's either harmful to your organization's brand or your staff member's self-esteem.*) In those instances, ensure that you use a scheduled one-on-one meeting for that purpose, or pause at the next key milestone to debrief prior-period activity, or just invite the person to sit with you informally so that you can talk together about the performance you just witnessed or the product that was submitted. The closer your comments are in time to the event, the better your chance of encouraging the continuation of good work and of correcting other areas before they become ingrained or have a prolonged negative impact on the person, team, or brand.

### Offer feedback that is **Edifying**.

Let me ask you a question. What purpose does it serve to berate a colleague, especially in front of others? Yes, you share your thoughts about the work that was just done or the effort that was just offered. But, seriously, what impact is your reaction likely to have on the next product? What effect is your input likely to have on the ongoing working relationship? What's the likelihood that the receiver soon either will become numb to your outbursts or will begin polishing off his resume?

Effective feedback is *edifying*. It's input that seeks to build a person up, not tear him down. It's input that's designed to foster an environment that helps him produce at an increasingly successful level, not one that cultivates a workplace that has the opposite effect or that leads to a revolving door of people in and out of your department.

Offering edifying feedback becomes tricky, though. A desire to be edifying doesn't mean only addressing the good and glossing over any areas of challenge. That's not edifying; in fact, such an approach can hurt more than help. Rather, offering edifying comments means being honest about your colleague's activity; however, it's doing so in a balanced way, in a way that's not heartless or callous, but that presents a spirit that aims to help and build and not to hurt and tear down.

So, effective feedback is *relevant, attached to a standard, timely, and edifying*. That's not always an easy list to tackle; it requires some work on your part. That work starts with the building of trust -- establishing relationships in which people know that you have both the best interests of your organization and of them at heart. These are relationships in which people believe that you see them as more than pawns on a chessboard and a means to an end; yes, you want them to work hard and produce well, but they need to know that you care about *them* as much as you do about the bottom line, the end results, or your own success.

Such relationship development allows you to build the foundation for effective feedback. It is important to get to know the people on your team -- learn about them and how to encourage, coach, and challenge each one. When that occurs, you set the stage for the kind of interaction that happens naturally and comfortably and that facilitates discussion related not only to the continued growth of each person but also to the peak performance of your team.

Well, does your feedback **R-A-T-E** well? Are you seeing workplace goals being met, and are you contributing to the continual development of your staff? If you could benefit from some personal feedback, I invite you to call on **Executive Advantage**. Let us help you overcome your feedback angst! [Contact us today](#).



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## About Executive Advantage

At **Executive Advantage**, we are committed to providing results-based business and management consulting, leadership development, and coaching support. We partner with business leaders to build healthy, well-functioning organizations, where goals are met and people thrive. We also partner with individuals to create professional (and personal) lives with clearer direction, improved results, and greater balance.

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*people who have taken part in this process, provide them the opportunity to give feedback."*  
~Don Kaverman

*"In the theatre, the actor is given immediate feedback."*  
~Charles Keating

*"I just wanted him to give me some feedback."*  
~Richard Lies

*"[She] is always giving positive feedback and is constantly willing to help the other girls[.]"*  
~Rachel Maraio

*"All the feedback and participation has been great thus far. As the survey continues, I wanted to share some of the suggestions... They have been both impressive and helpful."*  
~Scott Morris

*"We're very interested in hearing how this is received and used[.] Depending on... feedback, we may add more content... in the future."*  
~Dennis O'Shea

*"We listen closely... and welcome constructive feedback. We welcome an objective and fair discussion about issues [that are] important."*  
~Walt Riker

*"We are still a work in progress, getting our feet wet and looking for feedback[.]"*  
~Eric Shanks

*"[T]here's incredible value in the feedback we get[.]"*  
~Greg Sullivan

*"I love feedback. I like to know when I hit something. Usually you know yourself, but you like to see that smile on the director's face."*  
~Skeet Ulrich