



Hello...Is Anybody Home?

I wish this were just my experience. But, conversations with many clients and work in numerous organizations sadly reveal that it is not.

Here goes.

You turn in an assignment. Then...nothing.

No *"Yes, this is exactly what I was looking for because...."*

No *"Hmm, I think we got our wires crossed here. Let's talk this through so you can take another stab at it."*

All you get is silence. Or worse yet, you get the sense that the assignment recipient is avoiding you; there's something to be said, but the problem is that he or she is not saying it...to you anyway.

What you want, what you need, is feedback! Right?

Too often, though, feedback is a difficult thing for people to give and especially to give effectively. People aren't always trying to sabotage those around them; they're not always uncaring or insensitive. Many times they just don't know why, when, or how to offer input in a productive manner.

That's our topic for this edition of **EA Insights**. Take a few minutes to think with me about giving feedback in a way that helps others to keep doing what they're doing well and to sure up deficiency areas. After all, we want people to receive useful information about their progress from their managers, and not be left wondering, *"Hello...is anybody home?"*

All the best,

June

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The 4-1-1 on Giving Feedback

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You've made it to "the chair". You're now an executive, manager, or supervisor; you're in a position of authority. Yeah, you!

However, along with your new title comes an important responsibility. You now oversee a team of people, and at least a part of your charge entails offering input to the members of that staff. It is your duty to provide (yes, here comes the dreaded "F" word)...**FEEDBACK!** (Feel free to look back at Part 1, "[Feedback: Laying the Groundwork](#)", if you missed that portion of the series.)

From my work with Executive Advantage clients, let me share that the giving of feedback can cause a case of the jitters for even the bravest souls. So, to lessen your angst, allow me to offer three notes -- you might say, the 4-1-1 -- for passing on feedback that should give you a boost in this area of your work.

First, consider your **Mindset**.

What's the underlying reason for providing feedback? It's a part of your responsibility as a leader. You are expected to direct the work of, and participate in developing the people on, the team you lead. While others *may* give feedback to your folks, you are the only one who *must* do so. Why? That's your job. You are a leader of...people! However, note that, if the only reason you engage in dialogue about



In This Issue

[The 4-1-1 on Giving Feedback](#)

[Quotes](#)

Quick Links

[EA Home Page](#)

[About Us](#)

[Solutions for Businesses](#)

[Solutions for Professionals](#)

[News](#)

[Contact Us](#)



"Quotes"

"There is a huge value in learning with instant feedback."
~Anant Agarwal

"We hold back our true feelings and beliefs, whether it's from a sense of being polite or fear of hurting someone's feelings. But what I have seen ... is that no one benefits from holding back and keeping things bottled up inside. So I pride myself on speaking my mind and not being afraid to give honest feedback."
~Nate Berkus

"I can tell people a story that they believe in and get behind. So I'm good at the leadership part. But I've always said that I'm a terrible manager. I'm not good at giving feedback."
~Stewart Butterfield

"Productive givers focus on acting in the long-term best interests of others, even if it's not pleasant. They have the courage to give the feedback we prefer not to hear, but truly need to hear. They offer tough love, knowing that we might like them less, but we'll come to trust and respect them more."
~Adam Grant

"We all have goals: We want to matter. We want to be important. We want to have freedom and power to pursue our creative work. We want respect from our peers and recognition for our accomplishments. Not out of vanity or selfishness, but of an earnest desire to fulfill our personal potential."

performance or conduct with a team member is because the company says you *must*, or because the person's messing up and causing you embarrassment or longer hours, then you've missed the boat.

Feedback discussions actually present an opportunity. Think about it. When a person's in the midst of an assignment or situation, he's in the weeds. Having you -- someone who's a little removed, perhaps more objective and/or experienced -- offer a different perspective, encourage continued positive performance, or collaborate to correct a misstep can be so instrumental for the person, for the team, and for the organization as a whole. So, it makes sense to shift the feedback mindset from simply fulfilling a requirement or engaging in self-preservation over to the recognition that feedback actually is about aiding someone's ongoing growth or enhancing his ability to contribute to the work you're trying to accomplish together.

Second, evaluate your **Momentum**.

A lot of folks view feedback as an *event* that occurs once or a few times a year. When viewed in this way, feedback is a big, but rather infrequent, deal. It lacks the consistency to create any momentum for reinforcing good performance or improving challenge areas, where necessary.

Instead, to generate energy, feedback -- whether it involves relaying affirmation or correction -- should become a regular part of the leader's role. There are countless chances to interact with people on any given day. You join forces on tasks; you witness people performing their duties as you move about the work area; you receive and review deliverables that are submitted to you. The routine observation of how a staff member works affords you ample openings on a regular basis to share a word of congratulation, inspiration, or instruction. In this setting, the giving of feedback becomes less of an event and more a part of the natural work cycle for you and for the group you lead.

Finally, hone your **Method**.

One reason people shy away from giving feedback is that, quite simply, it is not the most natural or comfortable thing to do. And, that's understandable! While some discussions may be stressful by nature, though, it is possible to grow more comfortable with giving feedback through attention to your method and through practice.

Here is a two-part high-level guide for *how* to offer feedback: Do your best to make your comments both specific and timely.

What's behind the call for *specificity*? Targeted feedback gives the recipient a sense of the particular action that she did well or the aspects of that task in which her work was deficient. Sometimes we think that people already should know what was good or not-so-good about their efforts. That may not be the case, or they may see the performance differently than you do. General comments may tell her that overall you were pleased or perturbed; however, the likely unanswered question is what, in particular, should be repeated or repaired for the future. Accordingly, vague comments do little good.

Timeliness is the second area for focus. The closer in time to the action you can offer insight, the more productive your comments will be. For instance, if a staff member submits a report to you in May, but your input isn't delivered until the December performance review, the time lapse likely will make even the most specific and thoughtful comments frustrating at best.

So, this two-part guide is a great start. Yet, it also takes practice to build the feedback-giving muscle. It can be useful to do a check off of *mindset*, *momentum* helps or hindrances, and then *method* for each planned feedback offering in order to walk through the steps and confirm your planned approach. It also can be helpful to practice with a trusted partner, either because you've pinpointed feedback giving as a professional development area for yourself or because you're preparing for a critical discussion. Practice sessions allow you to test your message, to gain neutral third-party perspective, and to adapt as necessary, in safety, before an actual conversation.

When handled effectively by the giver, feedback can be a significant contributor to peak performance in the workplace and to the growth of team members. Yet, as in all communication, there is both a giver *and* a receiver. Don't miss Part 3 of this series in which we'll consider the topic of receiving feedback well. Until then, if either side of the feedback message presents a challenge for you, help is at hand. Reach out to us at **Executive Advantage** to aid you in preparing for or debriefing about your feedback exchanges. [Contact us today](#). We're here to partner with you!



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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.

To learn more about **Executive Advantage**, contact us [online](#) or at (301) 280-5950.

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~Ryan Holiday

"I'm going to give input when I need to. When it needs to be said."

~Kyrie Irving

"If I'm looking at a client, I can say, 'Oh, wow, this is where you're weak; this is what you need to work on.' I can correct her in a matter of seconds, and then she's practicing specifically on the thing she needs to work on instead of repeating the same mistakes. Having that feedback is essential[.]"

~Jillian Michaels

"People want to know on an ongoing basis, 'Am I doing right? Am I moving in the right direction? Do you think I'm progressing?' Nobody's going to wait for an annual cycle to get that feedback."

~Pierre Nanterme

"I can't be a hypocrite as a coach because as a player that's what I wanted. I wanted feedback; I wanted communication from the boss. I showed up for work, ... but I want input. So that's the kind of coach I want to be."

~Adam Oates

"When we make progress and get better at something, it is inherently motivating. In order for people to make progress, they have to get feedback and information on how they're doing."

~Dan Pink