

team leader's **discussion guide**

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Thanks for the Feedback

team leader's discussion guide



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Author's Note:

This toolkit was created by Ann Garrido, Elaine Lin, Sheila Heen, Sarah Seminski, Heather Sulejman, and Doug Stone of Triad Consulting. It is based on the tools and approaches developed over the last 15 years in our work with leaders and their teams.

It is not intended for use in classroom instruction, and does not constitute a license to advertise or sell “Thanks for the Feedback” or feedback courses in the marketplace. “Thank for the Feedback”™ is a trademark held by authors Douglas Stone and Sheila Heen.

Suggestions?

If you have ideas for how to make this kit more useful, please feel free to let us know at info@diffcon.com.

How it works

- ▶ This facilitation guide is intended for use by leaders who want to share their learning from a Triad training session with their team.
- ▶ The guide is broken into thirteen sets of questions; each set tracks a chapter in *Thanks for the Feedback*.
- ▶ We imagine that you will meet with your team periodically -- perhaps one meeting per book chapter -- to discuss the questions relating to that chapter.
- ▶ Ask team members to read one chapter ahead of each meeting. They should note what resonates, what surprises them, what questions they have, and what ideas they have for the team.
- ▶ Once you get a rhythm going (after the first conversation) you may want to send out one or two questions to the group ahead of time so they can think about them as they read.
- ▶ Remember, less is more. A rich conversation about one or two questions will be more meaningful, and get more traction than surface discussion of many questions.
- ▶ You can start meetings in a number of ways. If the group is working through a particular challenge that is related to the chapter, you can start there. But you can also start by asking someone to summarize several of the key ideas in the chapter, and then lead a discussion based on the questions contained here. Follow the conversation wherever the interest of the group leads.
- ▶ Wrap up by summarizing key themes, takeaways, open questions, and assignments, and let them know when you will meet next time.

Some key assumptions about receiving feedback

- ▶ Personal and organizational growth and learning require each of us to improve our ability to receive (and give) feedback well.
- ▶ Receiving feedback well is a skill. However skilled we are at it now, with some thought and application, we can get better.
- ▶ Feedback is formal and informal, verbal and non-verbal, and can be from bosses, subordinates, peers, vendors, clients, and customers.
- ▶ Being good at receiving feedback allows us to get better at our jobs and improve our working relationships. Studies show that it leads to higher morale and better performance evaluations.
- ▶ Leaders who receive feedback well provide an invaluable model for their subordinates and teammates.
- ▶ One of the best ways to improve our ability to give feedback well is by improving our understanding of what it takes to receive feedback well.

What's my role in facilitating these sessions?

- ▶ **You do *not* have to have all the answers.** Your primary role is not teacher or expert, but facilitator. You play that role by asking good questions, by keeping track of time and agenda, and by working to include everyone in the conversation.
- ▶ Create a **safe space**, where people can share experiences, offer different perspectives and together wrestle with the challenges. Invite doubts, questions and resistance into the conversation. Ask questions like, “who sees it differently?” “what are you skeptical about?” and, “what is your internal voice saying?”
- ▶ The **facilitator is also a participant** in the group. You should share your own stories and places where you are confused, like anyone else in the group.
- ▶ Focus on what the group can **learn and apply** to their daily conversations. At the end of each session, orient the group to key takeaways and “snapshot commitments” that everyone can apply in between sessions and in their day-to-day.
- ▶ **Walk your talk.** People will be watching you closely to see if you are using the skills and tools and are truly open to feedback. They're watching how you respond to disagreement or challenge in these conversations, and how you handle your daily leadership tasks. Leader behavior is “loud”: people will notice and they will talk to each other about it. Give them something positive to talk about.
- ▶ **Have fun!** You are all on this journey together. As with everything in life, it can be alternately frustrating and satisfying, funny and anxiety-producing. Be alive to whatever is going on in the group.

Useful tips for facilitation

Types of questions

- ▶ **Open ended questions** like “What do you think?” “How do you see this working in our world?” or even “Thoughts?” Leave room for people to take the conversation in whatever direction seems most relevant to them. Closed questions like, “Don’t you agree?” elicit yes/no responses and close down conversation.
- ▶ **Follow up questions** like “Tell us more” “What’s an example?” and “When does that not apply?” can help you get under general labels and probe meaning.

Help them feel heard

- ▶ **Paraphrase meaning.** This can signal to others that you are listening and understand what they’ve said. This is particularly useful when the conversation is confusing.
- ▶ **Acknowledge strong feelings.** Saying, for example, “I know you feel strongly about this,” can help others feel heard when emotions run high.

Watch out for identity

- ▶ It’s normal for people to disagree. Don’t “Who’s right?” but rather, “Let’s explore why we see this differently.” Be aware that roles and identities may be implicated and use listening and questions to move away from defensiveness and toward mutual understanding.

Manage expectations

- ▶ Explain your role -- that you are facilitating conversation and mutual inquiry, not “teaching” as the expert.
- ▶ Help the group keep itself on track by articulating the purpose of the session, keeping track of time, and summarizing commitments before you adjourn.

Three Triggers

Discussion Questions

The introduction and first chapter are overviews of the material.

“The real leverage is in creating pull.”

-TFTF, p. 6

What do you think about the assertion that creating “pull” within a team around receiving feedback may be even more valuable than focusing on the “push” of giving feedback well?

In your own life, where have you experienced the greatest tension between wanting to learn and wanting to be accepted just as you are?

Think of a couple of pieces of feedback in the recent past that you have found tough to receive. Can you recall any physiological reaction that you had to the feedback? What were the most immediate thoughts to go through your mind as you received this feedback? How would you describe your experience in relation to the three triggers (truth, relationship, identity) discussed in this chapter?

Which of the three triggers (truth, relationship, or identity) do you find most befuddling and why? What has helped you manage these triggers?

“In addition to our desire to learn and improve, we long for something else that is fundamental: to be loved, accepted, and respected just as we are. “

- TFTF, p. 8



Appreciation, Coaching, Evaluation

Discussion Questions

Think of instances where you were looking for one type of feedback (appreciation, coaching, or evaluation) and you received another. What was your response?

We often desire different kinds of feedback from different people in our lives. *From whom* would you most value appreciation right now, and *for what*? Coaching? Evaluation? What ideas might you have to get more of the kind of feedback that you need?


In your team, what kind of feedback is most frequently given? How? What kind is least frequently offered? Why to you suspect that is?

How is evaluation expressed (both verbally and non-verbally) in your work environment? When has this evaluative feedback been helpful to you and when not?

Whose coaching has been most helpful to you? What did they do that you found so useful?

How much appreciation is expressed in your team? Does it matter to you how it is expressed - privately, publicly, words, actions, quality time?

When you give feedback, is it most often evaluation, appreciation, or coaching? What inclines you to tilt in one direction over another?



Bonus Round: How do we handle feedback with clients/customers/vendors? In what way does this affect our working relationship, and what could we change that would improve things?

First Understand

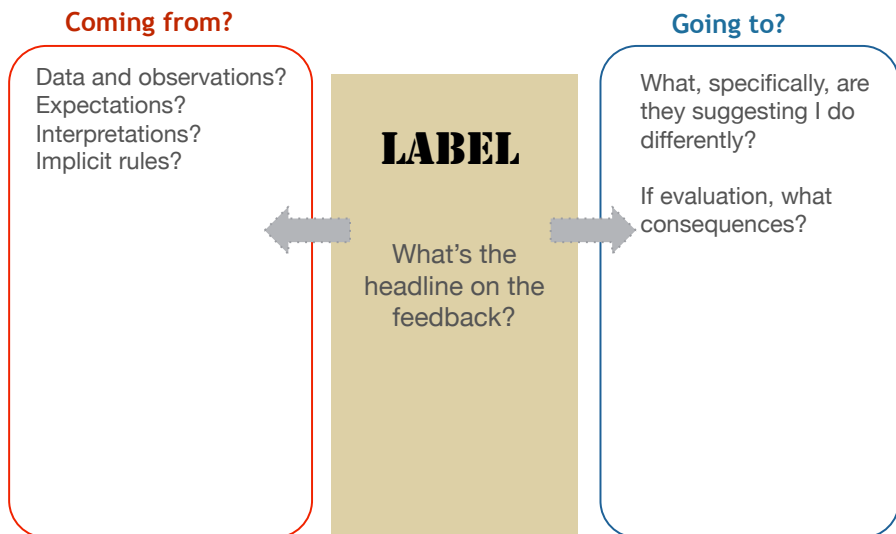
Discussion Questions

Think of a person who you find challenging to deal with. Then fill in the following sentence: “I just wish she/he were more “_____” or “less _____.”

Now dig under that “label.” Where is the label “coming from” and where is it “going to?”

Consider a label *you* have received from someone. What was your reaction? What did you assume they meant? Thinking about it from their point of view, where might it be coming from? Where might it be going to? What kinds of follow up questions might you now want to ask the person who gave you the feedback, if you were able to do the conversation over again?

First, understand the feedback



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First Understand (cont)

Discussion Questions

When we receive a piece of challenging feedback, we tend to “wrong spot” -- we name all the things that are wrong about the feedback. Consider a piece of feedback that rubbed you the wrong way. What was wrong about the feedback you were given? What might be right about it?

Read pages 64-66, about “Differences in Interpretation.” Can you think of implicit rules you have that others violate? Can you think of any implicit rules others have that you have violated?

The authors note, “Identifying the birds rather than the trees doesn’t make the birds wrong.” (p. 67) What does this mean and what are the birds or the trees in your most current feedback conversation?

Respond to the authors’ argument that the goal of feedback isn’t to be objective, but rather, “It should be to make judgments thoughtfully, and once made, to have them be transparent and discussable.” (p. 70) If taken seriously, how might this impact feedback conversations and structures within your organization?

How does texting/emailing feedback complicate the conversation about feedback? What could be done to improve the quality of these online conversations?



See Your Blind Spots

Discussion Questions

Think of recurrent feedback in your life that you find confusing or baffling. What is it that others seem to see that you're not aware of? What would your best friend or spouse or sibling say are your blind spots?



"The fact that others are always reading our faces, tone, and behavior doesn't mean they are always reading us right."

- TFTF, p. 85

What's your reaction to the idea of learning about your blind spots? Does it feel threatening? Worrisome? Exciting? Interesting? If it depends...what does it depend on?

Recall a time when you tried to hide an emotion or an attitude and it "leaked" out in ways others were able to spot. How did they let you know?

The authors claim, "Strong emotions can seem as if they are part of the environment

rather than part of us. *It's not that I was angry, we think, it's that the situation was tense.* But situations are not tense. People are tense." (p. 87) What do you make of this statement? What's an example from your own life that might illumine that point?

Describe a time when you had good intentions and yet it had a negative impact. How does this affect your ability to distinguish between the intent and impact of others on you?

Who are the supportive mirrors that you most commonly turn to when you get hard feedback? Who are some potential honest mirrors for you as you try to get better at receiving feedback? If you wanted someone on the team to serve as your honest mirror, how would you start the conversation?

Don't Switchtrack

Discussion Questions

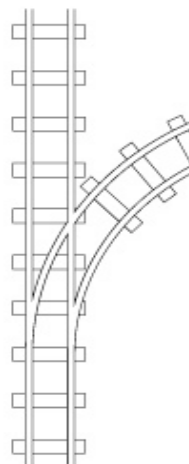
In addition to the “truth triggers,” the authors note that sometimes we dismiss feedback because “how, when, where, and why it arrives says something damning about the who,” (p. 100) implying we are not required to listen. Think of an example of a time when you struggled with feedback because your assessment of the “how, when, where, why” felt inappropriate to you.

Consider the dialogue between Louie & Kim (p. 102). Where would you say that the “switchtrack” first occurs in the conversation? What are the two topics they are trying to discuss at the same time?

Think of an example of switchtracking from your own work life. What was your objection or reaction? Did it have to do with what you think of the person (credibility, etc.) or how you felt treated by that person? Was the feedback itself off-base or useful?

Who are the people that you have the easiest time receiving feedback from? The hardest? What insights does this chapter offer into why they might be easy / difficult?

Think of a recurrent argument within the organization that seems to go nowhere (or goes in circles)? What are the two “tracks” or topics? What would it look like to “signpost” in this situation? (p. 117) Underneath the rhetoric, what do you suspect both sides are worried about?



Identify the Relationship System

Discussion Questions

Marriage researcher John Gottman reports that 69% of the fights couples currently have are about the same subjects they were arguing about five years ago (p. 128). We might suspect the same will be true in the workplace when we work closely with other people for an extended period of time. Think of a relationship in the workplace where you fall into repeat conflicts. Map the “You and Me” intersection as you see it. Now that you’ve “taken one step back,” consider how you might break the pattern.

What roles do you hold at work that put you naturally into conflict with other roles in the work environment? What kinds of techniques have you come up with to help you minimize the built-in conflict? What other ideas might you try, from this chapter or from elsewhere?

“Feedback is often expressed as ‘This is how you are, and that’s the problem.’ But in relationships, ‘This is how you are’ really means ‘This is how you are *in relationship to how I am.*’”

- TFTF, p. 126



Identify the Relationship System (cont)

Discussion Questions

Where have you experienced role confusion in the work place? What kinds of clues do you look for to help you get a better understanding of where your role begins and ends?

Think of a difficult situation in the workplace where you suspect a bigger system (other players, physical environment, timing and decision making, etc...) was at play? How have you attempted to raise these “big picture” questions in the conversation? How has this been received? What might you try differently after reading this chapter?

The authors describe several benefits of a “systems lens” (pp. 136-141). Which ones are most persuasive to you? Can you think of others? Do you see any drawbacks to using a systems lens?

In this chapter, the authors frequently mention the benefits of taking responsibility/owning up to one’s own contribution in creating and sustaining the tension. In your own experience, what makes this so difficult to do? If you’ve done it, what have been the results?

How do you see the interaction between a systems lens and personal accountability?



Wiring & Temperament

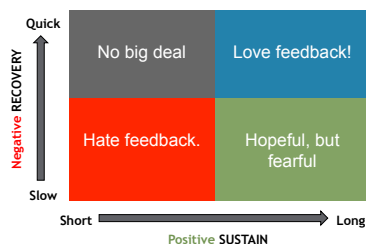
Discussion Questions

In this chapter, the authors note that “wiring matters” in how we think about feedback. As best as you are able, how would you describe your own wiring in terms of

- ▶ baseline? (your natural level of happiness in life)
- ▶ swing? (the degree to which your emotions swing both negatively and positively when you receive feedback)
- ▶ sustain and recovery? (how long you sustain the buzz off of positive feedback before you return to baseline / how long it takes you to recover from negative feedback before you return to baseline)

What is your response to discoveries in the field of neuroscience about the biological roots of feedback profiles? Are you consoled? Concerned? Curious? Other reactions?

Swing/Recovery Combinations



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Describe a time when, in retrospect, your feelings were not your friends upon receiving feedback. How did they disproportionately distort your sense of identity - past, present, and future? What helped you to begin to see things more in proportion?

What do the authors mean by the term “Google Bias?” (pp. 161-162) Think of an example from your own life. What triggered this thought pattern and how did you recover?

After reading this chapter, what new ideas do you have for making the most out of your own “Magic 40?” (p. 158)

How does your own wiring influence not only how you receive feedback, but also how you give it?

Dismantle Distortions

Discussion Questions

Describe your own “feedback footprint,” from the moment you receive difficult feedback until you return to your baseline. What patterns do you see in how you react and how you work through the challenges?

Take an example of challenging feedback from your past, and use it to practice separating the threads of feeling, story and feedback.

Think of the last time that a piece of feedback provoked a strong reaction in you. Then create a feedback containment chart for yourself related to that feedback. What *is* the feedback about? What *isn't* it about? What do you see as the benefits of creating a containment chart?

Feedback Containment Chart

What is
this feedback about?

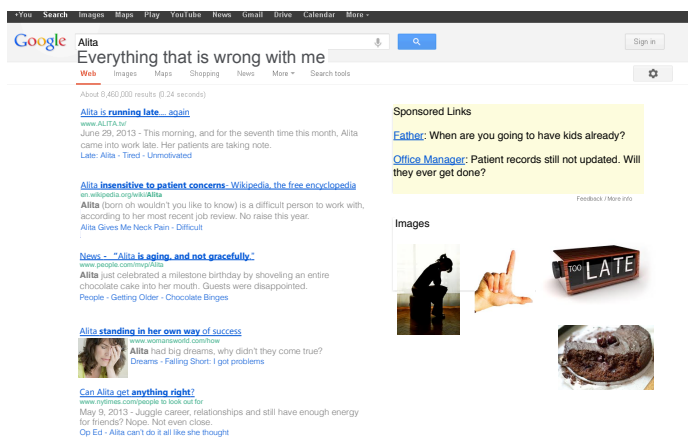
What's isn't
it about?

SEE
WE
ME

Dismantle Distortions (cont)

Discussion Questions

The Google Bias distorts our sense of self



Role play for a minute your future self twenty years from now talking about a piece of feedback that is currently disturbing to you. Write down what your future self would have to say about it. What advice would your future self give your current self?

Sketch out a “balancing picture” (p. 174) for yourself to hang in your office space. If comfortable, share your picture with the group and ask what they see in it. What more might they suggest you add or take away, based on their experience of you?

Which of the five techniques for “dismantling distortions” outlined in this chapter seemed most intriguing and/or promising for you in your life? Pick one to commit to trying this coming week.

What would it mean for you to let go of the fantasy that you can control how others see you? What appeals to you about letting go? What inclines you to resist letting go?

What is your advice to a friend or colleague who is seriously “drowning” from challenging feedback? What makes it hard to take that advice yourself, when it is you who is drowning? Who can you turn to for help in such situations?

Cultivate a Growth Identity

Discussion Questions

Review the chart on p. 196. Do you think you naturally have a fixed identity or a growth identity? If you find yourself saying “it depends,” then on what does it depend? Which statements on the chart ring true for you?

What three adjectives most immediately come to mind when asked to describe yourself? To “complexify” your identity toward a more nuanced picture, around these three adjectives add twenty additional adjectives that are also sometimes true. Then in an outermost circle, add twenty more that are infrequently but nevertheless occasionally true. How can having a fuller picture of our identity help to ground us when we receive challenging feedback?

Think of a piece of evaluation you received recently - an assessment, a criticism, a time in a race, a bid won or lost. What did you hear as the judgment layered on top of the evaluation (p. 201)? See if you can “sort for coaching.” If so, what might the evaluation be telling you that you could work on?

How do you typically do on your “second score?” In the wake of an upsetting evaluation, what is your pattern? Do you give up? Blame others? Redouble your efforts (and does that include changing or learning anything)? Think of examples. What might help you earn a better second score?

What are your thoughts on this statement: “Having a growth identity doesn’t mean you are never upset by feedback.”

How do you handle the feedback you have for yourself? Are you your own worst critic or do you tend to reassure yourself? Where does this propensity come from? In what ways is it helping you or hindering you? What might you do about it?

Of the multiple ideas suggested in this chapter for cultivating a growth identity, which hold promise for you? What can you commit to trying this coming week?

How Good Do I Have To Be?

Discussion Questions

Consider whether you've had a relationship in your life (current or past) where the feedback has been unrelenting. What is/was that like? How do/did you handle it?

Reread the story of Hunyee and her mother on page 216, and continuing on pages 221 and 223. What do you think of the boundary that Hunyee is trying to set?

What experiences have you had setting a boundary with others? What was the other person's reaction? Looking back, what would you do the same or change about how you handled it?

Reread the story of Dave on page 219. Have you ever received feedback that you knew was "right" but that you weren't ready to take? What was it, and what did you need to be ready?

How do you react when you have coaching/evaluation for someone else in your life and you feel they aren't listening? How do they respond? Is it coaching, or evaluation? Is that how they hear it? What impact is it having on your relationship?

Is there a change about yourself you've been asked to make that you've decided you can't or won't? What new ideas did you gain from this chapter that might help you mitigate the cost of your decision on others? What steps would you commit to trying this week?

"The biggest mistake we make when trying to create boundaries is that we assume other people understand what's going on with us."

-TFTF, p. 219



Navigate the Conversation

Discussion Questions

The authors mention four skills that are needed within feedback conversations - listening, asserting, “process moves,” and problem solving. Which of these four do you consider your natural strong suit? Which of these probably will require the most development and practice?

Review the chart on p. 237. Which of the three triggers does your internal voice most commonly fall prey to?

Think about an upcoming conversation that will likely involve feedback you are dreading or not wanting to receive. Write down a short script of the dialogue between you and your internal voice to prepare. How might you negotiate with your internal voice, especially about the trigger it is most susceptible to?

How can you tell when you’ve moved from inquiry in a conversation to “hot inquiry”? (pp. 240-241) What phrases are you most likely to employ when you slip from curiosity (trying to figure out what the other sees) to advocacy (arguing your point)?

The authors talk about being your own “process referee” (p. 244-246). What do they mean and how might it be useful in your own most challenging feedback situation at present?



“Listening may be the most challenging skill involved in receiving feedback, but it also has the biggest payoff.”

-TFTF, p. 234

Get Going

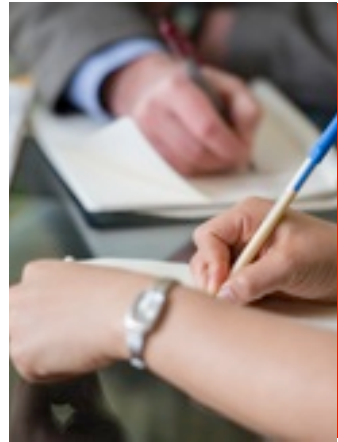
Discussion Questions

What do you think about going to someone you have difficulty with to ask for “one thing”? (p. 258) What would the advantages be? What are the risks involved for you? How can you mitigate those risks with a “small experiment?” (p. 261)

The author’s note that attempts at new patterns of behavior often make us unhappy and less satisfied before we begin to experience the benefits -- a phenomenon they call the “J-Curve.” How does being aware of the J-Curve impact your willingness to try “small experiment”? What are some ways you’ve figured out for dealing with life’s J-Curves in other areas of your life?

Who are the people who most frequently offer you coaching feedback in your life? What would it mean for you to “coach your coach”? Which of the questions on p. 277 hold the most promise in your view? Which feel potentially uncomfortable and why?

How do you react to the statement *“Feedback isn’t just about the quality of the advice or the accuracy of the assessments. It’s about the quality of the relationship, your willingness to show that you don’t have it all figured out, and to bring your whole self - flaws, uncertainties, and all - into the relationship”*? (p. 290) Are there relationships where it feels more safe than others for you to do this? Does it apply to professional relationships in the same way it does for personal relationships?



Pull Together

Discussion Questions

The authors note that there are no “perfect feedback systems.” What do you think about that statement? What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of your current feedback system at work?

Based on this closing chapter, what new ideas do you have for how you might improve the system? (brainstorm together)

What are one or two ways that you personally might take greater advantage of the system as it currently exists - maximizing your own learning even in an imperfect system?

TFTF is explicitly about *receiving* feedback, but as you come to the closing chapter, how do you think differently about your role as feedback *giver*? What would you do differently?

