



Keyword: Feedforward

Feedback Isn't Enough

by Kevin Eikenberry

We all want feedback – we want to know how we are doing. Getting that input gives us a benchmark of our current performance and helps us improve. It is important. It is necessary.

And it isn't enough.

Consider your basic performance review (even if it is a really effective one) or most any performance discussion. Most, if not all, of that conversation focuses on the past – what people have done that worked and went well, and what could be improved or changed.

At the end of that conversation, the supervisor, coach or leader feels better – they have given the person feedback! Unfortunately, for the other person that might not be enough.

While they now have a new perspective on their past performance, they must do the translation – they are left to figure out what to do *next time*.

Four Types of Input

There are four types of input that we can give to people:

- Negative feedback (that didn't work – remember that).
- Positive feedback (that did work – good job!)
- Negative feedforward (next time, avoid this or that)
- Positive feedforward (next time, try this and repeat this)

While most people think of feedback as positive or negative, that tells only part of the story. As important as it is to learn from the past, we are looking at the past as a guide to adapting, changing or improving future performance.

Instead of focusing on the past only, why not make your intentions perfectly clear and use the past to give people advice about what to do *next time*?

Five Reasons to Consider Feedforward

No translation required. If we have ideas about what to do – or not to do next time – why not share them? When we have an expertise, sometimes when we give feedback we are



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assuming that people will know what or how to change or adapt. When we give clear feedforward we aren't assuming – there will be no translation required.

It can be faster. Sometimes we spend a long time trying to give the feedback in a way that people will accept and understand. In these cases it might be much faster to just give some clear directions on what to do next time. We all know this is true because in a crisis or overloaded work situation this is what we do. Remember that feedforward isn't only effective, it can be faster.

It can be more readily accepted. People are less defensive when receiving advice about what to do in the future. On the other hand, there can be lots of defensiveness and denial when people are hearing about their past performance. Because it is future focused, feedforward is often accepted – and therefore used more readily than feedback.

We can't change the past. Maybe this should have been first on the list. We can learn from the past, but we can't change it. This is why feedback is still important – if we focus solely on the future our advice may become too directive (do this, do this, but not that). On the other hand if we only think about the past, we aren't creating the future we desire. Focus some of your conversation on what you can change – which is the future.

Feedforward creates an upward spiral. We are having a conversation about performance because we want people to continue to grow, succeed and be more productive and happy in their work, right? Using feedforward as a tool helps us move people in an upward, engaged spiral of performance.

Feedback is important, but it isn't enough. Examine how your coaching and mentoring sessions go. Are you sharing feedforward? Are you asking for feedforward? Including this in your discussion will create better relationships and better results – for both the coach and the coached.



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