



# Leadership Insights & Actions

## "Coaching News That You Can Use"

July/2008

### How Am I Doing?

#### The Right Way to Ask for and Use Professional Feedback

*by Thomas J. Haizlip, M.A.*

We all seem to have a love/hate relationship with feedback. We know that we need it to improve, but we still avoid asking for it because we are worried about what we might hear. To avoid this potential difficult conversation, most of us end up keeping quiet and just guess what others might be thinking about our performance. This is very unfortunate because we all need help in figuring out how we can improve our performance and advance in our career. Here is a simple 7 step method that you can use to overcome your fear of feedback and find out what you need to do to be seen as a top level player.

#### **1. Pick A Feedback Team**

Trust is the most critical ingredient for honest dialogue. But, asking your best friend at work how you are doing is a lot like asking your spouse if they think you are getting too fat. To get the best feedback, you need to get it from multiple sources. Create a feedback team by choosing at least 4-6 coworkers that you respect and admire. Try to pick peers or senior leaders you work with, but whom you do not report to directly. Make sure everyone on your team has a consistent opportunity to observe your performance. Be sure you have at least a moderate level of trust with all of your feedback team members because you will need to be able to discuss sensitive job topics.

#### **2. You Go First**

Never just start a conversation by asking someone for feedback. First, tell them you are trying to improve and then ask them if they are willing to be part of your performance improvement team. If they agree, then give them an honest self-assessment of your own professional performance. Talk about both your strengths and weaknesses. Be sure to discuss areas where you perceive a need for further professional development. The more honest and open you can be in talking about your own performance gaps, the easier you will make it for others to give you valuable feedback. This also demonstrates a high level of self-awareness and maturity so they will feel safe to give you feedback without fear that you might become upset.

#### **3. Listen & Don't Interrupt**

After you have presented your self-assessment, ask them for an evaluation of your performance. While receiving this feedback it is very important that you listen attentively and do not interrupt. No matter what you hear, even if you might disagree strongly,

just stay calm, composed, and focused on what they are saying. Be aware, if you act defensive or start arguing about any point of the feedback you are receiving, you are risking losing a member of your feedback team. Remaining silent does not mean that they are right in their assessment or that you agree with them. Just accept it as an honest point of view and wait and see if other people on your feedback team give you the same feedback. It is a good idea to keep notes of the feedback you receive from each person and be sure to paraphrase back all important points to assure that you understand everything the other person is saying.

#### **4. Feedback Must be Turned Into Goals**

Your behavior can only do four things: start, stop, increase or decrease. To improve your performance you must know what behaviors you need to change and how you need to change them. For example, if someone suggests that you could improve your performance by "trying to be more positive," or by "acting more like a team player," what exactly does that mean? The problem is that these are both vague statements that will leave you guessing, perhaps incorrectly, about what you need to do to improve. To be more confident that your performance will align with other's expectations, you need a way to turn your feedback into concrete, measurable, and specific behaviors you can work on improving.

#### **5. Always ask the "Camera Question"**

No matter what feedback you receive, make sure you ask, "If a camera could see me or a tape recorder could hear me doing what you recommend, what would it see or hear?" This is the magic question that will help you and your feedback team turn feedback into a set of specific behaviors that will demonstrate your improved performance. Maybe "have a better attitude" simply means that you should smile, greet everyone in the morning, do not interrupt others when they are talking, and be sure to point out the good ideas that other people suggest. Wonderful, now you have turned a vague feedback statement about your "attitude" into a set of behaviors you can start, stop, increase, and decrease.

#### **6. Create Your Own Performance Improvement Plan**

Be sure to thank your coworkers for their feedback. Even if it was negative, it is still valuable information and you should act gratefully. Tell them how you are talking with others to get additional feedback and then ask them if you can meet with them again in two weeks to discuss your performance improvement plan. Next, you need to integrate all the feedback that you get from others and sort it into high priority and low priority categories. The more people that tell you that you need to improve a specific behavior, the higher priority that you should assign to that behavior. Likewise, if only 1 out of 6 people mention you need to work on your "typing skills," then you can make that a much lower priority.

#### **7. Continue the Feedback Process**

Share your performance improvement plan and let them know what behaviors you will be working on. This will prime them to notice change. Then ask if you can meet with them monthly or at least quarterly to discuss the progress that you have made and to get more feedback from them. Improvement is a process, not an event. It will require an ongoing commitment and regular feedback. It takes time and effort to change behavior and it also takes time for others to notice the changes in your performance. The key to long-term development success is to create a feedback loop that gives you regular performance updates so you know how to adjust your behavior and continue to improve your performance.

#### **Summary**

Both you and your organization will benefit from your ability to seek out feedback, accept constructive criticism, and develop a performance improvement plan to get better. As you improve, you will align your actions with organizational goals and priorities and help create an environment where people can feel comfortable asking for feedback because they know that others want them to succeed and are committed to their success.

## **Do You Know How to Accept a Compliment?**

### **How You Say Thanks Affects How Often You Receive Praise**

*by Thomas J. Haizlip, M.A.*

Praise and recognition are great ways to motivate people and improve performance. We all want to feel valued and appreciated, but did you know that how you respond to praise can actually influence the amount you are likely to receive. That's right, if you do not know how to accept compliments well, you may be unknowingly discouraging others from giving you the praise and recognition you deserve.

#### **Modesty is Not Always a Virtue**

When someone gives you praise or recognition, you must be careful not to let your modesty accidentally insult your admirer. Remember, when you respond to praise with comments like, "Oh, it was nothing special," you are actually "undoing" someone's compliment and telling them that they were "wrong."

#### **I Come to Praise Those who Praise**

The right way to receive a compliment is with a mix of confidence and gratitude. For example, if someone says that you did a great job on your recent group presentation, never say "I was not even trying." Responding like that actually punishes the person praising you and reduces the likelihood that they will do it again in the future. Instead, try to say something like, "Well, thank you so much for noticing. I really take pride in my speaking skills and it means a lot to me when someone lets me know that I am making a positive contribution. I really appreciate the compliment." Wow, now that is the right way to accept a compliment. It demonstrates both pride and gratitude and also expresses appreciation to the person giving you praise. This serves to reinforce their behavior and increases the likelihood that they will praise you again in the future.

**Next Newsletter: The Difference Between Self-Confidence & Conceit**

## **Great Management Is No Substitute for Great Leadership**

### **About Thomas J. Haizlip, M.A.**

Since 2000, I have helped transform great managers into great leaders. My experience and training as an expert in human behavior allows me to quickly assess and analyze why you are not succeeding and what you need to do differently to move forward. Over 50% of my clients have been promoted after working with me and learning how to become a more effective leader. Please, give me a call so I can help you move from where you are to where you want to be as a leader.



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