

From Push to Pull, 'Thanks for the feedback', Stone & Heen, (2014)

Summary

- "The **key variable in your growth is you!**" Learning how to 'metabolise' feedback well is about getting into the driver's seat of own learning and development.
- 'Pushing harder' rarely opens the door to genuine learning, whereas creating 'pull' is about mastering the skills required to drive our own learning and **recognize and manage our resistance**, how to combine confidence and curiosity
- Good coaching creates the conditions for people to open-up to both support and challenge

"As we worked to develop ways to approach feedback differently, we soon realised that the **key player is not the giver but the receiver**. And we came to see how this could transform not just how we handle performance reviews on the job, but how we learn, lead, and behave in our professional roles and in our personal lives.

... feedback is not just what gets ranked; it's what gets thanked, commented on, and invited back or dropped. Feedback can be formal or informal, direct or implicit; it can be blunt or baroque, totally obvious or so subtle that you're not sure what it is.

In today's workplace, feedback plays a crucial role in developing talent, improving morale, aligning teams, solving problems, and boosting the bottom line. And yet. **51% of respondents** in one recent study **said their performance review was unfair or inaccurate**, and one in four employees dreads their performance review more than anything else in their working lives.

Pull Beats Push

Training managers how to give feedback - how to push more effectively - can be helpful. But if the receiver isn't willing or able to absorb the feedback, then there's only so far persistence or even skillful delivery can go. It doesn't matter how much authority or power a feedback giver has; **the receivers are in control of what they do and don't let in**, how they make sense of what they're hearing, and whether they choose to change.

Pushing harder rarely opens the door to genuine learning. The focus should not be on teaching feedback givers to give. The focus - at work and at home - should be on feedback receivers, **helping us all to become more skillful learners**. The real leverage is creating pull...

See 'The Push - Pull Continuum', p4

Creating 'Pull'

Creating pull is about mastering the skills required to drive our own learning; it's about how to recognize and manage our resistance, how to engage in feedback conversations with confidence and curiosity, and even when the feedback seems wrong, how to find insight that might help us grow...

We like the word "pull" because it highlights a truth often ignored: that **the key variable in your growth is not your teacher or your supervisor. It's you.** It's well and good to hope for that special mentor or coach (and cherish the ones you come across). But don't put off learning until they arrive. Those exceptional teachers and mentors are rare. Mostly, our lives are populated by everyone else - people who are doing their best but may not know better, who are too busy to give us the time we need, who are difficult themselves, or who are just plain lousy at giving feedback or coaching. The majority of our learning is going to have to come from folks like these, so if we're serious about growth and improvement, we have no choice but to get good at learning from just about anyone.

...(but) we are conflicted.

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... **receiving feedback sits at the intersection of these two needs - our drive to learn and our longing for acceptance.**

The transformative impact of modeling is crucial. If you seek out coaching, your direct reports will seek out coaching. If you take responsibility for your mistakes, your peers will be encouraged to fess up as well; if you try out a suggestion from a coworker, they will be more open to trying out your suggestions. And this modeling effect becomes more important as you move up in an organisation. Nothing affects the learning culture of an organisation more than the skill with which its executive team receives feedback. And of course, as you move up, candid coaching becomes increasingly scarce, so you have to work harder to get it. But doing so sets the tone and creates an organisational culture of learning, problem solving and adaptive high performance.

3 Kinds of feedback

The word 'feedback' can refer to three different kinds of information: appreciation, coaching, and evaluation. Each serves an important purpose, each satisfies a different need, and each comes with its own set of challenges.

- **Appreciation** is about relationship and human connection - 'you matter'
- **Coaching** accelerates someone's learning, grow or development
- **Evaluation** tells you where you stand - it's an assessment, ranking or rating

Separate Appreciation, Coaching and Evaluation

A single performance management system can't effectively communicate all three kinds of feedback. Each requires different qualities and different settings to be effective.

Evaluation needs to be fair, consistent, clear and predictable - across individuals, teams, and divisions. We need to understand who is evaluating whom and what the criteria for success and achievement are. We'll need to have thoughtful 2-way conversations throughout the year about goals and progress, in time to address problems along the way.

Good **coaching** requires different parameters to work well. Those who are improving need **frequent, close-to-real-time (options for improvement), and the chance to practice small (experiments) along the way**. One Big Performance Review each year isn't likely to help, because at its core, **coaching is a relationship, not a meeting**. Coach and coachee need ongoing discussion of what the coachee can work on in light of organisational needs and individual competencies. They need people who can be *honest mirrors* to help them see themselves when they're not at their best, and *supportive mirrors* to reassure them that they can get better.

... there are at least two problems in mixing coaching with evaluation. First, on the receiving end, my attention will be drawn to the evaluation, which drowns out the coaching... The (bigger) concern is that, **if I'm going to be open to coaching, I need to feel safe**. I need to know that admitting mistakes or areas of weakness isn't going to count against me in my job security or career advancement. I need absolute **trust** that being open in coaching conversations will not adversely affect my evaluation.

If you had to pick between preaching the benefits of being a learner and modeling good learning, well, there's no contest. In many ways, the manager is the culture: if they're good learners, they set the tone for a learning culture... so *make your endeavor to learn explicit*. Encourage people to discuss your blind spots with you... Ask for coaching and help, not only from those above you, but from peers and subordinates, because modeling is the most powerful thing you can do as an individual to improve the culture.

The '*Push-Pull*' Continuum of helping behaviours

Push

- Instructing
- Advice - giving
- Informative stories
- Giving feedback
- Making suggestions
- Powerfull questions
- Summarising
- Paraphrasing
- Reflecting

Pull

- Listening to understand