

# Thanks for the Feedback

[Stone & Heen]

## Study Guide

<https://gracelead.co>

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## **Thanks for the Feedback**

Douglas Stone & Sheila Heen

The key variable in your growth is not your coach or your supervisor. It is you.

Learning about yourself can be painful. The way people deliver feedback is sometimes inaccurate, unfair, and poorly delivered. They may deliver it at times when you are least receptive. Regardless of that, you can learn to become better at receiving feedback and growing from it.

- This study guide has organized the key ideas at a summary level rather than a chapter level.
- The discussion questions are not in the book. They are aimed at discussions you could have within your ministry team.
- The diagrams are modified slightly from those in the book. or, in some cases, entirely different.

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## Benefits of Receiving Feedback Well

When you receive feedback well:

- Your relationships become richer.
- You learn and get better at things.
- Other people find it more enjoyable to work around you.

- It is easier for you to work with others to solve problems.
- By your example, you help others see the value in seeking feedback for themselves.

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## Truth Triggers Block Feedback

We resist feedback if we think it is wrong.

### *Type of Feedback You Are Getting*

Before rejecting feedback, it is helpful to understand what type of feedback you are getting from the person.

- **Appreciation** is giving thanks to you and encouraging you to keep doing what you are doing. For it to be effective, it needs to be specific, authentic, and in a form that you find satisfying.
- **Coaching** is showing you a better way to do something to help you grow. Coaching can be related to improving your skills or at fixing a perceived imbalance in a relationship. [Note: Grace uses the word coaching to mean the act of listening and asking questions to help a person discover the best way forward.]
- **Evaluation** is telling you where you stand compared to a standard or compared to others. Evaluation aligns expectations and clarifies consequences.

Once you know the type of feedback, ask clarifying questions to be sure you understand what the person is trying to tell you. Recognize that even if 90% of the feedback is off target, that the 10% might be just the insight you need to grow.

### Tips

- Ask for the **type** of feedback you want.
- Be prepared to negotiate if the other person wants to give you a different type of feedback. For instance, you may want appreciation while the other person wants to give you some coaching. Look for a way you can both get what you want.

- If you need both evaluation and coaching, schedule the evaluation before the coaching. Until you know where you stand, it's difficult to focus on how to improve.

### *What the Feedback Giver Means*

It's easy to spot something wrong with the feedback you are getting; however, focusing on wrong spotting defeats your learning opportunity.

It is a challenge to understand what the feedback giver is trying to convey. Part of the problem is that we use **labels** which represent a collection of our impressions. We think the label describes what's in our head, but it doesn't. Here are a few examples.

Coaching	Giver Means	You Hear
Be more confident.	When you don't know, be confident enough to admit it.	Give others the impression that you have all the answers.
Don't be so opinionated.	Do us the favor of hearing our points of view.	Tone down your enthusiasm. Be bland and passive.

Evaluation	Giver Means	You Hear
You received a 4 out of 5 this year.	No one gets a 5 and few get a 4. I'm impressed that you got 4 twice in a row!	Last year I got a 4. This year I worked harder and still got a 4. No one noticed my hard work.

When you hear a **label**, avoid filling in the meaning. Ask clarifying questions to find out what the feedback giver means.

**Coaching**

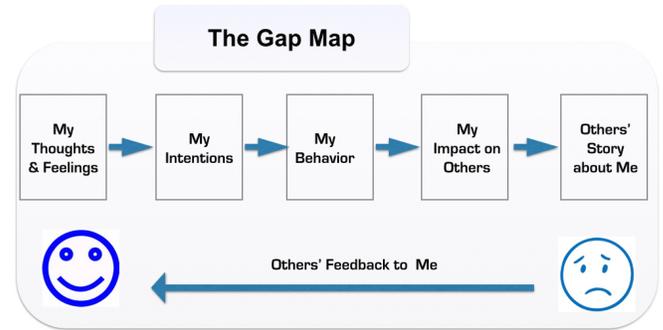
<p><b>Looking Back</b> What did you observe about me that is related to this topic? What do you see that I don't see?</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid gray; padding: 2px 10px; display: inline-block;">Label</div>	<p><b>Looking Forward</b> What is your advice? If I want to take your advice, what can I do or say to implement it? Can you show me what you mean? Give me an example.</p>
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**Evaluation**

<p><b>Looking Back</b> What criteria did you use? What concerns do you have? Are there skills or experiences that I am missing?</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid gray; padding: 2px 10px; display: inline-block;">Label</div>	<p><b>Looking Forward</b> What are the consequences? How will this affect me in the coming year? What coaching, assignments, or training is available that might help me?</p>
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Ask yourself what makes sense about what the person is saying even if it is buried under a label. The better you understand the feedback, the more likely you will find something in it that is useful. You can then make an informed decision about what to change, if anything.

Another challenge to understanding feedback is that you have **blind spots**. There is always a gap between the self you think you present and the way others see you. Your own behavior is largely invisible to you. You may have given good intentions, but your thoughts and feelings will affect your behavior in ways that are contradictory to your intentions.



- **Blind Spot-Your Face:** People react to subtle nuances in your eyes and facial expressions that convey your mood to them. You are largely unaware of the messages your face sends.
- **Blind Spot-Your Tone:** You are unable to hear your voice the way others do. Your tone, pitch, and cadence convey your emotional state to them.
- **Blind Spot-Your Patterns:** You often don't realize that you have established behavior patterns which have affected others' opinion of you. [Ex. How many times have you 'promised' to do something and not delivered?]

There are also blind spot **amplifiers**.

- **Emotional Math:** Others count your emotional state at double the rate of anything else in the interaction. If they see you as angry or tense, that is what they will primarily take away from the interaction.
- **Your Character:** While you tend to attribute your actions to the situation, others tend to attribute your actions to your character.
- **Your Impact:** You tend to judge yourself by your intentions. Others tend to judge you by the impact you have on them. Despite your best intentions, you may have a negative impact on others.

How I See Me	How Others See Me
Shy	Aloof
Spontaneous	Flaky
Truth Teller	Harsh
Smart	Arrogant
Quality-minded	Hypercritical

## Tips

- Say, "I've been working hard to be more \_\_\_\_\_, yet from your reaction, that's not the impact I'm having. What do you see me doing or failing to do that is getting in my own way?"
- Look for behaviors that you are interpreting differently than others are.
- Get a second opinion from someone you trust. Ask them if the feedback you are getting may be in your blind spot. Ask if they have seen you do those behaviors and how the behaviors impact them.
- If possible, have someone record your interaction (get agreement from all those present). When you listen to the recording, you will get a better sense of how you come across to others.

## Discussion

- Which type of feedback are you most in need of right now (appreciation, coaching, evaluation)?
- Which type of feedback is most common on your ministry team?
- Consider a label someone used when giving you feedback. How sure are you that you know what the person meant?
- Who is in a position to give you candid feedback on the differences between how you see yourself and how others see you?

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## Relationship Triggers Block Feedback

We resist feedback if we think the person giving it has questionable motives or lacks credibility. Also the way the person delivers the feedback may cause us to resist. Instead of hearing what the person is saying, we focus on our issues with the person. The authors call this switch tracking.



### Switch Track Process

Step 1	You get feedback.
Step 2	You experience a relationship trigger.
Step 3	You change the topic to how you feel.
Step 4	You talk past the other person who continues to stay on the original topic.

Relationship triggers include:

- You resent the feedback giver's lack of skill and judgment in giving feedback.
- You don't think the feedback giver is credible. You view him as low in knowledge and/or character.
- You don't trust the feedback giver. You suspect his motives.

### Tips for the Switch Track

- Spot the two topics, the original one and the relationship one.
- Separate the who from the what. Discuss each separately.
- Help the feedback giver be clear about his/her meaning.
- Explore the dynamic in the relationship and identify what each of you is doing that contributes to the problem.
- When you get coaching feedback, watch for possible relationship issues that might lurk below the surface.

### Relationship System

A relationship is a system. As such, when something goes wrong, each of us is part of the problem. The challenge is that we only see what the other person contributes to the issue. We think the best solution is for the other person to change.

### Avoid Being an Absorber or Shifter

- If you absorb all the responsibility for the relationship issues, you will become resentful. You cannot solve the problem on your own because you are only part of the problem.
- If you shift the blame to the other person, you make yourself a victim. You become helpless and unable to see the part you play in the problem. The

other person cannot solve the problem alone because you are part of the problem.

### Take Three Steps Back

Step 1	You+ Me Intersections What are our differences in preferences and traits that create friction?
Step 2	Role Clashes Are we clear on who has what roles? Do our roles inherently conflict with one another?
Step 3	Big Picture How does the physical environment, the processes, and the interaction of other people contribute to the friction?

### Tips for Relationship Systems

- Take responsibility for your part of the relationship issues. What are you doing or not doing that contributes to the friction in the relationship?

- Engage the other person by asking him to help you change. Then explain what he could do that would help you change. Presenting it this way is easier for the person to hear than you simply telling him to step up to his part of the problem.
- Keep alert for You + Everybody intersections. If you hear similar feedback from several people, it can be discouraging. View it as an opportunity for you to improve multiple relationships by working on this one behavior.
- Consider modifying roles or processes to reduce relationship friction.

### Discussion

- Which processes in the Grace environment contribute to relationship friction? What changes to roles or processes could you make to reduce the friction?
- Who, if anyone, on your team is an absorber or shifter and how can you help this person move toward a balanced relationship system?

## Identity Triggers Block Feedback

When we perceive an attack to who we think we are, we resist feedback. Our brain's survival functions cause us to move toward pleasurable things and away from painful ones. The brain gets confused when it faces short-term pain that is necessary for long-term gain or short-term pleasures that produce long-term pain.

### Reaction to Feedback

Your reaction to feedback contains three components:

- Baseline:** You have a personal default level of well-being. If yours tends toward happiness, you easily soak up positive feedback. If yours tends toward low satisfaction, you will respond strongly to negative feedback.
- Swing:** You have a natural degree of sensitivity to input. If you are highly sensitive, you will react strongly to even a small amount of feedback. If your sensitivity is low, it will take a large amount of feedback for you to react.

- Duration:** You have a built-in amount of time that it takes to recover from a swing and return to baseline.

	Long Sustain of Positive	Short Sustain of Positive
Quick Recovery from Negative	Love Feedback	No Big Deal
Slow Recovery from Negative	Fearful but Hopeful	Hate Feedback

Although about 50% of our happiness level is hard-wired and 10% is circumstantial, there is 40% that we can learn to control by how we interpret feedback.

## Thoughts and Emotions Feed One Another

- Strong emotions push you to extreme interpretations of feedback. You get what you Google. If you are looking for what's wrong or right with you, that is what you will notice.
- Feelings affect how you imagine the future. In the moment you tend to assume that you will always feel the way you do now.

## Dismantle Distortions

1. Be prepared and mindful. Know how you tend to receive feedback. Inoculate yourself by thinking about what you will do if the worst happens. This lets you feel prepared. During the feedback, analyze how you are reacting. Engaging your brain in this way has a calming effect.
2. Separate the strands of feeling, story, and feedback. Identify how you feel (anxious, knot in stomach, fearful, angry, rush of adrenaline, embarrassed, sad, faint, nauseated). What is the story you are telling yourself? What is the actual feedback?
3. Contain the story. Remember: being lousy at one thing doesn't mean you are lousy at everything or that you can't get better at the one thing; having one person dislike you doesn't mean no one likes you or that the one person will never find anything to like about you. Distinguish between consequences that WILL happen and those that MIGHT happen.
4. Change your vantage point.
  - ▶ Pretend that you are someone else watching you receive the feedback. Would they think your reaction is reasonable?
  - ▶ Look back from the future. Pretend it is 20 years from now. How important does the feedback seem from there?
  - ▶ Cast the comedy. See yourself as a character in a comedy. If you can laugh at yourself, it will disrupt the panic and anxiety.
5. Accept that you can't control how others see you. Force yourself to consider the struggles of the person giving you feedback. Empathy can help you pull something useful from their feedback even if most of it is unfair or wrong.

## When Life Comes Down Hard

- When you are drowning in strong negative emotions, reach out to others for solace.
- Seek those who can be supportive mirrors. Ask them to help you see beyond the current pain and help you view yourself with a balanced perspective.

## Cultivate a Growth Identity

- Give up simple labels. You are a complex blend of things. Your intentions are a mix of purely positive and some less than noble. You have contributed to the problems you are having.
- Shift to a growth mindset. View tough situations as learning opportunities. Praise yourself (and others) for how much effort they put into learning rather than natural ability.
- Move toward a growth identity. See yourself as a person who is eager to put effort into learning. Try to find something you can learn from feedback.
- Give yourself a second score. Evaluate yourself on how well you handled the evaluation. This score is as important to your growth as the evaluation itself.

## Discussion or Self Reflection

To what degree is this like me?	low<.....>high
I love feedback.	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
I have someone who serves as a supportive mirror for me.	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
I separate the strands of feeling, my story, and the feedback.	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
I view tough situations as learning opportunities.	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
I reward myself when I get something helpful from feedback because of the way I handled it.	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5

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# Feedback in Conversations

## *You Have the Right to Set Boundaries*

1. You have the right to choose whether to apply feedback. To make this clear, say “I’m pleased to listen and consider your feedback.” Be sure you understand the consequences of choosing to not implement the feedback. Some people may not consider their feedback optional. Others may think you are rejecting them if you reject their feedback.
2. You have the right to stop receiving feedback. If you are unwilling to keep receiving feedback on a subject, say, “I’ve heard your feedback and I’ve made my choice. Let’s not discuss it further.”

## *Boundary Alerts*

Here are some signals that you need to set boundaries.

- The feedback giver attacks your character or is unrelenting and unappreciative of changes that you make.
- The feedback giver tries to take you hostage by stating that unless you change it means you don’t respect or love him.
- The feedback giver makes threats. [A fair warning is letting you know the other shoe may drop. A threat is telling you he will make sure the shoe squashes you.]
- The feedback giver never takes responsibility for his part of the problem. The changes he wants are entirely for his benefit without consideration for what you want for yourself.

## *Tips for Turning Away Feedback*

- Be transparent. Tell them what you are doing to implement the feedback or why you are not implementing it at this time.
- Be firm and appreciative. Tell them specifically what was helpful about their feedback. Also, firmly tell them if there is something you want them to change in the way they give you feedback.
- Redirect unhelpful coaching. State specifically how the feedback giver can best help you. Praise them when they give feedback in that way.
- Use ‘and.’ Say, “What you’ve said makes sense. I appreciate your perspective AND I’ve decided that your suggestion is not best for me right now.”

- Be specific about your request. What exactly do you want the person to do and for how long?
- Describe the consequences of the person not honoring your boundary request. Do not make a threat. State what adjustments you will make to your side of the relationship to protect yourself from the thing they are doing that is harming you.

## *You Have a Duty to Mitigate Costs to Others*

There are usually costs to others when you do not make the changes they request. It is your duty to find ways to mitigate these costs.

- Ask others how your choice will affect them.
- Work together to find ways to lessen their discomfort. The goal is to find ways of interacting that are workable for both of you.

## *Navigate the Conversation*

### **Open the Conversation by Getting Aligned**

- Quickly determine if the person is giving you feedback and what kind. What type of feedback do you need most right now: evaluation, coaching, or appreciation?
- Be clear as to whether an agreement is necessary. If so, who gets to decide if you disagree? If the other person is the decision maker, is he/she making a suggestion or giving a command?
- If the feedback giver jumps to demands or accusations, say, “Can we take a minute to step back? I do want to hear your perspective on this. Then, I’ll share my view. After that, we can figure out where and why our views are different and what to do next?”

### **Use 4 Skills to Manage the Body of the Conversation**

1. **Listen.** Effective listening is difficult because your internal voice gets most of your attention. With practice, you can enlist your internal voice to help you listen better. Your purpose in listening should be (1) to be sure you understand what the other person means by what they are saying and (2) let the other person know you understand what they are saying.

Internal Voice	Listen for:	Questions to Ask:
<b>TRUTH</b> That's wrong. That's not helpful. That's not me.	<b>Data</b> they have that I don't and interpretations they have that are different from mine <b>Impacts</b> I'm hearing that I may not be aware of because of my blind spots	Can you give me an example? What did that mean to you? What are your concerns? What do you see me doing that's getting in my own way? How did that affect you?
<b>RELATIONSHIP</b> After all I've done for you? Who are you to say? You're the problem, not me.	<b>Switch tracks</b> that add a relationship topic to the discussion <b>Systems</b> between us; what each of us is contributing to the relationship tensions	Help me understand your feedback then I want to talk about some of my relationship concerns. What do you see me contributing to the problem between us? What is most upsetting to you and why?
<b>IDENTITY</b> I screw up everything. I'm doomed. I'm not a bad person, am I?	<b>My wiring:</b> how sensitive I am to feedback and how quickly I recover <b>Opportunities</b> for me to sort for <b>coaching</b> ; what I can use for growth and learning	Help me put your feedback in perspective with how you view me overall. What could I do that would help me improve? What could I change that would matter most to you?

- Assert what's left out.** Avoid telling the feedback giver that he is wrong. Instead, add your perspective to the conversation.  
 Examples:
  - ▶ I see things differently.
  - ▶ I'm feeling under appreciated so it's difficult to focus on your feedback.
  - ▶ I agree there are things I've contributed to the problem. I'd also like to look at other factors that are playing a role so we can arrive at a good solution.
  - ▶ That's upsetting to hear because it's not how I see myself.
- Be your own process referee.** Pause the action to diagnose where you are in the conversation and propose a way to get things on track. Examples:
  - ▶ I hear us both trying to persuade the other, but I don't think we're fully understanding one another. Tell me more about your concerns.
  - ▶ I see two issues here and we're jumping back and forth between them. Which do you want to discuss first?
  - ▶ I hear you saying \_\_\_\_\_. I disagree. Is there anything that would help me better understand your view?
  - ▶ We're deadlocked. Your solution seems to be that I give in. That doesn't seem fair to me.

What's a fair way to decide when we don't agree?

- Problem solve to create possibilities.** What people say they want is usually a position that does not reveal what the underlying interests are. Listen for underlying interests. Invite the other person to think with you about different ways to meet the underlying interests.

### Close with Commitment

The crucial last part of a meeting is to clearly state your agreements and next steps. It may help to create an action plan and to agree on measures of success.

### Discussion

- Under what circumstances do you have difficulty setting boundaries with those who give you feedback?
- Discuss ways to be sure you are aware of how your choices to decline feedback affect others.
- Does your internal voice seem to talk loudest about truth, relationship, or identity issues?
- How often do you document agreements and next steps after you have a feedback meeting?

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# Five Ways to Take Action

## 1-Name One Thing

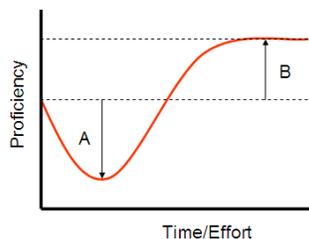
You can get overwhelmed by too much feedback. Look for themes that reveal key areas to address. Ask, "What is one thing I could change that would make a difference for you?"

## 2-Try Small Experiments

Run through a scenario in your head of how a change might work. Pick one small change to try for a set period of time.

## 3-Ride Out the J-Curve

Sometimes you struggle to make a change you know is right because it is an unpleasant change to make. Consider the reality that things will get worse (A) before you begin to see improvement (B).



Try two **strategies** to ride out the J-curve.

1. Increase the positive appeal of the change. Find others to go through the change with you. It will make it more fun to share the challenge. It will provide accountability and encouragement.
2. Increase the cost of not changing. Establish an unpleasant consequence of not sticking with the change.

## 4-Coach Your Coach

[By coach, the authors mean anyone who gives you feedback.] When you discuss the process of what helps you receive feedback, it accelerates your leaning. This is not about making demands of your coach. It is about figuring out together what works best for both of you.

- Tell your coach how you tend to react to feedback what what the coach could do that would help you receive feedback better.
- When you request feedback, state how getting the feedback would help you serve the ministry or coach more effectively.
- Avoid excessive requests for feedback. Mix it up by asking others about their thoughts and experiences on topics. You can learn from that without making things always about you.

## 5-Invite Them In

There may be people who could offer you good advice who hesitate to do so. They may think you don't welcome feedback. Come to them with a specific feedback request and explain why you think they have a perspective that would be helpful.

## Discussion

- Discuss how it might work to ask for one key thing to address the next time you have a performance evaluation.
- For you, which of the two strategies for riding out the J-curve would work best for you and why?
- Considering people in your ministry, which ones rarely ask for feedback and which are excessive in their requests for feedback?
- How often do you give feedback compared to how often you receive feedback? Do you need to make changes?
- Discuss how it might work to coach your ministry leader on the best way to give you feedback.
- How often does your ministry leader ask for feedback from you?
- How often do you give your ministry leader unsolicited feedback and how does your ministry leader react?

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## Feedback in Organizations

### *No Perfect Feedback Systems*

There are no perfect feedback systems. The greatest leverage is helping people inside the system communicate more effectively. It's the receiver's skills that have the most impact. We need to equip receivers to create PULL, to drive their own learning. When they do, the organization gets better. We PULL together.

When implementing a performance evaluation system, HR and senior leaders should provide the following to employees:

- clarification of the goals of the system
- an explanation of why this system was chosen over others
- list of costs as well as benefits
- description of the costs of people not participating fully
- an invitation for ongoing discussion, suggestions, and feedback

Listen to complaints about the system. Ask for specific suggestions. If you reject an idea, explain why.

A single performance management system cannot effectively communicate all three kinds of feedback. Here are the key challenges.

- Evaluation: We need to understand who is evaluating whom and what the criteria for success and advancement are.
- Coaching: Coaching is a relationship, not a meeting. There needs to be ongoing discussion of areas to address in light of organizational needs and individual competencies.
- Appreciation: People hear appreciation in different ways. Appreciation systems are not as effective as building a cultural norm of appreciation.

### *Promote a Culture of Learners*

- Highlight stories about people learning. Tell some stories of what we learned from mistakes.
- Cultivate growth identities. Discuss ideas for how to get the most growth from feedback.
- Discuss second scores. Ask feedback givers to encourage receivers to consider how they react to feedback and what they do with feedback.
- Create multitrack feedback.
  - ▶ Track-1: performance management system, apprenticeship program, training
  - ▶ Track-2: informal coaching, sharing success stories, discussing best practices, exchanging favorite books and articles
- Leverage positive social norming. Highlighting good norms does more to change disliked behaviors than calling out bad norms. [xx% of you have \_\_\_\_\_. Thank you!] Those who did the good behavior get recognition and sense appreciation. Those who did not will get the message.

### *What You Can Do to Impact Culture*

- Model being a good learner. Hold yourself accountable in a way that others see. Ask for coaching from your peers and those you lead.
- When you give feedback, balance your desire to avoid hurting feelings with the receiver's need to hear what is blocking their progress.
- Ask your receivers to coach you on how best to give them feedback that helps. [Be prepared to vary this for each receiver.]

### *What You Can Do as a Feedback Receiver*

- Remember, regardless of the context, you are the most important person in your learning.
- You don't have to wait for someone to give you feedback. You can observe others, ask questions, and seek suggestions.
- While learning is a shared responsibility, ultimately, it comes down to you.