

# CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK

Can you give as good as you get?



“Feedback is a gift.” There was a time that I didn’t see it in that way, but now I have to say “thank you” to those who taught me this valuable lesson. It has taken me more years than I wish to admit to embrace the wisdom in the feedback that I have received.

As someone who often gives feedback to many people in organisations all over the world, I find that it is a rare individual (even among senior executive ranks) who truly embraces constructive feedback, even when it is delivered with the best of intentions and in a positive spirit. Why is this so? Well, it takes resilience and self-knowledge, aspects we often neglect in the daily rush of life. Feedback drives performance and prospective leaders are doomed if they do not develop the ability to find the real lesson in feedback.

We have all experienced a time in our lives when we did not like the way someone delivered a message to us, did not think the feedback given was valid (sometimes it is not), or heaven knows – chose to ignore it! At times we may not recognise our own behaviours or characteristics and may be unaware of how they affect others.

So why pay attention if we don’t like what we are hearing? Because feedback is a gift. When you next receive feedback and get the urge to reject it, PAUSE ... you may not recognise it as a gift at first. It may not be packaged in the most attractive way. In fact, it may not even seem like a gift at all. But it is. The more open you are to receiving feedback, the greater the potential for discovering the treasure.

What else have I learnt?

- When in a feedback/conflict situations, LISTEN! Find out whether you are all referring to the same thing. Clarify to make sure of this. Clarifying clears up misunderstandings and permits information to be exchanged more freely.
- People are often relieved when you respond to feedback by wanting to know more. The more open you are to receiving feedback, the greater the potential for discovering the treasure. The amazing thing about finding the real truth in the feedback you receive is how much you can grow and benefit from using it. Remember how difficult it is for people to give you feedback because they will be afraid that you may misinterpret it or react negatively. Don’t fall into the trap of becoming a close-minded, suspicious individual who behaves as a victim and misconstrues helpful and useful information as negative. Instead, consciously choose to stay open-minded, give the benefit of the doubt, and use the gifts you have been given.
- Our strengths and development areas vary according to the situations that we find ourselves in. Sometimes our strengths turn into development areas. If you are not actively seeking feedback in these areas (and responding appropriately to it when you get it), your path to greater responsibility and success will be riddled with obstacles. Do I personally enjoy peers pointing out areas where I need to improve? Not particularly! But I’ve learnt that I have limited opportunity to improve what I do significantly without it.

- Learning to give positive and constructive feedback is also a challenge. If you want to grow in your ability to develop people, you need to become comfortable with providing constructive feedback to others. The effective manager needs to provide specific, timely feedback for things done well (and celebrate these) while also paying attention to things that could be changed for the better. There was a time when it finally became clear to me that I was hurting people around me if I withheld feedback that would help them.

At BIOSS we spend so much of our time in appreciations – we train in appreciative and honest conversations. We also try to develop this in our client relationships and endeavour to listen actively to feedback. Of course, we love the positive feedback, but we also try to really listen to and act on constructive feedback with full realisation that our strength is built on the strength of the feedback we have received.

To all our clients – thank you and keep it coming. We appreciate your feedback.



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