

The Gift of Feedback

*Understanding and using
feedback for personal growth*

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

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ChartHouse’s philosophy on facilitation and facilitator’s guidesi

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About Marshall Goldsmith, Ph.D.

Marshall Goldsmith is known around the world as a leading expert on the subject of feedback, and is one of the most active consultants in the development and implementation of feedback programs for organizations. With clients ranging from Johnson & Johnson to the International Red Cross, his firm has delivered feedback to over one million people through the use of 360-degree feedback surveys and personal feedback interviews. When Kelty Goldsmith, his consulting firm, conducts large scale feedback programs for organizations, it is usually Marshall who delivers the tough messages to the top executives.

Goldsmith is also known for his top-rated seminars on feedback, as well as his popular program, “Money Back Guarantee Coaching.” He is also on the Board of Advisors for the Peter Drucker Foundation, and has been both editor and contributor to three of its books.

About the film

ChartHouse’s *The Gift of Feedback* is a film which explores an often misunderstood subject: feedback. Many see feedback as a negative thing, something that happens after a mistake is made. But the truth is that feedback is a *gift*, without which some aspects of personal growth would be difficult, if not impossible. For anyone who interacts with others at work or at home, it is crucial that the gift of feedback is understood. It plays a critical role in living effectively in an interpersonal world.

In the film, Marshall tells a story which captures one of the reasons why the subject of feedback presents such a challenge. As he drives to the airport, his wife shouts a warning. Marshall’s response and subsequent reflection get us thinking about the elements of feedback, and how difficult it is to establish a set of good habits around feedback.

Marshall proceeds to outline a five-step process for taking advantage of the gift of feedback. These steps — **Ask, Listen, Thank, Think** and **Follow up** — are each explained in detail, supported by stories and anecdotes to enhance learning and understanding.

About the facilitator's guide

This guide has been developed to support those who wish to facilitate learning about feedback in their organization through the use of this film. Discussion questions, background information and tools such as group exercises are provided to help learners both understand and implement the film's core concepts. In other words, this guide was designed to give you the tools necessary to accomplish your organizational goals around the understanding and utilization of feedback.

Purpose of the film and guide

The purpose of the learning program — which includes the film and this facilitator's guide — is to help individuals see feedback as a gift that is crucial to personal growth in an interpersonal world, and for which there is no substitute.

Uses of the film and guide

A number of potential uses were taken into account as this film was produced; we are sure you will create others as well. Consider using *The Gift of Feedback* in:

- **Preparing for performance appraisal.** Almost every organization has an appraisal system, and many include face-to-face discussions among key participants. The most typical meeting occurs between boss and employee, although increasing numbers of organizations are including the employee's associates in the process. This learning program can lay the groundwork for a highly productive meeting, by framing feedback as a gift.
- **Making performance evaluations effective.** At ChartHouse International, we define performance *appraisal* as a meeting to summarize the many instances of performance *evaluation* which occurred during the time period in question. In other words, performance evaluation happens every day, while the performance appraisal is an annual or semi-annual event. This learning program can form the core of a training program which frames the performance evaluation process in a positive manner while underscoring its importance.
- **Developing an openness to 360-degree feedback.** Each year, millions of workers are provided feedback from peers, bosses, selves, direct reports and sometimes customers and suppliers. A substantial number of those workers are not prepared for the results, and certainly don't see feedback as positive event in their lives. This learning program is ideal for framing the feedback process, or as an activity which precedes the distribution of feedback results.
- **Deriving benefits from other surveys.** Surveys and instruments are commonplace in the workplace today. Any such tool that provides information from others is subject to the human forces addressed by this learning program.
- **Developing an openness to self-report instruments.** Many self-report instruments are normed, and provide feedback by comparing a person's responses to those of others (the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator is one example). While the feedback doesn't come from another person, it does arise out of comparisons to a composite of other people. With special adaptations, this learning program can assist the presentation of results from such surveys.

Benefits to participants

1. More willingness to accept feedback with an open mind.
2. A greater likelihood that feedback will lead to behavioral change.
3. Less tension and conflict in feedback sessions.
4. A greater understanding of feedback processes.
5. More effective leadership, with leaders who model a willingness to ask for feedback, listen to it, thank the sender, think about its implications and follow up on those areas most in need of behavioral change.

Staying focused as a facilitator

As a facilitator, it's important that you understand the following message, for it will serve as a compass to keep you on track and out of trouble. It will help you in answering questions and fielding resistance.

When you look in the mirror, you can learn some things about yourself. But those things are limited, for you can only see yourself through your own eyes. The key to growth in an interpersonal world is to find a way to see yourself as others see you. Living without that information is like driving a car with no windows: you bump into things but have no idea of the result of that bump.

The interpersonal world of organizations is built around the interactions of individual human beings. This is how relationships are formed. When there is trust and respect in those interactions, the relationships and hence the organization can thrive. When trust and respect are missing, both suffer.

To quote Marshall Goldsmith:

“People think what they think, regardless of our intentions. Your associates think what they think. Your boss thinks what she or he thinks. Your customers think what they think. Your peers think what they think. For you to play your most effective role in the organization, to become a leader in all of your activities, you need to know how others react to your initiatives and even to your presence. You need to know what they think.”

It is only after having that information that you can decide whether it is useful to you as you seek to find one or two things upon which to concentrate your development attention.

Feedback is a gift you can't give yourself. It can only be given to you by another. This is why we should always say “thanks”.

FACILITATING THE FILM

The next few pages offer new facilitators a blueprint to follow, and provide experienced facilitators with a few ideas to consider.

We have developed a standard opening and three options for facilitating this film. These three options are prepared to fit different time allocations. The material is for you to use in any way you see fit, so mix and match or add your own ideas.

We would love to receive your feedback on what works for you, and we accept the responsibility of passing the great ideas on to others who are also dedicated to creating organizations where information flows freely between and among individuals.

Preparing your opening

The topic of feedback needs to be framed clearly. Participants will have heard the word “feedback” used in many ways, so it is important for you to provide a clear, focused beginning. We recommend an opening which is both precise and benefit-related. The ideas below are designed to give you a starting point in developing your opening remarks. At the end of this section is a space provided for you to prepare a draft of your opening.

Definition of feedback. All facilitators get grilled on definitions, so it’s worthwhile to think about the meaning of feedback in this context. It may be of interest to note that the term was first used in reference to the screeching noise we have all heard microphones make. The feedback builds with intensity as the sound waves merge.

In this learning program, our definition of feedback is quite specific. For information to be considered feedback, it should meet these criteria:

1. It is information we receive from others.
2. We can ask for feedback, or it can just be delivered.
3. It reflects on how we come across to others as they see us.
4. It is important, in that it contains information which could be significant in maintaining a trusting, respectful relationship with another person.
5. You can't give it to yourself, because you do not have the ability to see yourself as others see you.

Receiving not sending. The purpose of this learning program is to improve the receipt of feedback. Many films focus on *giving* feedback, but this program is unique in its focus on *receiving* it. It's about using feedback for personal growth in an interpersonal world.

Focus on growth. Our focus will be on feedback you can use to grow in areas that are important to your effectiveness as a leader, team member and friend. The material is important to all of your relationships, but the focus will be on the organizational arena.

Interdependence, not independence. There are things we do alone and things we do with others. This program is about our work with others.

Feedback is a gift. We say feedback is a gift because it is the only way you can obtain information about how you are developing as a leader, team member or associate. Since the information resides in others who work with you, their willingness to share it with you is a gift. The only way to improve relationships is to find out how the other person is reacting to your actions, values, beliefs, and mannerisms.

Now write out some notes which will help you introduce your program. Remember, feedback is a gift. After you have written your opening, study the session options below and choose or create a sequence of events.

FOR PREVIEW ONLY

FOR PREVIEW ONLY

Option 3: A half-day session

- Introduce yourself and the topic.
- Make your opening statement which frames feedback as a gift and defines the term in this context.
- Give two personal examples of important feedback; one from your work life and one from your personal life.
- List at least two possible benefits from watching the film.
- Identify the organization's interest in this program, in other words, what the organization hopes will happen from this experience.
- Show the entire film.
- As a group, discuss what it would be like to have an organization where individuals saw feedback as a gift.
- Note that there is some feedback which is not a gift (for example, feedback with malicious or shaming intent) but that we are focusing solely on feedback which is a gift. We are assuming good intentions.
- **BREAK FOR TEN MINUTES**
- Break into small groups and instruct each group to come up with as many good examples of feedback as possible. Review the definition before they begin. Ask each group to report back in twenty minutes.
- Listen to the resulting examples, and make reinforcing comments. Point out the "gift" that is embedded in each example. Where appropriate, note the risk taken by the giver of feedback.
- Note that feedback needs to be proactive if you want to be sure to get what you need to grow.
- Discuss briefly why going out and soliciting feedback is difficult.

- Have the group help you summarize the key points of the film.
- Summarize the key theme to provide the final focus.
- Distribute tools for further study.*
- If you will be meeting again to extend the learning, outline the expectations and identify the time and place.
- Notes:

* ChartHouse International has developed a supplementary guide on the subject of feedback, as part of its new *Book Renewal*[™] collection. The book, sold separately from the film, can be used as a stand-alone training tool or as a complement to the film to help participants extend their learning about feedback. It includes supplementary concepts, personal activities and application exercises which will ensure a higher level of learning transfer to the job. Titled *Finding the Gift in Feedback*, and co-authored by Stephen C. Lundin, Ph.D. and Marshall Goldsmith, Ph.D., it is scheduled for publication in March of 1998.

Planning and preparation checklist

Design the session:

- Define what you hope to accomplish
- Write your opening statement

The day before the session or earlier:

- Review the film
- Review your discussion questions
- Study your supplementary material for consistency
- Make copies of any worksheets

Prior to the session:

- Verify that all materials are present
- Arrange the room in the desired layout (a “U” shape often encourages discussion)
- Check audio visual equipment
- Greet participants as they arrive

Issues of concern to a facilitator

There are some “hot buttons” which may get pushed during the process of discussing feedback. We must remember that we have no control over the emotional history of a participant, and must first express our understanding that their experience and its emotional base is valid.

Our purpose is to help reframe and move beyond that experience. For instance:

- There are people who have had feedback used against them, as weapons to serve another’s need for power or control. There is not much we can do about that except be clear that we are not naïve, and know that these things occur. Then quickly move to a positive framework, focusing on the “Ask” step from the film. It’s this step that puts the feedback participant in charge of the process.
- There may be participants with unresolved emotional problems, and the threat involved in opening to feedback is too difficult for them to even consider. This is the ultimate challenge for a facilitator, and enormous amounts of time can be wasted on an unresolvable problem while the group waits.
- If you think that the emotional baggage of the person in question is just too great to resolve the issue they have raised, move the group to a quick exercise and talk privately to the person. Point out the following: a) they control their use of the feedback and whether they ask for feedback; b) it is a choice, not a requirement, to participate; c) offer to meet with them privately to consider what you recognize is a difficult situation; and d) ask if they would like to continue or leave. Offer to make leaving smooth.
- At some point in their lives, most people have received feedback about things they could not change (gender, personality, body type, parents or physical features, for example). Make it clear that we are only considering things which are behavioral in nature, and which can be changed if desired.

EXERCISES

The following material provides a basic structure upon which a facilitator may build. It's not our purpose to develop a complete set of supplementary material, but if you want to spice things up a bit, here are a few additional learning opportunities. Our network of facilitators tell us that these are useful.

EXERCISE #1:

Receiving feedback: a facilitated discussion

OBJECTIVES:

After completing this activity participants will be able to:

- effectively use feedback for personal growth;
- determine the advantages of asking for feedback on their performance, behavior, etc;
- recognize the risks involved in receiving feedback, and be aware of ways to minimize these risks;
- discuss implications of not receiving feedback;
- obtain a better understanding of how others see them.

STEP 1. Ask participants to list some reasons why they might ask for feedback from others. Write their ideas on a flip chart as they are offered. The examples may come from any aspect of the person's life. You will receive responses like the following:

- to increase self-awareness
- to discover areas in which improvement is needed
- "to see if I see myself as others see me"
- to have an awareness of strengths /weaknesses

STEP 2. Ask for comments and ways one might ask for feedback, and write them on flipcharts as well

STEP 3. Ask participants to list the reasons why people might avoid asking for feedback, and write these on the flipcharts. Typical responses might include the following:

- avoid critical remarks
- afraid of the answer
- retaliation
- truth hurts

STEP 4. Ask participants to think of ways one might overcome these reasons, and post their remarks

STEP 5. As a final step, ask the participants to comment on the implications of not asking for feedback. They will come up with comments like the following:

- nothing will change
- we will remain unaware of important things
- communication will be shallow
- our careers will suffer