

ARE YOU PROVIDING THE RIGHT KIND OF FEEDBACK TO YOUR TEAMMATES & COLLEAGUES?

I am embarrassed to admit it, but delivering feedback was something I really struggled with throughout my time as a people manager. Whenever I saw something small in my team that needed to change, I would hesitate, and a small bad behavior would evolve into a bad habit. And whenever I had to deliver truly tough feedback, I would mix up the message because I didn't want to hurt the other person's feelings. At the end of the conversation, they would never know if they were in trouble or if they were amazing.

On the flip side, I also struggled with giving positive feedback. In most cases I didn't give enough positive feedback. I would tell myself that my people know that I think they are doing great, so I don't have to say it. And whenever I gave actual feedback it was primarily at a surface level. I gave a lot of "Good Jobs" or "Atta-Boys," and thought that they were sufficient in terms of positive feedback.

I wasn't good at giving feedback. That was a reality I had to face when I was passed over for a promotion and was almost demoted. While I lead my team to amazing achievements, my team was breaking apart and they saw me as some sort of "taskmaster a--hole" who only cared about the results and not about them and, in many ways, they were right. They didn't know what I thought about them because I never gave them feedback.

But research shows that I am not alone. Sixty-five percent of employees say they need more feedback in their jobs, and 39% feel they are unappreciated at work. Think about that for a second. Two out of every three employees feel like they need more feedback in their daily jobs, and that lack of feedback is causing them to feel disengaged and undervalued at work. And I shouldn't have to tell you this, but research shows that disengaged and underappreciated employees will underperform and not try their hardest.

So, what can we do about it? Well the best method I have seen so far is used by my current company, Unity Technologies. Giving feedback is actually a foundation of our culture and is part of a program that is taught to every employee. In this program, we focus on delivering Fierce Feedback, Active Listening, Driving for Alignment in meetings, and how to Build Relationships.

It is our hope that by ensuring every employee, (from our C-levels to our frontline) has these skills, we can maintain our culture where everyone feels like owners, where they put our users first, and where bold ideas become a reality. But before we dive into the practical skills of providing feedback, we need to ensure we have the right mindset.

The Fierce Feedback Mindset

Having the right mindset is critical. In fact, I often think having the right mindset is even more important than having the right skills. Consider this. Would you rather have someone who truly believes in people coming together in an aligned decision, but just doesn't know the "right" skills? Or would you rather have a person that knows the "right" way to run effective meetings, but just doesn't believe it is important?

Personally, I'd rather have the person that believes in the importance of giving feedback, but just doesn't know how. This type of person will try and figure out their own ways of communicating feedback, and even if they aren't doing the 'right' things, they are still trying to things in the right way.

When it comes to Fierce Feedback, we believe there are four critical mindsets that you need to hold:

1) You are on their side. Too often people (including myself) will use feedback as a weapon. You angered me, so now I'm going to tell you off. But that kind of weaponized feedback isn't helpful. In fact, it will most likely cause the other person to become defensive or be hurt in the process. Fierce Feedback is about helping the other person do more of a good thing or do less of a negative thing. It's about helping them be better, and that requires that we understand their perspective.

Going into Fierce Feedback where you "know" what happened, and you "know" what the person should do in the future, is a quick way to ignore their perspective. If you truly want to be on their side and avoid weapon-

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izing feedback, then you need to do two things: be curious about their perspective and remove your own negative emotions from the conversation.

2) We owe it to people to be honest, because feedback is a right. This mindset is something I really struggled with. I would try and soften constructive feedback, and sometimes I would even avoid giving it all together because I didn't want them to feel bad. At the time, I didn't realize that I was actually hurting the person more by not giving the feedback.

Want an example of why we owe it to be honest to people? Have you ever had something embarrassing happen to you at work? For example, your zipper was down, or you had food on your face, or some part of your clothes broke. Well, would you rather someone tell you to your face, or would you rather find out at the end of the day when you get home? In one situation, the person was honest with you, while in the other situation, your colleagues probably saw the embarrassment, but no one was willing to tell you.

3) We all have things to learn. Feedback is also something we should seek out and ask for. Only narcissists think they are perfect and have nothing to learn. But for the rest of us, we need to embrace that all of us have areas to improve. Maybe that means overcoming a weakness or gap, or maybe it means improving something from good to great.

4) Feedback is also a gift. It's a privilege to receive it. And when we do actually get feedback from other people, we need to treat it with respect. Getting defensive, emotional, or ignoring the feedback are quick ways to stop getting feedback. If someone works up the courage to give you feedback, then you need to have the courage to hear them out.

Being open and respectful to receiving feedback doesn't mean you have to agree with what everyone else says about you. But it does mean that you need to be curious about their perspective and be willing to discuss it openly with them. By listening to feedback (even if you disagree with it), you are gaining valuable perceptions about yourself, and are less likely to have glaring issues that you are unaware of.

The Five Steps for Giving Fierce Feedback

The first thing you need to know about Fierce Feedback is that the name Fierce does not mean ferocious, attacking, or savage. Our definition of Fierce is more similar to how you can call someone "fiercely loyal." We want Fierce Feedback to mean direct, honest, and intense feedback, but always done with a good intent.

The five steps of Fierce Feedback can be simple to grasp, but these steps can be difficult to master. These might seem like common sense to you and, in truth, these are common sense actions. But as you are learning more about them, truly ask yourself if you are performing them when providing feedback to your team, your colleagues, and your direct manager.

Step 1 - What. Have you ever received feedback from someone that just talks and talks and talks, and never gets to the point? It can be infuriating, or scary, always waiting for the other shoe to drop. That's why Step 1 is to describe the behavior that you observed, while being as specific and direct as possible. The goal should be to describe what they did in one to two sentences. Any longer and it becomes you just monologuing how bad they were. Focus it down, so you can clearly say "you did X."

- Good Example - *In our last meeting with Jon and Lea, there were a few times you cut off what they were saying.*
- Bad Example - *You tend to not listen to people.*

Step 2 - So What. Immediately after describing the behavior in which they engaged, you need to explain the impact it had on you (or your perception of the impact on others), and what's important about it. The So What step is all about motivating the person to either engage in more of the good behavior or less of the bad

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behavior. And for that reason, you need to make sure you describe the impact in terms that they care about. If your team member doesn't care that they are coming across as a jerk, then describe the impact in a way that they can see and understand (i.e., they might get assigned to less interesting projects, their ideas will be ignored, etc.).

- Good Example - *The impact was that Jon and Lea became visibly frustrated and stopped contributing to the meeting.*
- Bad Example - *You're a jerk when you don't listen to people.*

Step 3 - Open a Dialogue. Up to this step, it is just you talking, but Fierce Feedback isn't meant to be a monologue by you. Fierce Feedback is supposed to be a conversation, and that is why Step 3 is all about opening the dialogue. Your first goal is to get to the core issue of why the behavior happened. Did something happen that you are unaware of? Did you play a role in the bad behavior? Think of yourself like a doctor, asking questions to make sure you find out the root cause of the illness, not just the surface level symptoms.

- Good Example - *Were you aware you were doing this? How open are you to other people's ideas?*
- Bad Example - *I don't care why this happened. I just want it to never happen again.*

Step 4 - Now What. Once you have reached a shared understanding for the root cause of the behavior, then you should explore options on how to address the root cause and get to the desired result. The critical thing to remember in Step 4 is that the feedback receiver should be the one coming up with proposed solutions, not the feedback giver. If you are a parent, you are already aware of this trick, because kids (and adults) are significantly more likely to do something if it's their own idea than they are if they are told what to do.

- Good Example - *What can you do in meetings to ensure everyone has a chance to share? How can we make quick decisions but also make sure everyone is engaged?*
- Bad Example - *I think you need to do X.*

Step 5 - What's Next. Once you have reached a shared plan on how to address the root cause, then you need to decide on the next steps. What actions will the person take, and what will you do? And if you are their manager, then we also recommend you help them set timelines and goals for their improvement, and also schedule some further meetings to track their progress.

- Good Example - *What specific actions will you take at our next meeting with Jon and Lea? Let's check in after the meeting to see how it went.*
- Bad Example - *Just get it done ...*

Fierce Feedback Tips and Tricks

When giving Fierce Feedback, we recommend the following things:

- Don't start the conversation by saying "I have some feedback for you." That treats feedback like you telling them something, and not you having a conversation with them. We recommend starting the conversation by asking "Are you open for some feedback?" That way they get to have a choice, because sometimes people just aren't in the right mood to hear feedback. If you've just had a big fight with your spouse, then most likely you aren't in the right mindset to receive feedback from your boss. So, ask if they are open for some feedback, if they say no, then just ask when a better time would be.
- Make sure the feedback is given in a timely manner. Talking about a meeting more than a month ago is just going to cause confusion or misremembering what actually happened. If you can, give the feedback as soon after the behavior as possible.

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- Give more positive feedback than constructive feedback. If you have children, then I am sure you already know that positive reinforcement is significantly more effective than consequences and punishments. The same can be said for adults. Positive feedback is significantly more effective in changing people's behaviors, so make sure your ratio of positive to constructive feedback is much higher.
- Fierce Feedback should never be given through emails or texts. Ideally it is done in person, or over a video call. Body language is a critical part of communication and losing the ability to see the other person increases the likelihood that critical aspects of the feedback are lost or confused.
- Be smart about where you give your feedback. Some positive Fierce Feedback can be done while getting a coffee, but if you are getting into a more serious conversation, make sure you can conduct the conversation in a private room.
- Finally, keep Step 1 and Step 2 as short and direct as possible. Some people want to add a lot of context, thoughts, descriptions, their opinions, etc., but that is all just fluff. Remember a simple rule, the more time you are talking equals the less time the feedback recipient is talking.

Providing direct and honest feedback (with a positive intent) is a critical role in today's workforce. If you don't do it, you risk not only demotivating your teammates and colleagues, but you hinder their ability to perform to the best of their abilities. When it's done right, your organization will be humming with feedback, and your people will be the better for it.

Cary Bailey-Findley has spent the past decade building the Human Capital within three Fortune 500 companies and was awarded the ranking of #1 development organization in the world by the Association of Talent Development. He is currently building the employee development portfolio for Unity Technologies. He holds a Master's degree in Industrial and Organizational Psychology and a Master's degree in Business Administration.

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