

Feedback and Forgiveness--Valuable Yet Underutilized

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Pause and reflect for a moment. Think about how comfortable you are with the concept of feedback. Do you frequently and comfortably seek and offer feedback?

Do the same thing for forgiveness. Are you quick to forgive when someone treats you inappropriately? Do you seek forgiveness when you have inadvertently (or even intentionally) behaved in a manner that offended someone?

I'm writing to leaders here. You need not be filling a "leadership role" to BE a leader. If you influence anyone, you are a leader. If you are a parent or a friend, you are a leader. If you make decisions that affect others, you are a leader. At a minimum, you lead your own life, right? So, this column is for you!

The topics of "feedback" and "forgiveness" have been smacking me in the face recently. That's why I included feedback and forgiveness as examples in my article last week. That article addressed the question, "Are you taking your freedom to choose for granted?"

Giving feedback is a choice. Seeking feedback regarding the effect of your actions is a choice. Forgiving someone is a choice. Seeking forgiveness for behavior that had some unexpected consequence is a choice. "Choice" was the topic of last week's column, because making decisions is a major activity for you every day! You make hundreds of decisions. For most actions you take, you presume that the outcome (the effect your behavior had on others) is exactly the same as what you had intended.

Ah, but often it's not. You don't realize it! You are oblivious. Your ignorance hurt's your effectiveness!

We humans judge things quickly--good or bad, right or wrong, happy or sad, guilty or not.

You judge yourself and you judge others. So don't be surprised that others do it, too. Your actions are on constant display, and people are judging them. As a leader, you are particularly in the spotlight. Every action you take will be criticized. You can't possibly please all the people all the time.

It's hard being a leader. Why would anyone ever willfully choose to assume a leadership position?

The Bible says "Do not judge, or you too will be judged." Yet we all judge others! "For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged." (Those verses are the opening lines of Matthew 7.)

Many people avoid feedback and forgiveness because these actions are often associated with "judgment." I think that's at least one reason why so little feedback and forgiveness is offered. But it need not be that way.

The value and effectiveness of your feedback and forgiveness comes down essentially to one thing. Is your intent to benefit the other person? Or is your intent to glorify yourself? That's the soul-searching question that is so hard to ask and equally difficult to honestly answer.

Is my purpose in providing feedback to educate, encourage, or nurture you, or am I just trying to look good or feel good? The question is easy to ask, but oh so difficult to honestly answer!

Is my failure to forgive because of a selfish desire for pity? Do I want to wallow in the pain associated with your offense? Do I want to protect my right to potential future retribution?

These are hard questions. I am not proclaiming that I am good at either feedback or forgiveness. I'm getting better, and it's partially because I ask myself these hard questions.

I also know that feedback is very powerful in helping individuals and teams grow and become more effective. Further, I know that forgiveness releases burdens and guilt and frees us to contribute the skills and talents that lie within us.

For a copy of last week's column, take a look at Dennis Hooper's weblog at www.buildingfutureleaders.com/dennis-blog.html or send an e-mail to dhooper2@juno.com.