Valuing Feedback

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I love feedback!

You see, I'm trapped inside my body, and I never really know what's going on inside the minds of other people. And I like to know if what I'm doing is being helpful, hurtful, or neither.

When I interact with others, I usually have an idea of what I want to accomplish with my actions. But others don't really know my <u>motives</u>. They can only infer what my intentions are.

However, what these other people do know for sure is the <u>effect</u> that my behaviors have on them.

So, we each have a part of the full picture! I know my <u>intentions</u>, but I don't know the <u>effect</u> of my behavior on the others involved. Others know the <u>effect</u> of my behaviors on them, but they don't know my <u>intentions</u>.

If the effect of my behavior on others is good, they usually don't say anything. Oh, a few might offer a compliment. But if my actions have created a problem or have made someone uncomfortable, often somebody will raise a concern. It's because of this tendency to give feedback when the information is on the negative side that has caused the concept of "feedback" to have a bad name.

Despite the negative reputation, strong organizations realize that routine feedback is a very productive communication and growth tool. Feedback is a wonderful gift that teammates give to each other to let them know what the effect of each other's actions has been. When I know what the effect of my behavior is, I can decide whether to continue it or change it.

Individuals on strong teams want every person to succeed. They work hard to help each other. They not only freely provide feedback, they also talk about the amount of feedback that is occurring on the team. They ask each other for ideas on how they can improve their feedback processes. They talk about what works well in providing feedback and what doesn't.

Good teams have a balance in their feedback; it's not just negative feelings that they communicate. You'll hear lots of compliments being shared--people like to hear when their actions help the team. Since most team members' behaviors are driven by honorable motives, and since there is a lot of collaborative work done by successful teams, it's not surprising that accolades and expressions of appreciation are frequently shared among team members.

Organizations that aren't yet healthily providing productive feedback may suffer from the tendency of us human beings to judge others. We all do it at times. We believe that we can accurately discern why someone has behaved as he or she has. When this happens, we somehow lose awareness of our biases. We think we are objective and perceptive and accurate in our judgment, even when someone raises a flag of caution. We refuse to consider other possibilities, choosing instead to criticize the motives of the offending party.

Teams where this kind of judgmental behavior is a norm usually struggle with relationships in many ways. Progress can be made only when three things are introduced. First, the team has to agree on a common objective supported by all. Second, an outside party, perhaps the organization's leader or a facilitator, insists that concerns be shared directly with the person responsible. Finally, supporting this change in team norms requires training in how to share feedback in ways that maximize honesty while reducing abusive confrontation.

Training materials are available to help individuals and teams learn how to productively give feedback. If your organization is struggling with backbiting and bickering, I encourage you to recognize these symptoms and form a planning team to consider and implement action steps to address this unhealthy situation.