

“Well, Folks, How Am I Doing?”

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Would you like people to know that you are deeply committed to improving your organization?

Would you like to protect yourself from the self-deception that can be so detrimental to leaders? (As clearly and objectively as we think we see things, it's hard to accurately judge our own performance. This is especially true when evaluating the impact of our attitudes and behaviors on our direct reports and others in the organization.)

Are you willing to be a role model regarding openness to others, listening closely to the way they see your behaviors? (Individuals in highly effective organizations are overt in asking for and providing lots of feedback to each other.)

How much honest, caring feedback occurs in your organization? How open are you personally to hearing how your behaviors affect those around you?

Would you consider subjecting yourself to some deep evaluation by those who work with you closely and are routinely affected by your expectations and direction setting? Busy leaders often don't think about or make time to seek feedback.

The top leader in an organization doesn't have anyone in an authority position to initiate the feedback process. Rarely will anyone else in the organization take the risk to initiate such a conversation.

Therefore, if it is to be, it will likely be up to you, the organizational leader, to request the feedback personally. Gather your leadership team for a morning or an afternoon meeting. Announce that you want them to collaborate on suggesting behaviors that you could improve.

Tell them you are about to leave the room and that you want them to spend the next hour or so becoming very specific in evaluating your performance. Ask them to write down their observations and suggestions on flip-chart paper or a whiteboard, so that they can review each item with you.

Will it work? In most cases, it will be a superb experience. If you have doubts about whether there will be confusion or controversy, have a good facilitator available to lead the session once you leave.

There is so much good that can come from this activity! Obviously, you as the leader will learn some very interesting things. In addition, look at the signal it gives to everyone about the transformation you are beginning to make--both personally and within the organization.

Most of you won't have to provide any further directions to your leadership team--just walk out and close the door. Some of you may prefer to offer some simple structure for the feedback. One approach that works well is to have the team identify what they recommend you start doing (that you haven't been doing) and what they suggest you stop doing (that you are doing ineffectively).

If you want an even more structured approach, there are many feedback instruments available to guide team members in evaluating your specific behaviors. To investigate these, just type "leadership feedback instruments" into any internet search engine.

Or contact me if you want some help identifying specific feedback criteria. In fact, if you'd like a skilled individual to facilitate this feedback session for you, let's talk. This can be a valuable first step in moving your organization toward excellence!

Are you ready to give it a try? If you are feeling reluctant to take on this experience, consider whether your personal pride is standing in the way of your desire to stimulate improvement in your organization. You could be a terrific role model for openness and seeking intentional improvement. This experience could transform the history of your organization!