

Feedback Matrix Using Feedback Constructively

Susanne: Hi, thanks for meeting with me today. As I mentioned, I wanted to talk with you about the construction plan you submitted yesterday. As usual, the quality of the plan was great. You definitely know what's expected by us and our client, so I want to thank you for that.

Charles: Thanks, it's great to hear feedback like that.

Susanne: Well, I'm glad you feel that way. What I'm a bit more concerned about, though, are the deadlines. You know that we build in extra time between when you submit the plans to us and when we actually present them to the client. However, I see that you often take advantage of that extra time, and you delay submitting your plans – they're sometimes up to a week late. This creates a bottleneck at the engineering approval stage, and I'm starting to hear about it. What can I do to get you back on track, so we return to the more efficient process we had before?

Charles: I'm really sorry. I've been stressed at home lately, and it doesn't help that Les, the new guy, comes to me with questions all the time. Can you give me a week to focus on finishing the plan I'm working on now? With fewer distractions and some time to work out my problems, I know I'll get back on schedule.

Susanne: That seems reasonable. Thank you for being honest. I'll tell Les to ask Madeline for advice and suggestions for now. Let's get together in a few days to discuss your progress.

This sounds like a "textbook" feedback exchange – just how it's supposed to happen. Susanne expressed her concern, Charles accepted the feedback, they agreed upon a solution, and they have a date for follow-up.

However, while it seems ideal, we don't know how well it actually worked. And if the results of many feedback sessions are any indication, there may be less positive change than we would hope.

Have you ever been part of a conversation like that? Chances are that you've observed that people (possibly yourself!) do one of two things when receiving feedback:

1. They accept the negative part of the feedback, but try to explain it or justify it (or decide that the person giving the feedback is wrong, so the comments are dismissed entirely).
2. They focus on the positive, and use it to reinforce what they already know to be true.

In either case, the feedback often fails to achieve the desired result. Rather than starting the process of self-examination to understand how their behavior needs to change, people continue to do what they were doing before, without making any major shift or correction.

The Matrix

The feedback matrix*, as shown below, is a useful tool that helps with self-exploration. It encourages you to examine both the positive and negative aspects of feedback, and then connect the comments back to what you already know about yourself, and what you did not know and need to explore more fully.

	Positive	Negative
Expected		
Unexpected		

Feedback generally falls into one of the categories in the matrix:

- **Positive/Expected** – We often have a good idea of what we do well, because we receive regular positive feedback about these things. But instead of simply hearing this familiar praise and doing nothing with it, ask yourself:
 - How can I celebrate this aspect of myself?
 - How can I use this skill to improve my productivity or personal satisfaction?
 - How can I use the skill to help others who are not as strong?
- **Negative/Expected** – If we're honest with ourselves, we're often aware of some of the areas in our life that need improvement. If our boss asks for a meeting, chances are we know and expect what will be discussed. In fact, we're often more critical of ourselves than others are, but we just don't know how to improve without some help. To apply this expected feedback and make a positive change, ask yourself:
 - What actions have I already taken to address this concern?
 - How successful were those actions?
 - What else do I need to examine and/or change to achieve the results I want?
 - If I don't make these changes, how will this impact my job or life?
- **Positive/Unexpected** – Receiving positive feedback that we don't expect is like a surprise birthday present. It creates a wonderful feeling when we learn or hear something positive that was totally unexpected. But after the initial joy, it's important to examine this feedback further by asking yourself:
 - Why was I surprised to hear this?
 - What previous experiences might have caused me to forget or dismiss this strength or ability?
 - How will I celebrate this newly discovered skill?
 - How can I use this skill to improve my life?
- **Negative/Unexpected** – This feedback is the most difficult to hear and understand. But it can also be the source of much self-discovery, if we're open to it. This unexpected feedback often comes from areas that we don't want to acknowledge, or aren't prepared to face, and it can cause some strong emotions. However, when we learn to deal with it, we can take big steps forward on our journey of self-improvement. Some further questions to explore include:
 - What other information do I need to make sense of the feedback?
 - What support do I need to deal with the implications?
 - What plan can I put in place to make small, achievable changes in the short term?
 - How will improving this impact other areas of my job or life?

Download our **feedback matrix template** to use this technique. When you give or receive feedback, use this matrix to improve your experience – and your outcomes.

Key Points

Feedback is meant to be the first step toward change. Unfortunately, the result is often too much or too little change, which doesn't help you achieve your goals.

The Feedback Matrix helps you get the most from any feedback session. It leads you to examine the negative and positive aspects of the feedback, and ask yourself what you did and did not expect. It challenges you to take advantage of the expected positives, commit to working harder on the expected negatives, celebrate the unexpected positives, and fully explore the unexpected negatives. With this tool, you can use feedback effectively to achieve significant, positive change.

Download Worksheet

* Originator unknown. Please **let us know** if you know who the originator is.

Thanks to Kathryn Jackson, a Life Coach and Mind Tools newsletter reader from New Zealand, for sharing this useful tool with us.

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