



Small Feedback and Big Feedback

High-performing teams are feedback rich. Very feedback rich. Knowing how you're showing up for other people and the quality of tasks you've been asked to perform is the fastest way to improving your performance. And the performance of the team.

High performers routinely ask for feedback. Incredibly often. Unnervingly often. Effective, facilitative leaders give feedback. All the time. Every chance they get.

Studies show that the best CEOs constantly ask how they're doing, and create systems where feedback is always part of the dialogue. And everyone below the CEO, surveys show, seeks more feedback than they get. Managers routinely fear giving feedback, and people who work for them routinely wish they got more. This is pretty easily fixed.

Small Feedback

Asking is easy. "How did I do? Any feedback for me?"

Giving feedback is an acquired skill. But easy to acquire.

First, specificity. When someone asks--how did I do?--respond with specifics. "I thought your willingness to ask many questions in the meeting was very helpful. I really appreciated the question you asked at the end. I would like you to keep doing that. And showing up one minute late was not helpful. I want us to set a new standard for the team--meeting times matter. I need your help with that. Does that help? Is there anything else you are curious about? How about you? Any feedback for me?"

The above is a conversation you can have after every single professional encounter. As a closer to every standup meeting, routinely included, it becomes a steady compass on the quality of the relationship. It provides a level of both intimacy and professionalism that can enhance performance.

Big Feedback

Every once in a while, probably monthly, the team should be convened to check-in with each other. A big feedback moment looks something like this:

Each person should look around the room and identify three people with whom they have important professional and/or personal relationships.

They are invited to pick one and go sit in front of that person so that the room is now divided into pairs of people sitting across from each other. In 6-minute increments minimum (or any longer length of time available), each person is invited to speak to the other person about the quality of their professional relationship, responding to four specific questions:

- What I value in you and our relationship
- “How I am with you”—meaning what it is like for me to be in your presence and to work with you
- What I would like to see improved in our relationship
- What I am willing to do to ensure that this improvement happens

After each person has finished, they “compare notes” on what they are going to do to support a more effective working relationship, and agree to check in in a similar way in an agreed-upon length of time.

[Capture and hold](#) the conversation on paper. Check for agreement afterward.

Case Study

Jahna’s team consisted of 5 co-workers, across three departments, all working on the same projects (but not all the time).

She had weekly stand-up meetings with each of them and one all-hands meeting.

Jahna had a feeling that some of the members of the team were more engaged than others, and that this unevenness was causing some tension. “Free riders” is what one team member said to her in private.

She had no forum designed to get line-of-sight into this phenomenon, so she decided to tackle it simply, by adding a “feedback moment” to her weekly one-on-ones. She wrote a note to each team member individually suggesting that they add a simple script to the end of each of their standups. It read “How are we doing together? As collaborators? What is working? What could be improved? What would you like me to do differently?”

She suggested that they each follow this brief script, write the conclusion down in the briefest form possible ([capture and hold](#)), and see if it helped align the team.

At her first one-on-one, her colleague Georgia seemed confused. “What is this? What am I supposed to say?” Jahna gently and patiently modeled the behavior by saying “Here’s how I think it could go. I noticed this week that in the all-hands it did not seem to me that you had much to say. I became curious because I value your perspective, and I hope you can find a way to speak up more next time if you have something to say. Like that!” Jahna smiled.

“Oh, Okay,” said Georgia. “I get it. So for me, I say less these days because I feel like it won’t make a difference. If you could do one thing differently, it would be to lead us toward a little more accountability. Sometimes these all-hands feel like wasted time because we all go back and have about half the direction we need to get the right thing done. Like that?”

“Great, thanks,” said Jahna. “Just like that. Really helpful. Let me think about it.” She wrote what she thought they covered and sent it to Georgia, adding “Did I get it right?” She wrote back “yes, and if you want to know the whole picture, I am not the only one that feels that way.”

After three weeks, her feedback conversations with each team member became relaxed, brief, and revealing. She assembled a clear picture of the way each of them was wrestling with the mild dysfunction in the team (and what she was doing as a leader that was not working). Four weeks out, with that rough assessment in hand, she designed an all-hands that explored setting new standards of performance for her team, and how to know when they were performing. And how she could more effectively lead them. A culture began forming around how they all wanted to collaborate, and complaints slowly disappeared.