

How to Inspire Change When Feedback Doesn't Work

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“Unsolicited, one-way feedback hurts.”



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■ COACHING & FEEDBACK

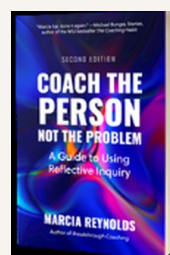
How to Inspire Change When Feedback Doesn't Work

There are common misconceptions in the workplace around the value of feedback. Feedback is generally focused on finding fault. The “helpful” information you give people often raises defenses or lowers confidence, decreasing performance, innovation, and health.

Most people are not raised or trained to comfortably accept criticism. When people experience a threat in the form of negative feedback, they move into a physical as well as mental defensive posture. This closes instead of opens the mind to seeing situations differently.

In the HBR article, Find the Coaching in Criticism, professors Sheila Heen and Douglas Stone found even well intentioned opinions, “... spark an emotional reaction, inject tension into the relationship, and bring communication to a halt” no matter the position or years of experience of the feedback recipient.[1] People want to learn and grow but they also have a basic human need for acceptance. Unsolicited, one-way feedback hurts.

Most people want to get better, but they want to feel engaged in a conversations focused on achieving their personal goals, not just meeting performance targets. They want conversations that pull out their ideas and have their eyes opened to greater possibilities they could explore, not one-way directives focused on what they did wrong. Humans yearn to be seen, heard, and valued, their brains shut down when they don't feel a positive connection.



THE BOOK

Coach the Person, Not the Problem

2nd Edition

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If leaders would hold development instead of performance improvement conversations starting with a coaching approach, they would activate creativity instead of defensiveness. Employees probably know what they did wrong when they reflect on a situation. It's better to connect with them with trust and care, and then focus on helping them discover what they can do to change.

Coaching is not giving feedback. It is an inquiry-based methodology designed to increase awareness. A coaching approach encourages self-discovery and self-generated solutions. This is far more effective than giving feedback and looking for compliance. Coaching has proven to improve learning, productivity and growth.[2]

■ FEEDBACK VS COACHING

FEEDBACK

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COACHING

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Of course there are times when a course correction is needed. But if the smart person you are coaching knows what to do but isn't

doing it, the conversation should focus on what is stopping the person from applying what they know, not on giving advice.

If people want to learn and grow, what should you do instead of just giving them feedback? Here are 6 steps to consider.

- 1 **Set regular check-ins.** When people expect regular conversations they won't fear the occasional summons or formal performance reviews.
- 2 **Create a safe space.** Set your intention to move toward their desired future. Feel hopeful and caring. Be curious and open to their ideas. Don't judge. They need to feel seen, heard and respected to risk thinking and acting differently.

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- 3 **Start with coaching.** Start by asking for their perspective of the challenges they are facing. Listen and summarize their assessment of their behavior. Share what you have experienced as the impact of their behavior, both good (praise when you can) and not-so-effective and hindering the successful achievement of their goals. Ask them to make suggestions for improvement before you offer your own.
- 4 **Don't focus on what went wrong.** Keep the focus on what it will take to better achieve their

expected and desired outcomes. When offering suggestions, share what they might learn by acting differently as well as indicating how different behavior might lead them to achieving their personal goals.

- 5 **Give clear expectations of results.** Be clear on what you and others expect will happen as a result of the changes they commit to making. Set regular conversations and be accessible as they work to sustain their changes.
- 6 **Be patient.** Creating new mental and behavioral habits take practice over time. Give them a chance to learn and grow before you stop or save them.

Coaching isn't about giving feedback; it's about helping people expand what they think is possible for themselves and their work. Strive to have regular conversations with employees around development to ensure their professional growth. ■

■ ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Marcia Reynolds is the Founder of Covisioning LLC and a globally recognized pioneer and expert in leadership coaching and adult learning. A Master Certified Coach and Neuroplastician, she has coached leaders, delivered leadership and emotional intelligence programs, and spoken at conferences for clients in 47 countries. She teaches in 5 coaching schools in the US, Asia, and Europe and has published 6 books, including her international bestseller *Coach the Person, Not the Problem* 2nd Edition. She has a doctorate in organizational psychology and two masters degrees in communications and adult learning.

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- [1] Sheila Heen and Douglas Stone, "Find the Coaching in Criticism," Harvard Business Review, January-February 2014, <https://hbr.org/2014/01/find-the-coaching-in-criticism>.
- [2] Marcia Reynolds, "Are You a Knowledge Sherpa? You might be if you coach with reflective inquiry," Covisioning blog, April, 2019. <https://covisioning.com/are-you-a-reflective-inquiry-knowledge-sherpa/>