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From Feedback to Feedforward: Turning Reflection Into Growth

Most leaders know how to tell someone what happened. The greater leadership opportunity is helping them decide what happens next. Traditional feedback looks backward. It identifies what worked, what didn't, and what needs improvement. The reflection is important, but if the conversation ends there, the employee may walk away understanding the problem without knowing how to move forward. That is where feedforward comes in.

Feedback creates awareness. Feedforward creates direction.

Feedforward shifts the conversation from reviewing the past performance to improving future performance. It does not ignore mistakes or eliminate accountability. Instead, it uses what happened as valuable information and turns it into a clear next step.

A Simple Three Step Leadership Framework

When addressing a performance issue, missed expectation, or development opportunity, use this approach:

Name What Happened

Be specific, direct & objective.

Avoid vague statements such as, "You need to communicate better."

Instead, identify the observable behavior:

"During the project, the team did not receive an update when the deadline changed."

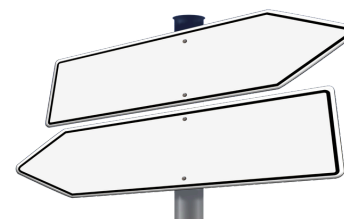
Clarity helps the person understand exactly what needs attention.

Clarify The Impact

Explain why the behavior matters.

"When the change wasn't communicated, team members continued to work toward the original deadline and had to adjust their priorities last minute."

Connecting behavior to impact creates understanding. It also keeps the conversation focused on performance rather than personality.



Focus On The Next Step

Invite the employee to participate in creating the solution.

“What communication plan can you put in place so the team receives timely updates during the next project?”

This encourages ownership and turns the conversation toward improvement.

Try This Today:

Think of one conversation you need to have with a team member, and before the conversation, write down the answers to the following questions:

- What happened?
- What impact did it have?
- What needs to happen differently next time?
- What question can I ask that encourages them to take ownership?
- When will we follow up on the agreed upon next step?

Then end the conversation by confirming one clear action and a timeframe. A strong leadership conversation should leave both parties knowing what comes next.

Organizational ROI:

When leaders consistently combine feedback with feedforward, organizations can experience:

- Greater employee ownership.
- Less defensiveness.
- Clearer performance expectations.
- More productive leadership conversations.
- A culture of accountability, learning, and growth.

The return is not simply a better conversation. It is a team that becomes more capable of reflecting, adapting, and moving forward.

The past provides information, but growth happens through what we do next.

Feedback helps your team see the gap.

Feedforward helps them close it.

The next time you give feedback, don't stop after identifying what needs to change. Help the person see the path forward.

Ready to strengthen your team's conversations?

If your leaders need support delivering feedback, building accountability, or developing their teams with greater confidence, let's connect. Through leadership coaching and organizational development, I help leaders turn everyday conversations into opportunities for stronger performance, meaningful growth, and healthier workplace cultures.