TREC TOGETHER RISING AS AN ENVIRONMENTAL COMMUNITY

Feedback and Crucial Conversations

When we're deep in the work of the heart and the spirit, we can sometimes bump up against the ideasand beliefs of our thought-partners and colleagues – or even outright disagree. While dominant culturehas created, in many of us, a fear of conflict, the ability to disagree, and give and receive feedback are essential skills that can catapult us into deeper, more trusting relationships and yield more successful, innovative strategies that advance our work. On the other hand, stifling disagreement can cause us to lose the tremendous value that comes from our differing perspectives and experiences, as well as unintentionally contribute to a culture of assimilation.

If the thought of giving feedback makes you at all uncomfortable, you are in good company: an Interactsurvey by Harris Poll showed that 69% of the managers [polled] said that they're often uncomfortable communicating with employees. [1]

Concurrently, according to a 2016 study, "65% of employees would like more feedback than theycurrently receive."[2]

While we can be lured into the short-term ease of suppressing disagreement, the long-term cost can bevery consequential. When disagreeing or giving feedback across identities, we can feel even more reluctance to broach challenging subjects. Research has shown that reluctance to give feedback across identities robs staff of the very information that can help them excel in their careers, and can even eventually lead to job loss, stagnation, or departure.

When you stop and think about it, giving feedback and sharing different perspectives– disagreeing– couldn't be more crucial. And yet, many of us will do just about anything to avoid them. Understandinghow to set ourselves up well to initiate a crucial conversation– or feedback–can help.

So, what exactly is feedback?

Feedback is:

Information about

- **past behavior,**
- **delivered in the present,**
- **to influence future behavior.**

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- Information about **how we are doing in our efforts to reach a goal**. The goal can be performance-based on something we are "doing" or the goal can be behaviorally based on how we are "being" in the process of getting work done.
- Information that supports and promotes each other's success in our work
- Information that helps people be aware of answers to vital questions regarding their work...
    - Why does my role exist?
    - What am I supposed to achieve?
    - How is my performance tracking to what is expected of me?
    - is the best use of my time?
    - How am I impacting and influencing others?
    - What is the quality of my relationship with others (manager, team members, colleagues,peers, or external partners or contacts)?
- Ultimately, it is a conversation about the effectiveness of actions and impact.

Feedback is not:

- An evaluative commentary about personal characteristics, personality style, or traits
- Criticism or venting
- Direction or directives
- Advice

What is the purpose of feedback?

- To help each other be effective and to succeed
- To test the reality of our perceptions
- To build healthy relationships
- To help each other learn and grow

The Purpose of Feedback is to Feed-forward Different Impact and Results

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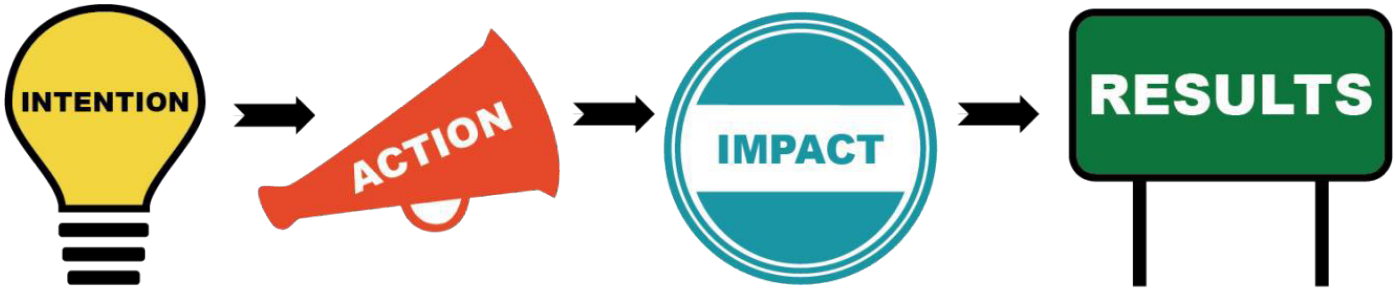

Feedback focuses the IMPACT and RESULTS of an ACTION, not about the intention or motivation behind the action.

Intention, while important, does not absolve responsibility for the impact of our actions.

What outcome do you want from the feedback? KNOW this before you give it!

- **Reinforce action(s), impact(s), and/or result(s)**
  - Supportive feedback when actions are generating positive results
  - Also known as positive feedback
  - Tends to be the most "under-used" and "under-experienced" feedback

- **Change action(s), impact(s), and/or result(s)**
  - Corrective feedback when actions are not generating positive results
  - Also known as constructive feedback
  - Tends to be the most experienced form of feedback

- **To feel better personally – relieve internal tension (frustrating, guilt, etc.) – feel good**
  - Abusive feedback – venting, sarcasm, criticism, de-valuing of the person
  - Insignificant feedback – platitudes, attention on things that have little or no importanceto goals or the work at hand
  - Offering unspecific praise as a way of seeking positive comments about you in return

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The Process for Giving Feedback:

1. **Presence –** It's important when giving feedback or stepping into disagreement to come at it with our most grounded, creative (as opposed to reactive) selves. From that stance, the chances that we will be able to be kind and offer useful and clear feedback are far more likely.

Take a moment to ground in your intention before even thinking about what you want to communicate and WHY. Feel your feet, feel your seat…

- Check your reactive tendencies! (We all have them) Do you tend to want to please, critique, control?
- Remember to remain curious: what do you not know about the situation or behavior?
- What might you be assuming or making up? (Remember the Results Model – we make up stuff all the time)
- What could come up in the conversation that could activate you into defensiveness or reactivity, and how can you make a plan to be prepared?

2. **Power & privilege scan** – What power dynamics might you want to take into account as you prepare? Positional power and differing identities, backgrounds, experiences, and orientations to disagreement, feedback, or conflict are always at play.

What can you plan for ahead of time, and what might you want to check in about to support the conversation/feedback?

How might this situation be related to your own cultural iceberg in terms of stated versus under-the-waterline expectations? What can you learn in terms of your own biases and expectations from this interaction?

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3. **Preparation** (crafting your feedback) – Giving direct and specific assessments and feedback about what is working and what could be improved builds trust over time, supports authenticity in leadership (which is critical), and forms a healthier development culture.

   - Use "I" statements
   - Intent – feedback is an indicator of commitment to a relationship: when we are not invested, we generally don't make the time for it. It is helpful to remind ourselves that, even – and especially – when we're giving more challenging feedback.
   - "Be kind whenever possible. It's always possible." – The Dalai Lama
   - Articulate your desired, long-term result (such as: better working relationship, more productivity, a better understanding…) Begin by plainly stating your intention. Don't waste time by talking in circles, but don't be too aggressive, either. "I'm excited about this quarter's goals and I'd like to have us working as efficiently as possible" is going to yield much better results than, "I feel like you've been micromanaging me."
   - Be willing to open up first. (*… and yes, this can take some courage*)
   - Be specific
     - What are you giving feedback about? What are the behaviors and/or actions that you are experiencing that are effective or not effective? Give examples!
     - Focus on the behavior, not on the "why" (motivation or intention). It can be harmful to assume we know why a person does or says something ("making stuff up"); if it is important, ASK what was going on for them that led to this particular action.
     - Focus on the behavior and action, NOT the person (what a person does, not who they are)
       - "When you don't make decisions in a timely way, I can't get my job done,"
       rather than, "you're so indecisive that I can't get my job done."
       - "You did not complete all of the steps I asked you to," rather than, "You did this wrong."
   - Be clear on what needs to happen (what needs to be different)
     - We often want to shroud challenging feedback by diffusing it, but the impact of that generally does not match the intention: the receiver leaves confused, uncertain, and perhaps less trusting. **Clear is kind, as Brené Brown says!**
     - What behaviors and/or actions do you need – what are you asking this person to do differently?
       - "I need you to go back and include all of the steps in the process before we can move forward," rather than, "Go back and do it right."
   - Be sure what you are giving feedback on is "actionable"
     - Is this something in their control? How?
     - Is this something they can and will take on? ASK and AGREE
   - Be timely
     - Immediate feedback is often very helpful
     - If it is a more significant issue or likely to trigger strong emotions in you or

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the receiver, take the time to work with yourself, prepare for the feedback and schedule a meeting assoon as you can. Don't delay too long!

- Be complete
  - Say what you need to say – get to the point
  - Refrain from coming back later and adding to the feedback – if you missed some important point, schedule more time and be sure what you want to add is significantlydifferent than what you already covered. Take enough time on the front end, so this does not drag out.

4. **Permission –** Surprising someone with feedback is not a good setup for them or you. If you want to give someone feedback, make sure the person is ready to hear you, and askthem where and when the best time would be for the conversation (place, time of day, etc.).

   - Ask if the receiver is open and available for feedback
   - Be sure it is well-timed given what is happening for the receiver
   - Give it in a place that is private and free of distractions
   - Refrain from "overloading" – pay attention to the key issue and avoid, "and another thing_____, and then there is this_____, and don't forget about the time_____." (if you find a temptation to dothis, it tells you that you have waited too long to speak up)

5. **Partner –**
   - Check for understanding and clarity
     - Ask if your feedback is clear, ask them to share their understanding
     - Ask what your part might be
     - Ask if the changes you want to see are "do-able" for them (what do they need to be successful, how can you support them?)
   - Determine next steps
     - Are there any specific actions that are needed? What are they? Will you meet again tocheck on progress? When? Be as specific as possible
     - What agreements do you have about moving forward together?
     - How can you support them?
   - Don't get panicky or flooded if it doesn't land well – hang in there, be curious, test for impactversus intent

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WORKSHEET FOR GIVING FEEDBACK		
PRESENCE	• What reactive tendencies might come up for you? (We all have them) Do you tend to want to please, critique, control? • What could come up in the conversation that could activate you into defensiveness or reactivity, and how can you make a plan to be prepared? • What do you not know about the situation or behavior? What might you be assuming or making up?	
POWER & PRIVILEGE SCAN	• What power dynamics might you want to take into account as you prepare? Positional power and differing identities, backgrounds, experiences, & orientations to disagreement, feedback, or conflict are always at play. • What can you plan for ahead of time, and what might you want to check in about to support the conversation/feedback? • How might this situation be related to your own cultural iceberg in terms of stated versus under- the-waterline expectations? What can you learn in terms of your own biases & expectations from this interaction?	
PREPARE	• Connect with the person about the WHY of your feedback – you are giving them this feedback because you are (committed to supporting their growth, hoping to strengthen your partnership, sensing they might not be aware of an impact, etc.) • What are you giving feedback about? What are the behaviors and/or actions that you are experiencing	

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	that are effective or not effective? Share one or two specific examples of what is not working. Focus on the behavior and action, NOT the person • Share the impact the behavior is having on you or the organization, if appropriate. Ensure you use "I" statements here, not saying, "others are saying or feeling XYZ," which can be very activating on the receiving end. • Be clear on what needs to happen (what needs to be different?) • Is this something in their control?	
PERMISSION	• How will you let the receiver know you'd like to give them feedback? • What time and place will be most supportive to them?	
PARTNER ON SOLUTIONS	• Invite the recipient to respond to the feedback. • How will you ensure your feedback was clear and that the receiver understood? • What are the next steps, and are they feasible? Does anything need to shift in order for them to live into the changes? • What are you willing to do to partner with them to support the changes you're requesting? • When and how will you check in on progress?	
If your feedback doesn't land well – hang in there, be curious, test for impact versus intent.		

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Example:

"*Thank you for agreeing to sit down with me, Jon. I'd like to talk about how we can have a better working relationship, and I'm a little nervous because I'm not as skilled in this type of conversation and I really want it to be productive. It might help if I first share some of my observations so you know what I am talking about, and then get your perspective. And then I hope we can come up with some ideas on how we work together more effectively. It might be good to take 30 minutes now and we can talk more later if we need to – how does that sound*?"

"So, more specifically, it appeared clear to me that in the last two projects we worked on that we were banging our heads together specifically when X and Y happened (specific example). I found that frustrating and disappointing because I do respect you and you and me having a good relationship is really important to these projects succeeding. In hindsight I wish I had raised this after the first project so I apologize for sitting on this. I have been thinking about some things I may have done that might have upset you and I'd like to test those, and I know there are some ways you approached things that I'd like to ask you to try a different way in the future."

"So I am curious about what you are thinking - have you experienced any frustration or worry about how we're working together or do you have a different perspective"

And now you're into the give and take, the dance of the conversation as you seek out clarity and mutual interests, hopefully concluding in some solutions.

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