

Giving Feedback as a Decision Maker & Receiving Feedback from a Decision Maker

Why this is important

Giving and receiving feedback is a crucial part of interacting in the workplace, both within your organization and with external stakeholders. As an employee, providing thoughtful, proactive responses to feedback will be a boon to your colleagues and stand you in good stead with Decision Makers. Failing to do so erodes trust, inhibits performance and, ultimately will be bad for your career.

As a Decision Maker, you have a powerful opportunity to model the behavior you wish to establish in your team and your organizational culture. Your feedback will affect all who hear it and hear of it.

Engaging in constructive feedback in either direction has multiple positive effects. It:

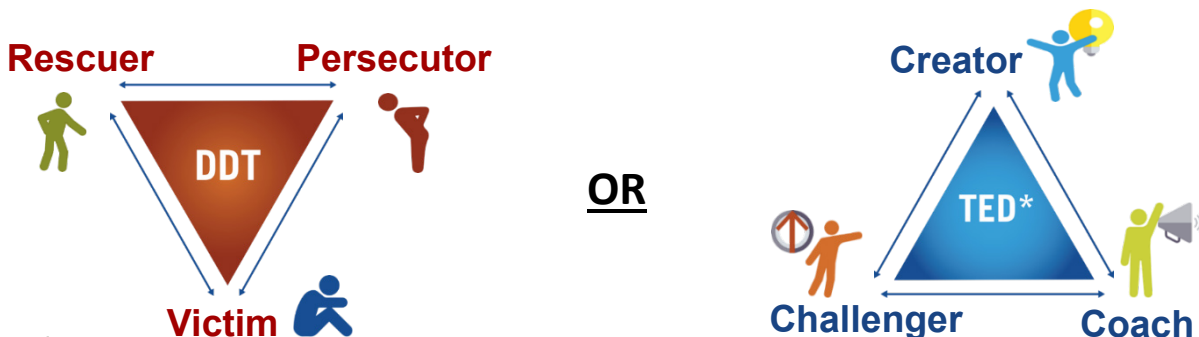
- Models positive leadership behavior
- Builds trust
- Develops individuals and their teams
- Supports high-velocity learning
- Improves organizational performance
- Strengthens relationships and engagement with stakeholders

Begin with awareness

The first step in achieving these positive outcomes, whether giving and receiving feedback, is personal awareness. This means being aware of how the way we think, feel and act contributes to (or detracts from) our goals for ourselves, for our organization and for our business outcomes. It all starts with our intent and the choices we make.

Choose how you will show up

We have a choice of how we relate to and show up for feedback, whether giving or receiving. A good tool for thinking about this is the Dreaded Drama Triangle and the Empowerment Dynamic from the Three Vital Questions. Whichever role we're in, the key question to ask is, how am I relating, from the DDT or from TED*?



We've all known decision makers who gave "negative" or corrective feedback from role of the **Persecutor**, leaving recipients feeling belittled or derided. You, or they, may have easily slipped into the **Victim** role, identifying the decision maker as the source of the problem, regardless of any truth contained in the feedback itself. A colleague may have played the **Rescuer**, confirming what a jerk this guy/gal is over multiple martinis (also **Rescuers**) at your local watering hole.

That same Decision Maker might have chosen the alternative, to deliver hard news as a **Challenger**, who does just that: challenges the **Creator** to do and be their best. The goal isn't to cut down, but instead to point to and insist on excellence. The **Creator** receives this as the constructive challenge it is, owns the situation and makes a plan for improvement. Your colleague, having shed the **Rescuer** role, ask powerful questions as a **Coach** to support your thinking and commitment to action.

Which dynamic will you choose as you give and get feedback, and what roles do you want to play? The first step is setting your intention to inhabit the **Empowerment Dynamic (TED*)** anchored in the intentions of agency, learning and growth. The next is to plan how you will do it.

Our best intentions can go out the window when someone comes to us unprepared and expects a decision or wants us to approve what looks to us like sub-standard work. Surrounded by all the pressures of a heavy work load, it's easy for everyone concerned to jump back into the **DDT**.

When receiving feedback from a decision maker, it's just as important to choose **TED***. We may not be able to control how others give feedback, but we certainly can choose our response. Our first responsibility is to inhabit the role of the **Creator**, who owns their thinking and action and responds accordingly. As the receiver of feedback—and if it's appropriate—you can also respond as a **Coach**, asking powerful questions to help the Decision Maker clarify their thoughts so you can respond more effectively to any requests that might be made.

There may also be times when it's appropriate to inhabit the role of **Challenger**, to support the Decision Maker in aiming for a higher goal.

No matter what TED role(s) you play, you're coming from a place of empowerment, with your focus on outcomes. When receiving feedback, this demonstrates your value to the Decision Maker and the organization; when giving it, you provide value by modeling behavior that leads to happiness and high-performance.

Set yourself up for success

Careful preparation goes a long way toward insuring that your ideas will get a good hearing:

- Organize your information (Check with others to make sure it makes sense to them too.)
- Send a read ahead
- Choose your presentation timing wisely for greatest attention and consideration
- Know your audience. Consider personality and thinking preferences so your transmission will be most easily/comfortably received.

- Keep a Blue Head. Prepare mindfully to interact with equanimity, no matter the message you receive.

Receiving Feedback from a Decision Maker About an Idea or Brief

Here are some points to keep in mind about receiving feedback from a Decision Maker:

1. Any time you provide information to or ask for a decision from a Decision Maker, you have the opportunity to demonstrate your value (as an employee, a partner, a future leader), and your potential to benefit the organization in the future.
2. You must choose two things wisely: How you respond to the feedback itself, however it is delivered, and the action you take in response to the feedback you receive. Remember, both of these factors contribute to the way you are viewed as a leader, and as a person. Be sure to take the opportunity to choose how you are perceived.
3. Your solution may not be the outcome the senior or decision maker selects. Listen, do not interrupt unless asked, and do not react (verbally or non-verbally) while the Decision Maker is talking. Remember, you asked for feedback and your role at this stage is to receive whatever the Decision Maker has to offer.
4. Every decision or event like this is followed by other actions that help you to grow and strengthen your leadership qualities. You have the opportunity to learn from each event, help yourself to be successful and achieve your Extraordinary Future.
5. Consider the character of the feedback as a guide to understanding it and formulating an appropriate response:
 - a. Approval: You have a decision. Listen to the feedback. Look for follow on requirements or guidance.
 - b. Interest: If there is a request for additional information and you can provide it, do so. If not, say so, and indicate when it will be available. Your request for a decision may be delayed.
 - c. Correction: While this may be hard to receive, your calm acceptance of the feedback, and subsequent proactive follow-up will speak volumes about you as a valued member of the team.
 - d. Redirection: You are directed down a different path, but you have a decision and potentially a new opportunity.
 - e. Dismissal: This is hard to receive and is perhaps the most challenging test of your ability to keep a Blue Head. If the Decision Maker indicates that you may return with new or differently prepared information, you will have the chance to try again.

Giving Feedback

Here are some thoughts about preparing to give feedback as a Decision Maker:

1. Decide if this is a good use of your time. Are you ready to provide guidance, comments or a decision, or is the time and material not ready for your attention? Are you the right person to be giving the feedback they request, or is there someone else who may be more useful to them at this time?
2. Consider the team's, or individual's duties, position in the organization and your intent on how you want them to receive this feedback. (Encourage this effort, champion their topic, redirect their focus, stop this behavior/effort, have them learn and return with a better outcome).
3. Consider whom you will provide the feedback to: The team, the team lead, the individual, or the individuals' supervisor and how you might tailor your message for greatest effect.
4. After reviewing the material, consider the character of the feedback that will best express your intent:
 - a. Approval: Intent – Rubber-stamp and clarify next steps.
 - b. Interest: Intent – Gain clarification to allow for possible direction.
 - c. Correction: Intent – Improve the person's performance or the quality of the material.
 - d. Redirection: Intent – Change the focus to a topic of greater interest or relevance to you or others.
 - e. Dismissal: Intent – Reject the work for specific reasons including lack of preparation, clarity or data.
5. Remember, each transmission (how you deliver your feedback: your tone, your body language and what you say) effects the culture of the team and the organization and possibly their success. Always be respectful and deliver your feedback from The Empowerment Dynamic.

It's not just what you say

There are three components to feedback: verbal (what you say: see above), non-verbal (what you do with your body) and environmental (the physical environment in which feedback is offered and received).

Non-verbal: You speak eloquently with your posture, facial expressions and focus of attention.

Regardless of what you say, the way you hold your body tells a story of its own. The person who stands or sits with arms crossed tightly on their chest and looks around the room is delivering a very different message from someone who stands or sits with arms open or at their side, looking the other person in the eye in an attentive way. The first may be send a message of defiance or disinterest; the second, a message of interest and engagement.

Most people are very good at receiving non-verbal cues like these. It's part of our ancient survival mechanism, and receiving these cues triggers powerful mechanisms in our brains that inform how we respond to others. So be sure, whether you're giving or receiving feedback, that your body is saying what you intend it to.

Environmental: Imagine being called into your boss's office to receive feedback on an important project you've been leading for some time. As you enter, your boss remains in her chair behind her desk, which is piled high with reports, books, and maybe a couple of laptops. You are asked to stand or sit with the desk—and all its stuff—intervening between you. How does this feel?

Now imagine the same scenarios, except that your boss rises when you enter, and invites you to sit in one of the two chairs in front of the desk, where she sits as well, with nothing between you. How does it feel now?

Regardless of the actual message—from praise to correction—the way people are arranged in space and the nature of the space itself plays a large role in determining the quality of the conversation that follows.

Another example of the environment mattering greatly is where people attempt to have interactions that require good thinking (like giving and receiving feedback) in busy places, such as the corner of a full conference room. We get far better results when we make sure to choose the environment most likely to produce the behaviors we want. Sometimes we have no choice—and have to make do—but most of the time, with just a little thought, we can boost our outcomes exponentially by finding ourselves in the right space.

For more detailed information on the practice of giving and receiving feedback, see the Give and Receive Constructive Feedback worksheet.

