



Episode 41: How to Get Better Feedback

Welcome to In the Right Direction podcast, where we believe you get to choose what's on your plate, you can manage the overwhelm, and that change is possible. I'm your host, Deb Elbaum, and I'm here to share insights and strategies to increase your happiness, one baby step at a time. Let's dive in.

Hi everyone, it's Deb. Today, let's talk about feedback – specifically, how you can ask for and get feedback from others that is helpful, relevant, and actionable. To get started, here are two questions for you:

First, what's easy for you about asking for feedback?

Second, what's hard about asking for feedback?

If you're listening to my podcast, I'm guessing that you have strong values around learning and growing as a professional and as a human being. You want to know what you're doing well, and where your growth edges are. You want feedback that is specific and relevant, so that you can incorporate it to grow as a leader.

The trouble, though, is that many of us are just not great at asking for feedback. We don't know what feedback we're asking for or we're worried about the feedback we'll receive. And because of this, we either avoid asking for it, or when we do ask, we don't make the most of the opportunity. We ask questions that are too vague.

Today, let's talk about how you can become a better solicitor of feedback so that you feel empowered to both ask for and receive it – whether around your communication, your work, or your leadership behaviors. In a few moments, I'll share an easy communication tool that you can use to feel confident asking for the feedback you want and need.

Before we get to that strategy, though, let's start with the what not to do when asking for feedback. If you're like many of my clients, you ask for feedback with a question that is too broad, like, "What feedback do you have for me?"

The trouble with this question is that it's too vague. It misses an opportunity to focus the thoughts of the feedback giver. With a question like, what feedback do you have for me, you have no idea what you'll get. Likely, it will be about what is top of mind for the feedback provider. It's more likely to be about them, rather than about you.

And you want the feedback to be about you. You want your colleague or boss to really consider what it is you are doing or saying, and then share relevant thoughts with you so that you can grow.

The communication tool that can help you get better feedback involves asking questions. Getting more actionable feedback requires asking more intentional questions. But not just any questions – the questions to ask to get focused feedback are a pair of questions that I call 2 sides of coin questions.

Two sides of a coin questions are powerful because they allow for more complete reflection.

Questions are a tool to help focus one's thinking, and you can help focus your feedback providers' thinking by asking 2 sides of a coin questions. The benefit of these questions are that they come in a pair. They invite the feedback provider to fully consider the topic you're asking about – both the positive and negative aspects.

Because let's remember that it can be hard for people to give feedback. They might be worried about hurting your feelings or they might not know what exactly it is you want to hear. The 2 sides of a question tool is brain-friendly and makes it easier on the feedback provider. It guides their brain to an area to focus on and consider.

When we ask 2 sides of a coin questions, we're recognizing that everything we do has both the positive and the constructive. Taking in our successes as well as our developmental opportunities is what helps us be even more effective.

Let's take this scenario as an example. Suppose that are practicing a presentation – maybe for an important client or investor. You run through the presentation with your colleague, and you want to ask for feedback.

Before you even open your mouth to ask the question, I want you to think. Because here's a secret: the first step in getting feedback starts with you. If you want to ask for and receive effective feedback, you need to be clear in your own mind what you want the feedback around.

Returning to our example of a getting feedback for a presentation, there are lots of things you might be curious about.

Do you want feedback around the content of the slides? Around your body language and energy?
Around your main messages?

Taking the time to consider what you want feedback around allows you to craft questions that are most helpful so you get the data you want and need.

Asking the questions you want the feedback giver to answer brings the control and agency back to you. After all, asking for feedback can be very vulnerable and personal. And when we take the time to decide what feedback we specifically want, it helps us feel more empowered. We're less hesitant and more eager to ask for feedback, because we've chosen the scope of information we want to receive.

Let's describe what I mean by this phrase 2 sides of coin questions. Two sides of a coin questions are a pair of related questions that ask someone to consider a situation from 2 different views, usually from a positive perspective and a developmental perspective.

Let's come back to our example of running through the presentation with your colleague. Let's imagine that as you've prepared, you've been working on honing your messaging. You want feedback about how your messaging is coming across and whether it's concise and focused.

To get this specific feedback, there are different 2 sides of a coin questions you could choose to ask.

Here's one pair of questions you might choose to ask your colleague:

Where was my messaging really clear?

Where was my messaging more confusing?

Here's another set of questions you might ask your colleague:

Where did I explain things just right?

Where were my explanations too long?

You see? Asking a pair of related questions like this invites your colleague's brain to focus and hone in on what you're most curious about. It invites feedback that is balanced, helpful, and relevant. That's the purpose and power of the 2 sides of a coin questions.

Here are some more quick examples:

Suppose you are new to your role, and you're having your 30-day check in with your boss. You want feedback to know whether you're focusing on the right things. You might ask this pair of questions:

-What do you expect me to know by now?

-What do you expect me to still be learning about?

Or let's take the example of a coaching engagement. At the end of a coaching engagement, I ask for feedback from my clients with these 2 sides of coin questions:

-What achievements are you most proud of from our coaching?

-What did we not achieve during our time together?

Being a leader means being intentional with your words and questions, and asking and role modeling the 2 sides of a coin questions can help you and others improve your feedback conversations. They can ensure that your communication is clear, confident, and helpful.

Thank you so much for listening and being part of my community. If you found today's episode interesting and want to see how coaching might benefit you as a leader, please reach out. Email me at deb@debelbaum or schedule a complimentary consult through my website: debelbaum.com. I look forward to it. I'm here to help you create your best self at home and at work, so that you're confident you're moving in the right direction for you.

Until next time!