



PeopleFocus



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Editor's Message

*'Tis The Season To Be Jolly ... Tra - La - La - La ...!
Or, Is It?*

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Indeed, **IT IS** the season to be jolly! Well, at least that's what the latest economic and employment reports show. In the wake of a "*robust economic growth in the first half of this year*," there has been a recovery in the job market. The unemployment rate has dipped to 3.4% in the third quarter.

Despite this jolly news, Singapore's economy is expected to slow down in 2005, and "*structural unemployment remains a concern*." In Issue 04-04, we took a look at self-employment as an alternative to a job as people are still concerned over job security. How then should workers cope with change and uncertainty?

In this issue of the **PeopleFocus** newsletter, we take a look at how we should view feedback as opportunities to grow, how bosses and managers should set clear expectations, and how we should handle change.

The **PeopleFocus** newsletter aims to provide informative articles and resources to organisations to help improve workplace performance and to individuals to develop their personal effectiveness in their career and life goals.

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Merry Christmas



Make Feedback an Opportunity for Growth

Dread the thought of receiving feedback? Well, don't. Seek out feedback and view it as an opportunity for growth.

You just gave a presentation at work to a potential client. Your boss is giving you some feedback - you were too soft, didn't get to the point quickly enough and lacked a compelling example.

Faced with the often-difficult experience of feedback, many of us respond in unproductive ways. When we receive feedback from others, both positive and negative, it is imperative that we take it positively as opportunities for growth, enhanced competence and improved performance.

Negative Reactions to Feedback

When given difficult feedback, most of us find that we do one or more of the following:

Pretend. We say little, disguise any hurt or humiliation, push the feelings way down and eventually act like it never happened. "*Thank you so much for sharing that.*"

Defend. We justify our actions, give explanations, and point out reasons. "*There was so much happening last week; I didn't have the time I needed to prepare. Oh, and the microphone wasn't working so well today.*"

Deny. Denial automatically makes the other person wrong. "*I don't see a problem; I'm great at what I do.*"

Interrogate. We ask for proof that there is any truth to the feedback. "*Well, if you want me to understand what you're trying to get at, I'll need some specific examples.*"

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Lash out. Anger is the first reaction for some. *“Get off my back, will you? How dare you criticise me, you of all people! I thought you were my friend.”*

Criticise. We go on the offensive through blame, innuendo or other unsolicited comments. *“I never believe anything those hotshots have to say. You know how it is in that department.”*

Self-destruct. We turn all our negative reactions inward against ourselves. *“I am such a loser. I’ll never get it right. I’m never doing another presentation.”*

All of the above reactions serve to distract us from learning from feedback. Learning from feedback is critical if we are to improve and succeed in our jobs.



Turning “Feedback” into “Feedforward”

Taking the dread out of receiving feedback can happen with as little as a simple twist of words - *“I wonder what’s going to happen”* instead of *“I worry about what’s going to happen”* and a slight shift in beliefs. All feedback is a gift. “Feedforward” focuses on the future, on growth, on improvements. Here are some guidelines that can help transform feedback into “feedforward”:

Track your own reactions. Recognise your emotions and responses. What body sensations, thoughts, emotions arise? Recognise that whatever arises in your mind is your own responsibility. It is not the other person’s fault that you are responding as you are. You get to choose how you think and how you respond. When we own our own reaction, it opens the way for genuine communication with the other person.

Get support. Though it may be difficult to identify, you may feel inhibited and ashamed upon hearing feedback that requires change. Ask trusted friends to listen, encourage and offer suggestions. Work with a coach. Even in settings in which people are expected to be self-

reliant, it’s nearly impossible to make significant change without such encouragement.

Listen with an open mind and heart. Begin by acknowledging that the perception of the person giving feedback is the reality that needs to be looked at. Without confirming or denying the perception of that person, simply listen and take in what he or she has to say.

Change defensiveness to curiosity. Don’t explain or defend yourself. It may be appropriate to bring the subject up later, if explanations are appropriate. For now, though, say the three magic words: *“Tell me more!”* What has the person giving you feedback observed? What does that person expect or want you to do differently? Don’t assume you know what the other person means. Ask questions to clarify your understanding.

Regard all feedback as an act of generosity. Feedback can help you recognise habitual styles that may need to change. It can help you re-examine how you are living your life. It is a wonderful gift. Consider offering sincere appreciation to the bearer of that feedback, even acknowledging how difficult it may have been to deliver the news.

Focus on the message not the packaging. There may be times when feedback is given harshly or by someone with whom we struggle, or there is a mixture of truth and personal distortion in what we are told. Forget about what package the message comes in; instead focus on, *“what is the message?”* How can you penetrate to the truth contained in the feedback? What can you learn? Contemplation is a critical step to interpret the message.

Reframe the feedback. When we put feedback in a positive light, negative emotions and responses lose their grip. For example, you could see the feedback on your presentation as a way to improve your chances of promotion, leading you to improve your skills in various ways. Or, the feedback may point you to greater personal success in a position that does not require presentation skills.

The bottom line: Taking feedback to heart puts you in control and takes you out of helplessness. It may require ruthless self-honesty and a little detective work, but the payoff is high. ■

Set Clear Expectations

Bosses and managers setting clear expectations for their employees or team members are critical to developing quality workplaces.

Too often, bosses and managers seem to lead through telepathy. Rather than set and communicate clear expectations - the milestones against which we test our progress - they assume their employees know what to do and how to do it. This results in hesitation, indecision and uncertainty.

Properly setting expectations for employees or team members is a critical dimension in quality workplaces. Below are 10 tips on setting clear expectations that will set standards for excellence and results, creates healthy teamwork, initiative and productivity.

1. **Start with a vision of what you want the end result to look like.** Not just what you want done, but the results you want to achieve when the project is completed.
2. **Discuss how you define "excellent performance."** Paint a complete picture. Refer to your performance review form. Don't assume.
3. **Keep your focus on the desired outcomes.** Do not describe each and every step to follow. Your goal is to guide, not control. Letting individuals find their own route toward productive outcomes encourages them to use their strengths to their fullest potential.
4. **Tie the mission of the department to each job.** People want to know that their role, whether large or small, makes a difference.
5. **Put the expectations in writing.** This would add clarity and avoids misunderstanding, confusion or misinterpretation by employees.
6. **Stay on the sideline.** You may be tempted to run in and play the game for a subordinate, but if you do, no one will learn a thing.
7. **Give feedback—and often!** The annual performance review is too late to let staff members know how they are meeting your expectations. Set up regular informal and formal review time (from weekly to up to quarterly for larger departments). Feedback given along the way sounds more like coaching and not like punishment.

8. **Ask for staff members' feedback.** Ask how they think they are doing. The more two-way communication exists, the greater the clarity around the expectations.

9. **Give positive reinforcement.** Don't mix the negatives with the positives. Mention the thing you like and you'll get more of it. Be specific and prompt.

10. **Don't take it personally.** When staff members don't perform as you think they should have, look for solutions, not blame. ■

Celebrate Hard Work

Working smart is good. But the reality is that there is no getting around hard work.

You've heard the phrase, "when you love what you do, you'll never work another day for the rest of your life." Whilst there's a lot of truth in that, the fact is, success, achievement and getting things done usually requires work, and sometimes it requires plenty of hard work!

Don't get me wrong, we should always find clever, innovative and efficient ways to work better and work smarter. It always feels fantastic when your work feels a lot like play. There are times when everything you do seems easy, productivity soars and results seem effortless - if only we can have more of them!

The truth is that most of us work really hard, whether it's at a job or building a business. To be successful at it, these require hard, sustained and disciplined work. So what motivates us to work hard?

To help you guide and motivate your employees more effectively, consider the following:

- Give specific instructions and directions.
- Give lots of specific and timely feedback about progress. Face-to-face works best.
- Set clear, positive recognition for achieving goals, plus encouragement to repeat their winning performance.
- Recognise effort and hard work. Sincere thanks are in order, but other incentives may work better i.e. allow them to train others, pick their assignments or become involved in decisions that will make them more visible in the organisation. ■

How Well Do You Deal with Change?

A conscious, developed awareness of our response to change can help us develop better coping strategies.

All change - professional and personal - carries with it the risk of the unknown and the unexpected. Some find this exciting and welcome the challenge.

Others go down the path of change reluctantly, dragging their heels all the way.

Do you:

1. Hesitate to make a change until everything is 100 percent right?
2. Never make changes unless they are forced on you?
3. Have to be totally fed up before you'll make any change?

Or do you:

1. Generally, look forward to change as exciting and challenging?
2. Review the events and your behaviour to determine if you could have done anything differently?
3. Take responsibility for your reaction to them, rather

than feel responsible for the negative changes that come out of nowhere?

4. Attempt to keep other changes to a minimum when coming to terms with a major change in your life?
5. Review how you have handled other such events in your life for lessons on how to handle this event?
6. Look to others who have undergone similar changes as models for how you might better address the change in your life?
7. Ask for help and support from those close to you, reliable friends and professionals who can help you develop productive strategies around the change?
8. Step back from the situation to get perspective and rest in order to regain a sense of balance?
9. Try to look at the "big picture" of the change, and acknowledge any mixed feelings you might have?
10. "Pick yourself up, dust yourself off" and continue to move forward rather than blaming or feeling victimised?
11. Move into "the way things are" instead of the "way things used to be?"
12. Risk disapproval and lack of support from others to make a necessary change? ■



About Us



Lionel L Lim is the founder of Aurora Executive Solutions (AES), a Human Talent Management and Development Solutions firm. He is a US-certified EQ trainer, a career and life coach, a People's Association approved trainer, and a licensed facilitator of the Profiles occupational assessments. Lionel is also an experienced facilitator of the EQ Map, the Emotional Intelligence Style Inventory, MBTI tools and the INSIGHT Inventory.

Lionel is a graduate of the University of South Australia with a BA in Communication and Media Management. He also holds a Diploma in Training and a Certificate in Counselling Skills. Lionel has a varied experience in executive search, communication, leadership, training, coaching and mentoring, as well as the effective management of teams in both local and overseas assignments.

Lionel is a professional member of the Asian Association of Career Management Professionals, the Six Seconds Emotional Intelligence Network, the Career Planning and Adult Development Network, the National Resume Writers' Association and the International Association of Coaches.

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