



# The Politics of Hope Newsletter

*“Helping Ordinary Citizens Become  
Extraordinary Public Leaders”*



## Giving and Receiving Feedback

By Donna Zajonc  
February 2009

“Honey do you think this dress makes me look fat?” was a request for feedback that I recently asked of my husband. Fortunately he is a skilled communicator and he used the opportunity for a “teaching moment” about the art of asking for feedback.

Developing the skill of giving and receiving feedback is an often overlooked component to becoming an influential leader. Closing our ears to feedback from others prevents us from receiving information that will improve our effectiveness. And, if we do not share our feedback with others, we rob them of the same opportunity to grow.

Feedback can come in many shapes and sizes. We all like the positive feedback that reinforces our gifts. It is the negative feedback, either expected or unexpected, that can hurt. But it is no feedback at all that can be even worse.

### ASKING FOR FEEDBACK

Preparing ourselves for honest feedback involves at least four steps. These basic steps will help us receive information, whether it applies to an everyday situation or a complex, long term project.

1. Ask for specific feedback. Working in the world of constant emails, interruptions and meetings can give us the illusion that we are in the feedback loop. Our modern brains are coping with this overload by filtering much of the information we hear in a day. If you want feedback, be specific when you ask for it. For example: “John, may I have your feedback on how I am approaching the Acme project goals by next Friday?”

### Quote of the Month

February 12th is the 200th anniversary of President Abraham Lincoln's birthday. It is said that his hand was shaking from greeting hundreds of citizens on New Years Day. Before signing the Emancipation Proclamation he paused to rest his hand, not wanting future generations to speculate that an unsteady signature may mean that he did not wholeheartedly endorse the proclamation.

*“And by virtue of the power,  
and for the purpose of the  
aforesaid, I do order and  
declare that all persons held as  
slaves within said designated  
States, and parts of States, are,  
and henceforward shall be free;  
and that the Executive  
government of the United  
States, including the military  
and naval authorities thereof,  
will recognize and maintain  
the freedom of said persons.”*

~January 1, 1863  
Emancipation Proclamation



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2. Check your intention for asking for feedback. My husband and I joke about this question: “Honey, do you think this dress makes me look fat?” (Yes, I actually asked him that question!) Be very clear about the purpose of your request. Ask yourself these questions: Am I looking for feedback to reinforce my situation or habit? Do I just want to look good in the eyes of others or, am I looking for honest feedback so I can grow and learn?
3. Listen and check for understanding. Ask only clarifying questions so you understand their feedback. You are asking for their honest perspective, not a debate.
4. Thank then for their feedback. It is often risky for others to give feedback. If you want to develop a trusting and open feedback-loop, thank them for their perspective and ask them to continue to share their views.

**Leaders who are hungry to grow and succeed are looking for insight into their “blind spots” — those areas that they can not see without feedback from others.** To successfully incorporate change, we must face these blind spots that will sooner or later block our effectiveness. Asking for and accepting feedback will accelerate your ability to see these pesky yet critical behaviors that, when faced and mastered, are keys to our success.

## **GIVING FEEDBACK**

If we do not learn the art of sharing feedback with others (including our boss!) we may cheat them of the opportunity to benefit from our unique perspective. Delivering feedback that is combative or poorly stated may be dismissed. Soft or unclear feedback may not be helpful or add to the idea pool. Any of these flaws will result in an underdeveloped collaborative relationship.

### **Sharing feedback has four similar steps.**

1. Check your intention for sharing your feedback. Too often our desire to share feedback is to fix or change the other person. We may not like their style or the way they are doing their job. Over time our resentments may grow and when we finally give feedback it may be combative or judgmental. Creating the highest good for the person is a key ingredient to sharing valuable feedback.
2. Asking permission to share your feedback is the second step. An example might be, “Susan, are you open to feedback about how you are approaching the City Bond election?” By asking for permission you are increasing the likelihood they will be open to your comments. Once they say



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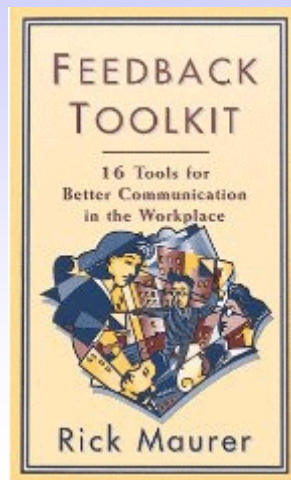


yes, they are more open to your feedback. If they say no, do not share your feedback. There’s a good chance their inability to hear your comments will spark a new conversation.

3. Keep your feedback concise and on topic. This requires a clear awareness of your intention for sharing your feedback. If you have a hidden agenda and are not fully aware of it, as the conversation unfolds you may veer off into a territory that has nothing to do with the topic in which you are sharing feedback. Bottom line your comments so you can stay on topic.
4. Give them time to absorb your comments and avoid repeating yourself or “driving home your point.” Depending on how the person receives your comments, they may need time to process your feedback. You might close with saying, “If you wish, we can take this up again when you have had time to reflect.” This gives them an opening to close the conversation and signals to them you are sensitive to the new information.

Both hearing and accepting feedback are critical skills that help us improve our effectiveness. Enrolling other people in your success by asking for genuine feedback is potentially one of the most valuable gifts you can receive from another. As you model receiving and giving feedback, you will create an organizational culture that values growth and learning. Soon you will find that others are following in your footsteps. The result will be a collaborative and mutually beneficial relationship.

## On Donna’s Nightstand



*Feedback Toolkit: 16  
Tools for Better  
Communication in  
the Workforce*  
By Rick Maurer

If you want to further explore the benefits of giving and receiving feedback in the office, this book is for you!

[Find it online at Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)



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### Complimentary Coaching Session!

Beginning in March, I have room for one new coaching client. My clients are leaders in a range of public organizations, elected service and small businesses. Coaching is especially useful to develop your individual leadership attributes, your role as a team leader and communication and listening skills. Call me today at 206-780-9300 or email me at [donna@bainbridge.net](mailto:donna@bainbridge.net) if you want a complimentary session to consider becoming the leader you want to be.

*“My gratitude list for 2008 has Donna Zajonc at the top. As my coach, she was instrumental in my business success which tripled revenue since its inception. Her positive encouragement and concrete ideas moved me forward to great success. She pushes me to excel where I am strong and helps me avoid pitfalls that have plagued me in the past. I highly recommend her assistance.”*

~Pamela S. Erickson, Owner  
Public Action Management

#### Comments?

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