

Receiving Feedback Well

WOW Virtual Event
February 2025

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My background

- Stanford Ph.D. in Psychology
- In 2024, I wrapped up a 26-year career in Tech across 8 companies where I hired and directly managed hundreds of people
- Last job was VP at Meta, leading a team of 1,500 data scientists for \$130B Ads business
- 2x Founder in the Family Tech space
- Mom of 2 (16 and 18 yr old), wife, daughter
- Now living my best life: enjoying a portfolio career as a startup advisor, Zumba instructor, mentor, and the founder of the Women of Wisdom community



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Why we need to learn to receive feedback

All of us who ever managed people were taught how to **give** feedback in countless training sessions

- **SBIR** model = **S**ituation, **B**ehavior, **I**mpact, **R**ecommendation
- Radical Candor model = Challenge directly + Care personally

Yet we are rarely taught how to **receive** feedback, beyond getting trite advice such as:

- “Practice active listening”
- “Treat feedback as a gift”

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3 distinct types of feedback

Appreciation

To see, acknowledge, connect, thank

Evaluation

To rate against a set of standards or to rank against your peers

Coaching

To help receiver expand knowledge, address performance gaps, improve skills

Complication: There's always an element of evaluation in coaching

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Giving appreciation feedback

- Express appreciation - cure MADD
- Be **authentic**
- Be **specific**
- Focus on the **process and efforts**, not just result
- Share the **impact**

Receiving appreciation feedback

- Thank you, it makes my day to hear that!
- I really put a lot of effort into it, thanks for noticing!
- Thank you, I'm happy to hear you feel that way!
- I'd love to take credit for this, but Amanda is the one who did the heavy lifting. I'll share this feedback with her.
- Thank you for the feedback. Everyone on our team worked really hard on this. I'll share your feedback with them.



Raise your hand

if you ever received feedback at work that was
inaccurate, unfair, or based on your personality
rather than your performance

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You are not alone

76% of top-performing women
received negative feedback
from their bosses

Compared to only **2%** of
high-achieving men

88% of these high-performing
women felt they were reviewed
based on their personality, not
their performance



Source: Report by Textio that analyzed performance reviews of more than 23K people across 250+ companies

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Unfair, But Valid Feedback - The Seeming Contradiction

The difference between unfair and invalid feedback lies in the details



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Source: <https://deblu.substack.com/p/unfair-but-valid-feedback-the-seeming>

Feedback: “You are hard to relate to.”

This feedback is **unfair**:

- Fairness = Does it apply to everyone equally?
- The answer here is no: For women to be seen as leaders, they must be perceived as both competent and warm. Men just have to be competent.

But it is still **valid**:

- Validity = How do people experience you?
- Other people experienced me as aloof and that affected my ability to build relationships

Feedback can be **both** unfair and valid

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Why we need to learn to receive feedback

- We get feedback often, both at work and at home
- We don't choose when we get feedback, what the feedback is, or how it gets delivered
- This feedback is sometimes biased and unfair
- It's natural to react to unfair feedback with anger, defensiveness, or depression
- But if we learn to receive feedback well - even if (and especially if) it's biased or unfair - we can turn every interaction into a genuine **growth opportunity**

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Growth mindset for receiving feedback

- **Embrace a Growth Mindset** – View feedback, especially critical feedback, as an opportunity to learn, improve, and develop new skills, rather than as a judgment of your abilities.
- **Separate Ego from Learning** – Understand that mistakes and negative feedback are part of the process of mastery.
- **Effort Over Talent** – Recognize that improvement comes from effort and persistence, not innate talent.
- **Reframe Challenges as Opportunities** – Critical feedback often signals areas for growth.
- **Cultivate Curiosity** – Those with a growth mindset seek out feedback not only to confirm strengths but also to uncover blind spots, making continuous improvement a goal.

Source: C. S. Dweck, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* (Ballantine Books Trade, 2016)

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What gets between feedback and you

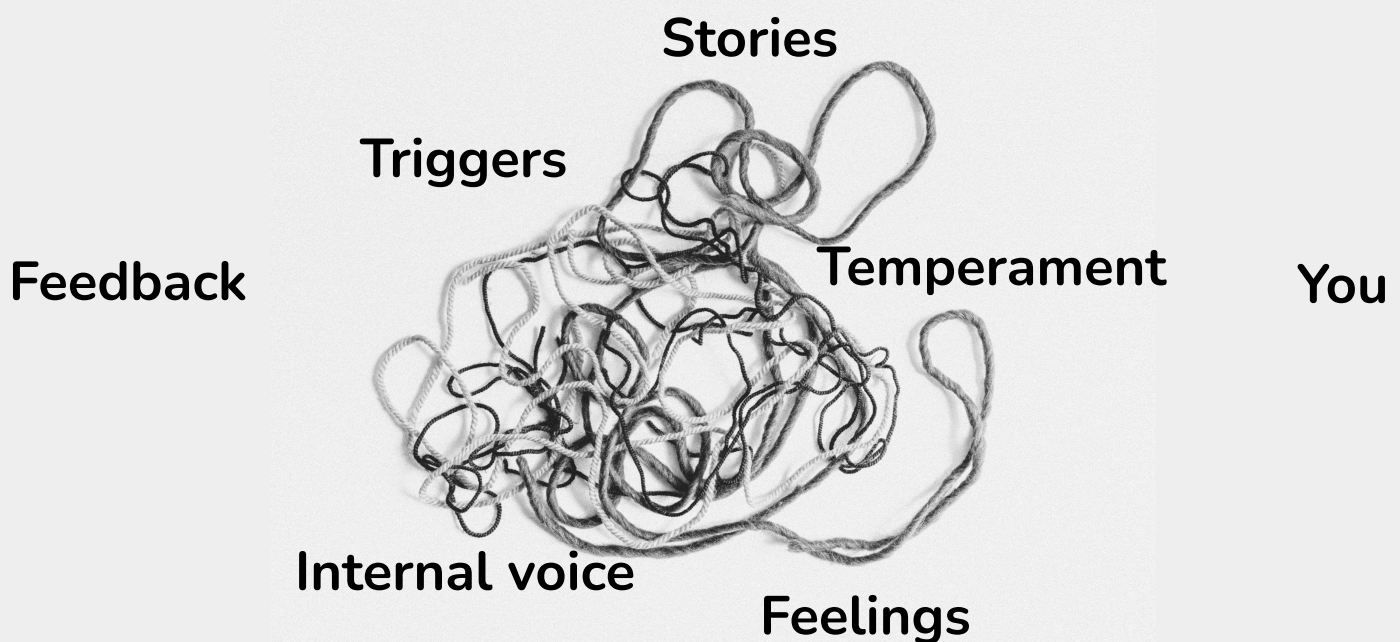


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3 types of triggers

Truth triggers

This feedback is wrong, unfair, unhelpful

Relationship triggers

I can't hear this feedback because it's coming from you

Identity triggers

This feedback is threatening to my identity

Source: D. Stone and S. Heen, *Thanks for the Feedback: The Science and Art of Receiving Feedback Well* (Penguin Press, 2012)

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Your internal voice

- *If you think you and your feedback giver are having a one-on-one chat, think again. You have each brought along your “**internal voice**”, the running stream of thoughts and feelings you have during the conversation in reaction to what’s going on.*
- *Our internal voice is often fairly quiet, especially when we’re absorbed in what someone is saying. But when we disagree with what they are saying, or feel emotional, our internal voice gets louder and demands more of our attention. And **when we’re listening to ourselves, we can’t also listen to others.***
- *Your internal voice is like a **personal assistant whose job it is to make sure no one bothers you**: “Sorry, Ms. Goldstein is busy right now. She’s absorbed in her own thoughts about how unfair you always are to her. You might try coming back later.”*
- ***When you are triggered, your internal voice goes from mere assistant to armed bodyguard.** When your boss, the head chef, yells, “If you can’t keep up, get out of my kitchen!” your internal voice leaps to your defense and shouts back (in your head): “If you’d equip this #*@\$! kitchen properly, maybe I’d have a chance!” The chef might get past your usual assistant, but no one is getting past your bodyguard.*

Source: D. Stone and S. Heen, *Thanks for the Feedback: The Science and Art of Receiving Feedback Well* (Penguin Press, 2012).

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How temperament affects your ability to receive feedback

Baseline	Swing	Recovery
The beginning and end of an arc, your default state	How far up or down do you swing in response to feedback	How long does the swing last before you return to baseline

Source: D. Stone and S. Heen, *Thanks for the Feedback: The Science and Art of Receiving Feedback Well* (Penguin Press, 2012)

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Feelings distort feedback in 3 ways

Our past	Our present	Our future
The Google bias	It's not one thing, it's everything	The forever bias

Source: D. Stone and S. Heen, *Thanks for the Feedback: The Science and Art of Receiving Feedback Well* (Penguin Press, 2012)

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5 ways to stop the distortions

- Be prepared, be mindful
- Separate the strands: Feelings vs. Story vs. Feedback
- Contain the story, right-size the consequences
- Change your vantage point
- Accept that you can't control how others see you

Source: D. Stone and S. Heen, *Thanks for the Feedback: The Science and Art of Receiving Feedback Well* (Penguin Press, 2012)

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Steps for Receiving Feedback Well

(Optional) Step 6: Coach the feedback-giver

Step 5: Close the feedback loop

Step 4: Act on the feedback (if you want)

Step 3: Reflect deeply on the feedback

Step 2: Say "Thank you for your feedback"

Step 1: Listen, ask questions, seek to understand

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Complication: Power and hierarchy

- In a hierarchical relationship, it's especially hard to separate coaching from evaluation as the same person is both coaching and evaluating you
- Does it mean coaching the coach is off the table? Not necessarily.
- Studies show that workers who seek out negative feedback (coaching on what they can improve) tend to receive higher performance ratings
- When asking for feedback, talk in terms of effectiveness rather than ambition
 - Do not say: "I want to get feedback on how to run meetings well because in 5 years I see myself as a vice president"
 - Say: "I want to get feedback on how to run meetings well because I want to use the team's time more efficiently"
- But use **caution and judgment** when asking for critical feedback at work

Source: D. Stone and S. Heen, *Thanks for the Feedback: The Science and Art of Receiving Feedback Well* (Penguin Press, 2012)

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