



Creating a Culture of Feedback Exchange

Feedback is information about *past* behavior that is delivered in the *present* to motivate for the *future*. Coaches need to understand the fundamentals of effective feedback exchange in order to guide leaders in how feedback can be used as a performance management tool. Feedback can serve as a management tool by *reinforcing* or *redirecting* behavior. Behaviors are *reinforced* when praise or encouragement for desired behaviors is offered, whereas less desirable behaviors can be *redirected* to more positive behaviors through the use of specific examples that illustrate more desirable behavioral choices. By engaging in a process of ongoing feedback exchange, leaders can establish a positive culture within their units around feedback. Coaches can help leaders move from being transactional with feedback, where the leader just “drops off” the message for the receiver to later figure out, to being more transformational. In being transformational, the leader helps the subordinate process feedback and develop from it. Transformational feedback is direct and focused on helping others improve rather than tearing them down. Coaches should help leaders understand that *exchange* is a key aspect of this relationship such that leaders are open to *receiving* feedback too.

Characteristics of Effective Feedback	
Aspects	Definition
<i>Proactive</i>	Clarification of performance expectations
<i>Informative</i>	Isolates specific behaviors, apart from the person, that need emphasis either via recognition/praise or constructive criticism
<i>Directive</i>	Identifies specific examples of behaviors that are preferred and aligned with the Army’s mission

Coaching on Feedback Exchange

Q: What can I do as a coach to help leaders foster a positive feedback culture?

A: Coaches can explain to leaders how positive feedback cultures result in a more collaborative unit and determined force. Specifically, coaches should...

- Guide leaders to an evolved definition of feedback that focuses on a culture of frequent exchanges and acceptance; one where feedback exchange is not reserved just for formal performance reviews
- Discuss the benefits of this new perspective and help the leader visualize effective feedback delivery and receptivity
- Explain the impact feedback can have on team-building and morale
- Model feedback behavior and help the leader understand the importance of high quality feedback and how to deliver it.

Q: How do I coach on the important elements of feedback exchange?

A: Follow the 4-step process described in this newsletter. The goal of this process is to open leaders to new concepts of feedback exchange such as what defines feedback exchange as effective and how to best cultivate the exchange relationship.

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4-Step Process to Coaching on Feedback Exchange

Step 1: Investigate the Viewpoint

The first step coaches should take is to *investigate the viewpoint* of the leader. In this step, the coach should ask questions of the leader to determine the leader’s view of and typical approach to feedback exchange. It is easier to achieve buy-in to a new concept when the coach approaches the discussion from an angle that makes sense in light of where the leader stands on the subject. For example, if the leader thinks of feedback as strictly what is provided in the formal performance review, the coach may need to ask the leader to consider what he/she might be unintentionally communicating to subordinates about performance expectations; such a viewpoint might suggest that “checking the box” is all that matters and actual, individual growth is of little value. Some investigative questions that coaches can ask leaders include:

- *What is your typical approach to feedback delivery with your unit?*
- *How often do you give feedback to your subordinates/ your colleagues/your supervisor?*
- *How comfortable are you receiving feedback from others, particularly those in your unit?*
- *What role does feedback play in guiding the performance of your unit?*

Coaches can also use a type of reflective questioning, **Powerful Inquiry**, to guide leaders to a new understanding of feedback exchange and encourage the leaders to enact changes within their units. Leaders can use a similar approach to questioning with subordinates as they walk through implications of specific behaviors. Sample questions for coaches to ask include:

Powerful Inquiry Questions	
Question Type	Example Questions
Clarification: Gather information to understand another’s view. Help the recipient consider why the behavior was chosen.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Could you provide an example to illustrate your meaning?</i> • <i>What did you intend to communicate by this action?</i>
Assumptions: Question the premise for responses; present open-ended questions to uncover underlying reasons for behavior.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What were your intentions behind the decision?</i> • <i>What presumptions about led you to make this choice?</i>
Implications or Consequences: Help the individual see the value of his/her role or acknowledge the impact of decisions and behaviors. These questions really help the individual see a connection between what he/she does and outcomes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What is important in providing feedback? What will happen if feedback is not given?</i> • <i>What impact could your feedback approach have on subordinates?</i>
Viewpoint or Perspectives: Engage the individual in an exercise of speculating about the perspectives of others. By proposing alternative ideas for how information might be interpreted, this broadens awareness of the possible effects of one’s behavior.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What is most important to your unit?</i> • <i>What are alternative views that your subordinates might have about the way in which you deliver feedback?</i>
Planning and Next Steps: Present future-focused questions. These move individuals from a hypothetical mindset to a true problem-solving orientation. Change can begin to occur here.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What different approach to giving feedback could you take?</i> • <i>What type of support would you need to create an open culture of feedback exchange in your unit?</i>

Step 2: Gain Buy-In

This step involves coaches helping leaders see that successful *delivery* and *receptivity* of feedback are important elements of leadership. By outlining the benefits of feedback exchange, coaches can help leaders buy-in to its value. There are many benefits of providing effective feedback. Feedback, when provided frequently and effectively, can help improve morale. On the contrary, poorly delivered feedback (e.g., gossip) can cause morale to suffer and derail a unit. It is important to have high morale because it can help the Army as a whole (e.g., improved recruitment & retention, reduced turnover), the unit (e.g., collaboration, flexibility, responsiveness), and individual Soldiers (e.g., satisfaction, physical & psychological well-being). In addition to describing the feedback-morale relationship, coaches can direct leaders to research on feedback (*see Learn More*). Coaches can also provide examples of two different types of feedback exchanges, an ineffective and effective, and ask leaders to talk through the likely outcome of each.

Selected Benefits of Effective Feedback:

- Provides an understanding of personal strengths and areas for improvement
- Empowers and motivates Soldiers
- Helps to shape effective work behaviors
- Promotes accountability for work
- Shows that leaders care
- Promotes organizational citizenship behaviors (“going above and beyond”)
- Improves job satisfaction
- Helps individuals achieve their best.

Step 3: Develop Techniques

In this step, coaches should work with leaders to collaboratively identify techniques that will help leaders optimize the impact feedback has on performance. At first, it may be difficult for leaders to conceptualize how feedback should be delivered or how to respond when receiving challenging feedback. The coach may start with reviewing the guidelines of effective feedback exchange and describing a personal experience such as when the coach was too defensive upon receiving feedback. The coach should emphasize the outcome of the encounter and ask the leader to suggest an alternative approach that would have led to better results. The coach should then encourage the leader to share a personal feedback experience and together discuss the pros and cons of that situation. This back and forth dialogue will help the leader develop techniques to use in feedback exchange. The following guidelines are also important to convey to leaders.

Guidelines for Feedback Receptivity

Learning how to encourage subordinates to provide feedback and become receptive to that feedback is often a difficult concept for leaders to learn. Leaders can model effective receptivity to their subordinates, thereby easing the feedback delivery when the roles shift. When receiving feedback, it is important to:

- Seek out and request feedback regularly
- Engage in active listening by restating what is heard to confirm understanding
- Avoid defensiveness and work to glean the key concerns
- Ask for examples of desired change and work collectively toward a solution.

Guidelines for Feedback Delivery

In delivering feedback, receptivity and acceptance are more likely when feedback is:

- Timely so the events are easily recalled
- Behavior-focused and not trait- or person-oriented
- Without emotionally charged feelings (i.e., focus on facts, not personal feelings)
- Developmental rather than administrative (e.g., tied to pay, promotions)
- Perceived as fair and delivered by someone perceived as credible
- Collaborative; recipients given “voice” in coming to solution (e.g., goal-setting).

The BET and BEAR models provide additional feedback delivery guidelines.

Reinforcing (BET)	Redirecting (BEAR)
<p>B: Behavior—The behavior the individual is exhibiting that is benefitting the unit.</p> <p>E: Effect—The effect the behavior is having on the units’ success.</p> <p>T: Thank you—Thanks and recognition for the behavior.</p>	<p>B: Behavior—The behavior the individual is or is not exhibiting that is inhibiting success.</p> <p>E: Effect—The effect the behavior is having on the unit.</p> <p>A: Alternative—A recommendation of a behavior the individual could do in place of the current behavior.</p> <p>R: Result—A description of the positive results that may occur if the individual makes the change or a suggestion of the consequences that may occur if not.</p>

Learn More: Resources on Providing Feedback

Want to know more about the Virtual Improvement Center?

The Virtual Improvement Center (VIC) is available as a resource for leader development on the MSAF website. The VIC offers numerous developmental activities including readings, exercises, and simulations organized by the Core Leader Competencies to make it easy to search by developmental need. The VIC can be viewed here:

<https://msaf.army.mil/My360/VIC/Default.aspx>

Want to know more about how to provide effective feedback exchange?

Check out the following resources.

Folkman (2006). *The Power of Feedback: 35 Principles for Turning Feedback from Others into Personal and Professional Change*. John Wiley and Sons.

Seashore, Seashore, & Weinberg (2004). *What Did You Say? The Art of Giving and Receiving Feedback*. Bingham House Books.

Kegan & Lahey (2009). *Immunity to Change: How to Overcome it and Unlock the Potential in Yourself and Your Organization*. Harvard Business Press.

Want to know more about how to improve unit morale?

Check out the following resources.

Bowles & Cooper (2009). *Employee Morale: Driving Performance in Challenging Times*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Bruce (2002). *Building a High Morale Workplace*. McGraw-Hill.

Step 3 Case Study: Providing Feedback Using the BET Model

As a leader, LTC Allen is responsible for providing feedback to Soldiers. He recently saw exceptional performance from one Soldier. The BET feedback that LTC Allen provided to the Soldier to share that he was doing good work can be seen below:

B (Behavior) - "While you were assigned as platoon leader, the leadership and enthusiasm that you displayed when you delegated tasks to other people during our training exercise helped to motivate others and guide them in an effective manner."

E (Effect) - "By assigning people to appropriate tasks at which they could succeed, you earned respect and trust from members of the platoon, which reflects well on you, the unit, and the United States Army."

T (Thank you) - "Thank you. Your efforts greatly contributed to the overall accomplishment of our mission."

Step 4: Solidify Application of Concepts

In this step, the coach can use modeling or role playing with the leader to help solidify the concepts discussed. The coach should encourage the leader to practice giving feedback and applying the concepts learned. First, the coach should encourage the leader to demonstrate reinforcing feedback by asking, "What positive feedback could you give me regarding my coaching? Try using the BET model to share this with me." After this feedback is given, the coach should ask the leader, "What constructive or redirecting feedback could you give me regarding my coaching? Use the BEAR model to share this." Following the leader's feedback, a discussion regarding the exercise can help to emphasize concepts learned. The coach should ask the leader what was difficult about providing the feedback and how he/she felt delivering it following the steps and information provided. Then, the coach should engage in the leader in discussing how this coaching about feedback exchange might influence how the leader addresses feedback with the unit in the future. Finally, the coach can encourage the leader to share any specific performance incidents that seem particularly difficult for the leader to address. The coach can offer to role play or practice how that dialogue might occur.

Practical Exercise: Implementing Continuous Feedback

This activity helps to show a leader the impact of giving continuous feedback, rather than only providing feedback at scheduled performance review times. The coach may suggest the leader complete this activity before returning for a coaching session. At the next coaching session discuss responses to the feedback and personal reflections.

Leader Exercise: This exercise involves finding an opportunity to offer praise to each unit member. Guidelines for providing feedback:

- Give praise to **each member of your unit at least once** this week for a performance incident.
- Provide the praise **face-to-face** to note the verbal and non-verbal reactions of recipients (unless geographic boundaries are prohibitive).
- Deliver praise **one-on-one** without other officers present to note the individual exchange.
- Do not linger and wait for the individual to respond; offer the praise and move along.
- **Be realistic and honest** in your praise. **Avoid exaggerating** your comments; **authenticity** is critical to success of this exchange.
- **Be specific** about what behavior or action was favorable.
- Mentally note each individual's instantaneous response. Ex: *What does he/she say? What is the expression on his/her face? What is the body language suggesting?*

Following each feedback interaction, write down the reaction of the recipient and any personal reflections regarding the interaction. Be prepared to discuss these with your coach.

Participation in Army MSAF is required by AR 350-1, Appendix K for all Army leaders and units. Leaders who participate in MSAF benefit from new insights into their strengths and capabilities, and their weaknesses. Use of resources associated with the MSAF program, such as coaching and the Virtual Improvement Center (described on page 2), allow leaders to build upon strengths and improve areas of need.



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