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*"Thoughts and action,
aligned fearlessly to purpose,
become crowning achievement"*

Welcome! We hope you enjoy this issue of the ProLaureate Executive Brief!

The Art of Giving Feedback

"Getting people to welcome feedback was the hardest thing I ever had to do as an educator."

Professor Randy Pausch, The Last Lecture

In its basic form, feedback is simply the exchange of information about how the parts of a system are functioning. And with that feedback comes the understanding that if one or more of the parts veers off course, then a prompt 'fix' is critical to get things back on track.

Since people are among these vital parts of 'the system', then it would make sense that building effective collaboration, cooperation and communication between people is essential to creating successful relationships - or relationship 'systems'. But for that to happen on a truly meaningful basis, feedback must be given and received in a way that is heard, received and acted upon in a positive way... and that is a learned skill - it is the art of giving and receiving feedback.

Feedback is every relationship's and organization's lifeblood - it's the mechanism that lets people know whether they are doing a good job or if their efforts need to be fine-tuned, upgraded or entirely redirected. If you think about how this works in a marriage or partnership, feedback really is the determining factor of so many elements of the relationship - the needs of both individuals, the business, the family, the lifestyle and the list goes on.

Most of us, however, are uncomfortable with the whole exchange of giving and/or receiving feedback. We avoid it like the plague, and yet, it is one of the most important things we can learn to master. Without

***"What is the
shortest word in the
English language
that contains the
letters: abcdef?
Answer: feedback.
Don't forget that
feedback is one of
the essential
elements of good
communication."***

- Source Unknown

feedback, we remain in the dark - we have no idea where we stand with the boss, our peers, spouse, kids, etc., and unless you are a mind reader, guessing is not an option!

Positive vs. Negative Feedback

One of the most important aspects of all of our relationships is how thoughtfully we air important grievances and how well those grievances are received. Oftentimes, we are quick to criticize rather than pause for a moment and think, and then offer honest praise or encouragement; and we are more than willing to focus on the real or perceived faults of *the person* rather than the weaknesses or failings of the *process*.

Then, to compound the problem, when we do get around to giving feedback - we have waited too long. This often happens because we are uneasy and/or uncertain as to how to deliver it. Most problems start out small, but when they are allowed to fester, they escalate. By the time many of us decide to give feedback, there is a backlog of frustration and anger that makes any conversation more difficult. Early feedback allows people to correct problems, and it prevents a bad situation from boiling over.

In a study of 108 managers and white-collar workers, researchers found that most conflicts were caused by inept criticism (ahead of mistrust, personality struggles, and disputes over power and pay). After harsh criticism, people refuse to collaborate or cooperate, leading to stonewalling and disengagement.

Across industries, employees believe they do not receive enough positive feedback. This is also true in our personal relationships. Therapist John Gottman's extensive research on successful marriages reveals there should be at least a 3:1 ratio of positive to negative comments. Similarly, organizational psychologist Marcel Losada found that business teams function best with a 5:1 ratio of positive to negative feedback.

How to Provide Effective Feedback

Constructive feedback focuses on what people have done and can do, rather than targeting their character or personality. If people believe their failures result from personal, unchangeable deficits, they lose hope and stop trying. Psychologist and corporate consultant Harry Levinson provides the following suggestions for delivering praise and feedback:

"He that won't be

***counseled can't be
helped"***

- Benjamin Franklin

Be specific. Focus on the actual behavior - not the person. Communicate clear facts that people can understand and act upon. Be specific when describing what the person did well or poorly and how it can be changed for a more positive outcome. Be concise and straight-forward.

Offer a solution. Feedback should identify ways to fix a problem - not the person. Try to open the door to unexplored possibilities and alternatives.

Be present. Feedback should be exchanged face-to-face and in private. Do not try to ease your own discomfort by giving it from a distance or in writing. You need to be fully present and allow the recipient to respond and seek clarification.

Be sensitive. Be attuned to the impact of what you say and how you say it. Even when your intentions are positive, you do not know how your message will be received. Your greatest empathy skills are required.

How to Receive Feedback

Take responsibility for yourself and your actions. View honest feedback as a gift - not as a personal attack. Feedback is beneficial because it provides you the opportunity to improve yourself.

Remember... giving and receiving feedback in an honest, genuine, constructive and open-minded way is an ART... and it is a learned art! So learn, practice and apply both giving and receiving feedback - it can bring rich rewards and opportunities for all those involved.

Previous issues of The Brief can be found on our website at
www.prolaureate.com

Feel free to contact us with comments or questions. We'd love to hear from you.

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Here's to your success!

Sincerely,

Roxanne Kaufman Elliott
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