How to Receive Feedback Best Practice Guide

Feedback plays a hugely important role in all areas of our working and personal lives. Feedback helps us to test our assumptions, benchmark what we are doing and provide insights we do not see. It plays a vital part in helping us to learn and improve.

At times we will receive unsolicited feedback which could be praise of criticism. At other times the nature of a situation naturally incorporates feedback into this event or process for example a client or employee review meeting.

At other times we will proactively seek feedback from others. This often occurs where we wish to test new ideas or improve and enhance the current situation.

In this process you are proactively seeking feedback from others, following the tips below will help to ensure this is a valuable and worthwhile process.

1. Feedback is about trust

Providing feedback does not come naturally to many people. Particularly if the person is being asked for feedback on the spot. Feedback can have negative overtones and create anxiety in both the person giving the feedback and the person receiving the feedback. A person giving feedback does not want to have their feedback rejected or met with a negative reaction. These are some of the factors that can lead to bland and meaningless feedback being provided. Therefore building trust is key

2. Explain your motivation

You may be clear as to why you are seeking feedback, but does the person you are seeking feedback from understand this. Take the time to explain why you are seeking feedback and why your have selected feedback. This helps the person understand the value to both parties. For example:

"We are committed to improving how we support our customers and employees and as part of this we want to understand how our company is perceived. As a new customer you will have a perspective which is really valuable to help us understand this."

3. Explain the process

Setting out what the process is will help the conversation run smoothly and set expectations for both parties. This will help the process feel more relaxed and natural thereby enhancing the quality of feedback provided. For example:

"I would like to run through a few questions which will help us talk about each of the areas we are looking to focus on. There may be other areas you wish to discuss and we can do this when we have worked through the first few questions."

4. Listen and Record

Hearing feedback can be tough and can lead to the instinct to justify or explain situations. When receiving feedback your focus is to seek to hear and understand. Being curious about what you are hearing will help provide a greater quality of feedback. Try to ask lots of follow up and probe questions. These could include:

"That's interesting, what makes you feel that way?"

"Could you expand a little on what you mean by ….."

Limit any judgement or explanation related to the feedback, this is likely to break trust and lead the person to clam up or just tell you what they think you want to hear.

5. Seek depth and specifics

You may find some feedback is initially relatively bland or superficial, or even the respondent is not able to put their response into words. Without specifics or depth to the response it will be difficult to do anything with the feedback.

Techniques to help draw out better information include using comparators e.g. if your brand was a person/animal/object what would it be and why

An example response might be: "the business is like labrador – there when I need and dependable but not particularly adventurous".

6. Seek balanced feedback

It can be that feedback from an individual can focus on just negative or just positive aspects. Reflecting this back to the person can help gain a more rounded view. For example:

"You have talked about what you like about the brand, are there aspects of the brand which you are less positive about?"

7. Say thank you

It might seem obviously but thanking them for taking the time and effort to provide the feedback and reassure them that their time has not been wasted. For example:

“Thank you for taking the time today to give us your feedback and I really appreciate your candour we will be using your feedback and that we receive from other clients to identify where we can improve how we work as a business.”

8. Capture themes and specific examples

Take the time to write down what you have heard and pull together common themes but also consider individual pieces of feedback. Also think about things you have not heard. For example, there things you would have expected to be mentioned why have not been?