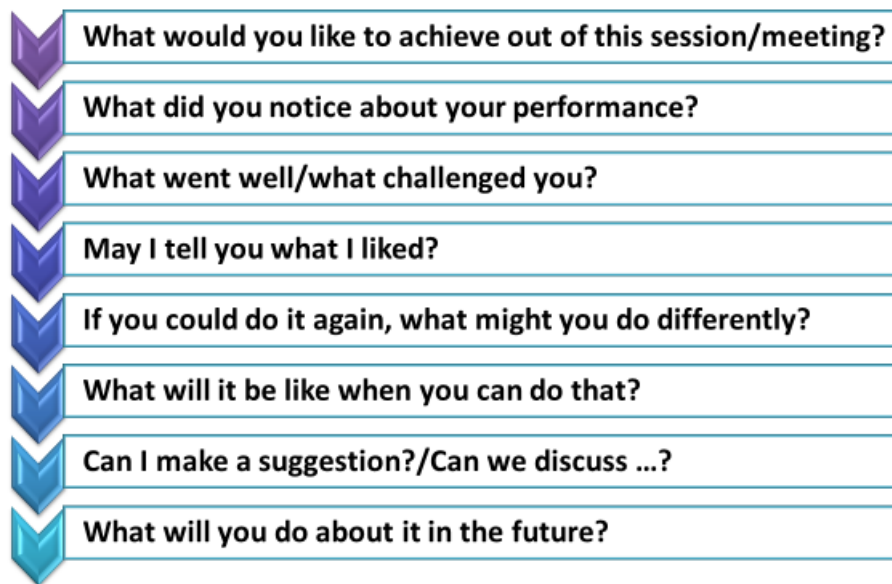# THE COACHING FEEDBACK MODEL

Coaching Feedback means asking people to give themselves feedback instead of, or before, giving one's own. It applies both to positive feedback and what I would call 'learning' feedback, rather than 'negative feedback'. (In a true coaching culture, the term 'negative feedback' is not appropriate as all feedback tends to be received as a useful part of the learning experience.)

This technique would apply to a conversation about an action, a project, behaviour, a staff appraisal, or any situation where people are being asked to reflect on their personal performance. The questions below are guidelines to a series of areas to be explored, and can be modified to suit a particular context, vernacular or style of communication:

What would you like to achieve out of this session/meeting?
What did you notice about your performance?
What went well/what challenged you?
May I tell you what I liked?
If you could do it again, what might you do differently?
What will it be like when you can do that?
Can I make a suggestion?/Can we discuss …?
What will you do about it in the future?

The significance of each question listed above lies in its purpose, rather than in the actual words used. Most of the questions are not chronological and can be mixed into a different order, although it is always useful to start with a future focused question and end with a plan of action. Let us now explore each question one by one:

Coaching Feedback means asking people to give themselves feedback instead of, or before, giving one's own. It applies both to positive feedback and what has come to be termed 'learning' or 'building' feedback, rather than 'negative feedback'. (In a true coaching culture, the term 'negative feedback' is not appropriate as all feedback tends to be received as a useful part of the learning experience.)

This technique would apply to a conversation about an action, a project, behaviour, a staff appraisal, or any situation where people are being asked to reflect on their personal

performance. The questions below are guidelines to a series of areas to be explored, and can be modified to suit a particular context, vernacular or style of communication:

The significance of each question listed above lies in its purpose, rather than in the actual words used. Most of the questions are not chronological and can be mixed into a different order, although it is always useful to start with a future focused question and end with a plan of action. Let us now explore each question one by one:

1. What would you like to get out of this conversation?

It is usually effective to start any undertaking by looking ahead to what all parties want to achieve before setting out. This focuses people's minds and highlights any differences or misunderstandings in terms of intention. Looking to the future has a side benefit of raising energy and clarity of purpose.

2. What did you notice about your performance?

Asking 'What did you think about your performance?' invites judgement, which tends to put people on the defensive. 'What did you notice?' is a neutral question requesting information rather than assessment. This can be rephrased to suit the context of the situation, and explored with several questions, such as:

- *What was your experience of that?*
- *What is happening at the moment?*
- *What have you done so far?*
- *Would you like to tell me where you are with this?*

3. What did you like about what you did?

Even if a neutral question is asked at (2), people tend to answer by describing what went wrong. It is important that people recognise their strengths as much as their weaknesses.

Less frequently, people talk only about what is going well in reply to (2), and in those cases I would ask a question based on 'What are your challenges?'

Alternative questions are:

- *What are your strengths?*
- *What are you enjoying about this?*
- *What difficulties are you experiencing?*
- *What have you achieved so far?*
- *What does knowing that you can do that tell you about yourself?*
- *Where else could you apply this?*

Another scenario is where people reply by talking about why the failures were all someone else's fault. In this case I would make the questions more personal, and include some based on question (5) in the diagram above:

- *What was your own contribution to the success/failure of the project?*
- *What might you personally have done differently that would have produced a different result?*

4. What I liked was …

As I said in the last paragraph, people tend to dwell on what went wrong, forgetting their accomplishments. How often have you walked away from an event where your performance was impeccable except for one small flaw – perhaps you forgot to cover a point or got something mixed up? These are the things which can stay with us for days, blotting out what we did well.

This element of the process represents an opportunity to give positive feedback, provided it is authentic, and to ensure that people appreciate their own strengths. This could happen anywhere in the conversation and as often as deserved:

- *Sounds like you have made real headway there*
- *How are people responding differently now you are doing that?*
- *I've been noticing a real confidence in your team recently.*

5. If you could do it again, what would you do differently?

This can be explored at length and asked several times. Each answer might benefit from being explored through the GROW questions shown in the diagram below:

- *And where are you with that now?*
- *Where would you like to be?*
- *What is getting in the way?*
- *How might you change this?*
- *How will you do that?*
- *What else would you do differently?*

The intention of this question is to look to the future, so it is in effect a Goal question in terms of GROW. The beneficial effect of this future focus can be intensified by the question which follows:

6. What will it be like when you can do that?

This is an extremely important part of the process. It directs the person's thoughts to the future, bypassing obstacles that may be obscuring their vision. This area can usefully be explored at length, using questions like:

- *What will the benefits be?*
- *How will it impact others?*
- *Imagine you have achieved it – what do you see/hear/feel?*

Help the person to place themselves in their future and gain a real experience of how it feels. A recognised technique used by top golfers is to imagine hitting the winning shot, hearing the roar of the crowd etc. This type of visioning creates new neural pathways in the brain, in the same way as new habits do. In this respect, the brain is unable to distinguish between fact and fiction – which is why we cry at sad films – and will believe that the victory is already achieved, making it much easier to do the process in real life (or repeat the process, as the brain believes).

This process raises energy, motivation and confidence. It is likely to improve personal performance far more than analysing what went wrong.

7. Can I make a suggestion?

Depending upon the context of the conversation, this is an opportunity for the coaching manager to offer any advice or to deliver any 'learning' feedback that needs to be given. With any luck, the person will already have come up with his or her own learning feedback, negating the need to deliver it at all. Notice that this question is placed near the end of the list; people perform best when they are in control of their own ideas and pace, so once they have said all they want to say, they will be more receptive to input from others. Alternatives to this question might be:

- *Would it help to hear something from my own experience?*
- *Could we discuss the feedback we have received from your customers?*
- *Could I share with you what is coming up for me here?*
- *I have an idea that might help. Would you like to hear it?*

Notice that all the above questions are prefaced by asking permission. This helps people to relax and think more clearly in sensitive situations, because they feel more in control.

8. What will you do about it in the future?

Finally we embark upon the 'Options' and 'Will' (actions) part of GROW, to tie down reflections and ideas into a solid pathway forward. If this is attempted too soon, without a thorough exploration of the present situation and the future, people will tend to remain 'stuck' and not know how to resolve their dilemmas or change their behaviour. Other questions might be:

- *What could you do about that?*
- *What would you advise someone else in your position to do?*
- *How/when/where/with whom will you do that?*
- *How committed are you to that course of action?*

The GROW model, upon which coaching feedback is based, is reproduced below:

The elements of the GROW model above do not have to be chronological and can be mixed throughout a conversation, although it is usually most effective to spend the greatest part of the time exploring Goal and Reality.

The key to the whole process of coaching feedback is that people give themselves the feedback first, and for most of the time. This is more effective because they will own it, deliver it in a way that will least jar or upset them, and will feel more enthusiastic about making changes.

References

Wilson, C. (2014) Performance Coaching: A Complete Guide to Best Practice Coaching and Training London, Kogan Page.

At Culture at Work we provide global coach training and leadership development programmes at all levels, including C-Suite, for organisations in 33 countries and in all main business languages. We can provide in-house courses by webinar, open coach training courses in London, ILM Endorsed, Level 5, Level 7 and Diploma coach training qualifications, manager-as-coach courses, plus general leadership development and team building programmes.
If you are interested in bringing a coaching culture into your organisation, click here for details of our in-house courses.
For details of our coaching workshops and presentations click here.
For details of coaching keynotes and conference speaking click here.
For open become-a-coach training click here.
Find out how to develop a Coaching Culture Strategy for your organisation here.
For Train the Coach Trainer click here.
We deliver in-house programmes worldwide and in all main business languages.
Download free coaching articles here.

Contact us through our contact form
Or on info@coachingcultureatwork.com
Or call +44 20 7022 4923

About the author:

An international speaker, writer and broadcaster, Carol Wilson is Managing Director of Culture at Work and a Fellow of the ILM, the Professional Speaking Association and the Association for Coaching, where she is a member of the Global Advisory Panel. A cross-cultural expert, she designs and delivers programmes to create coaching cultures for corporate and public sector organisations all over the world and has won numerous awards for coaching and writing. She is the author of 'Performance Coaching: A Complete Guide to Best Practice Coaching and Training', featuring Forewords by Sir Richard Branson and Sir John Whitmore, and translated into 3 languages; 'The Work and Life of David Grove: Clean Language and Emergent Knowledge'; and 'The Coaching and Feedback Handbook', an internal publication for IKEA. She has contributed to several other books and published over 50 articles including a monthly column in Training Journal.

www.coachingcultureatwork.com
info@coachingcultureatwork.com