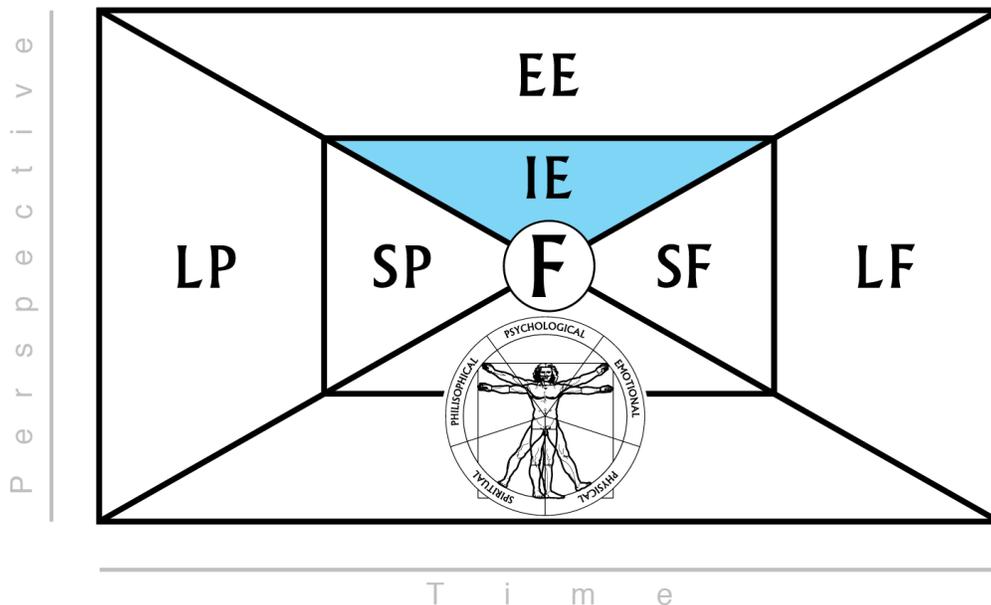




FINDING YOUR FLOW TOOLKIT
VOL. 12
MASTERING INTERPERSONAL FEEDBACK

"Breakfast is the Feedback of Champions"

-- Ken Blanchard



In my estimation, feedback is one of the most profound principles of life. Without feedback life cannot progress. As human beings, we rely on feedback in every part of our being—inside and out. In the literature on flow, feedback is one of the “big 9” concepts. If you want more flow in your life, you have to identify and utilize

your feedback loops to the best of your ability. Much later in the year (around Vol. 49) we will talk more specifically about using personal scorecards to gather feedback and measure progress in any game of life you are playing. However, since we are still discussing the interpersonal dynamics of flow, we'll simplify this a bit and talk about the importance of feedback when engaging with others.

The good news is that getting and giving feedback is technically very simple. The challenge is that interpersonally it can be tricky—that is, if you don't have a useful model to hold on to.

One of my former colleagues, Alan Fine, a brilliant coach and mentor, made an important distinction between logical systems and psychological/interpersonal systems.

A logical system is akin to an airplane. Perhaps it's common knowledge that an airplane is off-course most of the time. If on autopilot, it relies on multiple sensors to keep adjusting itself. A slight dip of the nose and the computer says "head's up". A small change in pitch or yaw, and the computer says "straighten out". An infinitesimal change in course and the computer says "stay on track". All this happens in a microsecond.

Give these same commands at the same frequency to a human being and the reaction is: "get off my back. Why are you always constantly pointing out my faults?" You get the point. There is a big difference between "getting" useful feedback and "asking" for useful feedback.

In corporate America, we often use 360° feedback tools, where your superior, peers, subordinates, and yourself, answer a variety of questions designed to help you identify the gaps in your performance. Is this a useful tool: absolutely? Are there less expensive, less technical, and more personal ways to get the feedback you need? You bet. Here are a few principles and some suggested language you can use anytime you want to gather interpersonal feedback and maximize your performance with

others:

Be Proactive

All too many people are reactive about feedback. They wait until they make a mistake or do something wrong or, heaven forbid, somebody finally says it: "you stink!" Don't wait for feedback to come to you. Don't wait for your spouse or significant other to blurt out "you are not fulfilling your end of the bargain". Instead, beat him or her to the punch. Ask for it. Most people are willing to give it and are honored that you asked.

Suggested Language:

"Susan, I'm really interested in improving my performance in X, would you mind sharing your perceptions with me? When's a good time?"

Logical Mindset:

Think of feedback as data, and nothing else. The more raw data you can gather, the quicker you can learn and build a plan of action. Think of yourself as an Olympic athlete looking to better your game. However, it's important to keep a barrier between your sacred self and your performance self. You have ultimate value in the eyes of your creator. Even if you are making significant personal and professional errors, keep this barrier in tact and look at it as an opportunity to refine whatever it is that will help you learn and improve.

You might consider the following questions as a useful framework for getting valuable feedback from others:

"Thank you for taking some time with me. There are just a few questions I wanted to ask regarding situation X or arena Y:

1. What am I doing particularly well in X?
2. Where am I missing the mark?
3. From your perspective, what can I do differently to improve?

This language is simple and gets to the essence of any performance feedback conversation you wish to have.

Get Multiple Points of View

It's important to remember that one person's feedback may or not be accurate. If possible, best to get multiple angles of data. If there is only one person who is relevant, then that is your data source. However, if others are available, consider getting other points of reference.

The more angles you get, the more accurate the information. You may even find that a certain source of feedback that you perceived as harsh or inaccurate, may be an outlier and not the norm. Getting others perspectives may smooth out the data.

Act on Feedback

Feedback is useless if it is not acted upon. It does you no good and it tells others that their valuable insights have been wasted. Be clear about what "specifically" you will do differently given the feedback that you have captured. Make sure their feedback is not vague or unclear. Get specific examples of the gaps in question so if you choose to make those changes, you will be able to point out your progress.

Validate Your Progress

When we get into personal score carding, this is a more complex process. However, when utilizing feedback from others, the process is simple: ask them!

Suggested Language:

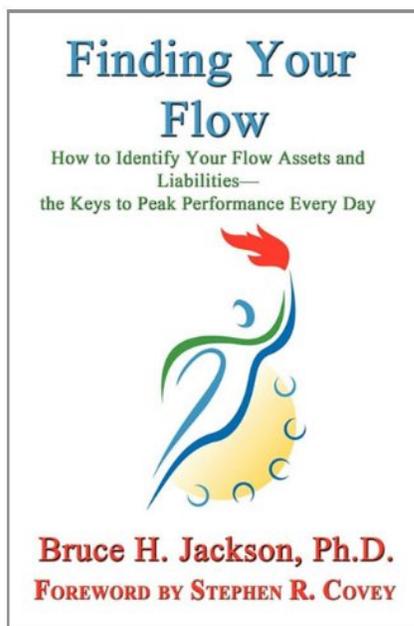
"I've spent the last few months seeking to improve X, from your perspective am I moving in the right direction?"

Interpersonal feedback does not have to get more complicated than

that. So pick an arena where interpersonal feedback would be helpful and give it a go. See if the change in your behaviors equates to an increase in your performance and the depth of your relationships. It's not easy to ask others for feedback. It takes courage and an internal mandate that seeks a better self. Given that you have this far, I believe this is you.

EXERCISE AND PRACTICE:

- Review the questions in: Embracing Feedback exercise
- Identify an arena where others play a part. Consider using the Embracing Feedback exercise sheet to gather important information about your interpersonal performance.

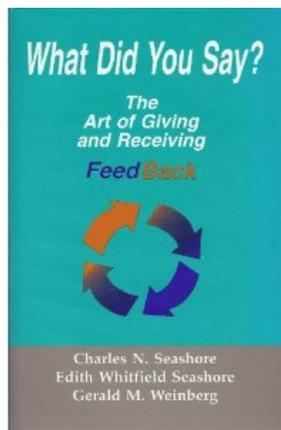


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