



Ask away

How can you unlock
the power of feedback?

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s a leader, having a healthy relationship with feedback has benefits. Yet feedback is not always considered useful and many do not know how to gather or use it.

Not only can it help you get closer to achieving your goals, it also improves both internal and external communication, serves to refine your brand identity, and ensures every opportunity to succeed is considered. Some leaders shy away from canvassing for feedback for fear they will appear ineffective. Yet reaching out to others is important when creating meaningful relationships.

The team as a whole is much more likely to listen, show respect and deliver results if they feel valued by a senior team member who cares about their feedback and takes time to implement their ideas. Don't just stick to the sources you like the best. Rich feedback can come from your staff, your boss, your clients, your peers and also from yourself.

Feedback to grow your business

Staff feedback

Collecting feedback from staff can bring you closer to your business goals and create a positive and

inclusive environment. Some leaders are complacent and assume they always know what their team is thinking, but this is not always true.

Staff surveys are often helpful for collecting information about processes, new product ideas or current levels of staff satisfaction. Creating a survey can be more beneficial than in-person meetings or roundtable discussions because it will encourage those who are less confident vocally to share their thoughts. Shorter surveys are more likely to collect accurate answers because they take less time to fill in, and you can offer an incentive for taking part. Similarly, surveys should be focused on one area at a time so that the feedback you receive is as specific as possible. Make sure you address any concerns raised in a follow-up meeting or document.

When reaching out for feedback, always ask a diverse range of individuals from all levels in the business. People you may not have initially thought of might provide a new perspective that you may never have considered. For example, when conducting a survey about a new product, the marketing department or receptionists may not be your first port of call. Yet they could both provide different strands of valuable feedback.

Client feedback

Sales, or a lack of, is feedback in itself. But if you are just collecting information about the product, you are missing out on a valuable feedback opportunity to develop knowledge of your customer. If you take the time to understand exactly who your customers are, you can tailor your products better.

Schedule regular catch-ups with teams that directly interact with customers. This is a great way to find out exactly what clients are talking about, what questions they are asking, and what feedback they have given on new launches and products. If you work away from your clients, it can be easy to lose touch with what they are looking for. Spending time away from head office and on the shop floor will give you the customer's perspective.

Focus groups can be helpful because they provide direct feedback on a specific product. Yet participants can often feel interrogated in a way that may alter the validity of the feedback. The best feedback comes from natural interactions with clients. So, if you own a restaurant or shop, eat or shop there. You'll be surprised what you learn.

Feedback to move you forward

Feedback from your boss

The most common way to receive formal feedback from above is an annual appraisal, which is likely to be centred around your achievements to

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date and areas to develop. While it is important to take stock of how far you have come in a year, asking for regular feedback from your manager will ensure you are constantly developing. You could ask your boss specific questions after a task to help make improvements in your skills. For example, you could ask: "What do you think went well in our meeting today?" to see what areas you could work on for the next meeting.

Feedback from your peers

If you are a member of the senior team, there may be no one above you. It is important that you have peers who can provide you with objective feedback, however. You could try finding a peer in a different part of the organisation, someone trusted in your family, or an experienced coach to give you external advice on how to handle a challenging situation.

Having this perspective can help you to make decisions that are grounded in rational thinking, as opposed to instinctive emotional responses. When you ask multiple people for peer feedback on your skills, don't react to every individual piece of feedback. Instead, look for any emerging themes and patterns that can offer ideas on how you can improve.

Listening to your own feedback

The voice inside our head can vary dramatically from person to person. For some of us, it is willing us on; for others, it is pointing out every error. Whatever it is saying, it is important to spend time getting in touch with this voice. To judge whether the voice is helpful or even grounded in reality, speak with a trusted friend. The more emotionally regulated you are, the better you can interpret feedback.

If an event didn't go as well as expected, you should ask yourself what lessons you can learn, rather than beat yourself up. When the situation arises again, you can then take a different approach, because you have analysed the situation and reprogrammed your internal feedback. Recognise your achievements as well, and reflect and learn from them, so that you can build an accurate picture of your performance.

When you get feedback from a variety of sources, you can improve and refine not only your business and your offering, but also yourself and your skills. It is through gaining these perspectives that we can reach our full potential. ■

Karen Meager and John McLachlan set up Monkey Puzzle Training and Consulting to support leaders and teams in their professional and personal growth. The first chapter of their book, 'Real Leaders for the Real World', can be accessed at bit.ly/2NZgFTTr