

Devouring Feedback

In our recent research we asked associates and partners and number of questions about feedback. Associates told us that feedback that is informal, oral and timely helps them develop most, as professionals. Seems simply enough - not quite.

Partners tell me that associates don't really want feedback, they want to be stroked. They also tell me that when that when they want to give constructive feedback they don't feel confident in these types of conversations and they struggle with associates who get defensive.

The last article in this series was about giving feedback. This one is about receiving it, being open to it – indeed devouring it. Why? Because your skills are the things that will secure your future and the best way to build skill is to take full advantage of the experience and wisdom of those with whom you work.



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Lawyers learn before the job, in the job, on the job and sometimes in spite of the job so take every advantage to learn from those around you.

So here is the top ten list for devouring feedback.

1. **Seek it out:** Ask for feedback from those with whom you work. You are giving a signal that you are open in information, open to their feedback and that it is important to you. You are also saying that you value the opinion of those you admire.
2. **Listen carefully:** Listen actively and carefully to the information being shared. Make good eye contact, ask for examples to clarify things you don't understand – take a genuine interest in the information being shared.
3. **Manage your emotions:** Sometimes informal, oral and timely feedback also comes with a healthy dose of emotion (even anger). Sometimes the best pearls of wisdom happen at the heat of the moment if you have the courage and the composure to listen. Breathe, remain calm, make good eye contact and listen. (This does not mean that abuse should be tolerated.) Sometimes the best feedback comes in the middle of a transaction when something got screwed up. You and your colleagues may be in a situation that looks a bit like a fire station during a three alarm blaze – no time for the niceties – but still time for mutual respect.
4. **Remain open and engaged:** In order to devour and learn from feedback you have to be open to it. When you are open you listen without interrupting, you ask questions to clarify and are sincere in your questions.
5. **Don't react immediately:** Give yourself some time to digest the information. If

the colleague asks for a reaction you might say something like “you have share a lot of information and I need a little time to react. I’ll have a much better conversation if I can take a few minutes and come back to you – perhaps outside the heat of the moment. In the meantime I’ll get onto fixing ...”

6. **Validate:** If you can understand the perspective of your colleague at the outset, say so. “I can understand your perspective...” Acknowledging the other person’s emotional state and validating their perspective will defuse the situation.
7. **Ask good questions:** Giving and receiving feedback is a collaborative process. “How would you have done this differently?” Ask for suggestions so that you can improve the current situation but also learn from it. “I’m here to learn and I don’t want to fall into this hole again...can we talk after we get through this so I can learn from this situation.”
8. **Focus on the issue:** The feedback may be on a substantive issue – something that you got dead wrong or something that you missed in your research or drafting. Alternatively, the feedback may be behavioural.
9. **Own it:** There is nothing worse that passing the buck. “My secretary screwed up...”, “The other associate...”, “The student let us down...”. The buck stops with you. Yes, the buck really stops with the partner but if you are on the receiving end of some serious “feedback” – own it. If it was not your mistake it will likely find its rightful owner in the future but passing the buck in the heat of the moment is simply not on.
10. **Circle Back and say thank you:** As noted in the previous article in this series, when partners lose confidence in you the work dries up – they stop making eye contact and it’s over. So circle back, acknowledge the feedback and say thanks. Ask more questions, show confidence and do everything in your power to learn from the experience. More importantly – shoulders back, head high and circle back to the colleague who gave you the feedback and thank them for taking the time to draw the issue to your attention.



You tell us you crave feedback so show that you have the maturity to accept it, learn from it and take action on it.

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