

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/synthesizing-feedback>

Professor of the Practice Tina Seelig asks Steve Garrity, founder of Hearsay Systems, and Juliet Rothenberg how they synthesize feedback. Rothenberg, a product manager at DeepMind, recommends taking feedback in a constructive light rather than personalizing it. Feedback helps you improve on your blind spots; treat it as user research.



Transcript

- It's possible.. I think there are multiple ways to take feedback, right? You can take it as, that's who I am.. And I think there are people who can give feedback in a way that is hurtful.. And so hopefully people will give you feedback not in a way that is hurtful, but I think you have to trust someone enough to give you feedback and then to take it and say, okay, they're not, you know, they're not insulting my personality.. They're talking about a couple of behaviors and they're talking about, I mean, someone gave me feedback recently and said, you know, this is within, like, I don't know you outside of work, this is just feedback within work, I am specifically not talking about your personality overall.. I'm talking about these specific behaviors.. And that's really helpful and I think you need, like, you can ask for that, but then you can also mentally talk yourself into, this person doesn't know all of me, let me vet that feedback with others.. For example, one of the pieces of feedback I got this weekend, that, um, totally comfortable sharing this, that my emotional range seemed very limited in these interactions.. That I had sort of one cadence, and, right, and Steve, I don't know if you know me well enough for this, but when I shared it with people who I'm close to, and when I shared it with my team at work, they said, what? You? (laughs) You know, you get really excited and you also, you know, get disappointed and you're not afraid to show when you're disappointed.. And you're, you know, you're pretty human in who you are..

And so, just being aware, too, of the context and vetting out feedback with other people can help you not take it as personally.. And then, to follow up with questions.. You said that.. You know, what were the situations that caused you to say that feedback? How would you have liked to see me behave differently? What suggestions do you have for things that I can do and things that I can change? I think part of the reason I'm good at responding to feedback is because I treat it as, almost like user research.. And user design (laughs) great.. How many questions can I ask to understand the whole scope of what's going on here.. - I think for a lot of people, they would think that's a very brave thing to do.. You know, to ask for feedback, cause you might hear something you actually don't want to hear, that's hard to hear.. - Oh.. - So, what do you think? - I think that's right..

And I think that's the point.. I think actually in a funny way, what you want to hear when you ask for feed.... If you're doing it, right is maybe not the right word, but if you're doing it right, then you want to get stuff you don't wanna hear.. Because if all you hear is stuff that you wanna hear then, like, it's nice to get praise.. It's not that helpful, right? Like, you actually want stuff that's hard to hear because it's actually the hard stuff to work on that's impacting you.. I have a slightly different, uh, not a different approach to it, but I just have to add on to Juliet's theory for this.. I think there are people whose super power is doing this very well.. And particularly, they tend to take roles or should take roles as executive coaches.. And I've worked with, I think it's tough when you build and run an organization to get feedback very very consistently.. Because everybody there works for you in some capacity and so you get less honest..

That's not to say you don't and there are people who are really good at, sort of giving feedback to people they work for, but I think it's harder.. Or maybe I just suck at it and this is one of my fatal flaws.. Either way, the way I've found to mitigate this is by hiring an executive coach whose super power is to go around and get this feedback.. And then frame it in a way that is not personal, but is also not taking the edge off it, right? Cause what you want is somebody who can go through and say, hey, here's all the stuff.. In their head, this person made this very personal attack and I'm going to reframe that to something which is not, like, it's okay, don't worry about it.. But it's also not personal.. It's, here's what I think they were trying to say and here's some ways you can start to think about working on it.. It also gives you a nice hack for accountability cause you

have somebody who can help hold you accountable to the changes you're trying to make.. Which can be really hard, cause these are behaviors you've adopted cause they worked for you for the last n-years of your life.. - You know, it's interesting, I'm just going to push back on one thing you said because you said praise isn't useful..

I would say that praise is really useful in parallel with feedback about what you can improve because that helps you understand what you do really well, right? - I think that's right.. Right, so.. - Yeah.. - Yeah, then if you're, if you already know what you're good at, then the feedback is helpful..