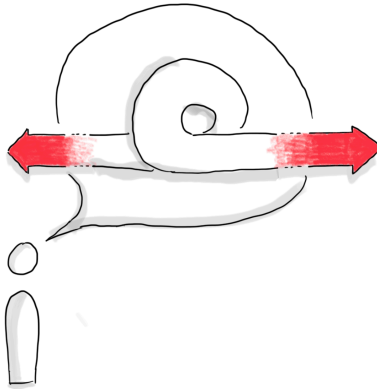


## How can you use the potential of feedback (or feedforward)?

10.8.2023, David Fiorucci



Anyone will tell you: feedback is important. Vital even. And yet, in spite of the many different theories and methods, its potential is not sufficiently put to good use, or is perhaps even put to bad use. Often, we repeat what we've learned simply by rote, without having integrated the key principles.

How often have you heard it said that you have to start with the positive before turning to the “negative”? Or that you should use the feedback sandwich: start by delivering positive feedback, introduce the “negative” and then close with positive feedback again.

My view is that there needs to be more clarity: there are times for addressing the positive and times for addressing the “constructive” (as opposed to the “negative”). In fact, constructive feedback facilitates development and growth.

Thus, by basing ourselves on a particular situation, event or outcome that we have experienced, either very recently or in the near or distant past (i.e. the “back” in feedback), we can derive certain lessons and convey them forward for the benefit of a person or a group of people (the “forward” part in feedforward). That allows them to progress, move forward and build.

The way I see it, situations do not need to be dressed up; indeed it can sometimes be counterproductive to start with the positive if your intention is to give constructive feedback. The person sitting opposite is well aware of what is going on and no doubt sensing from your attitude or the atmosphere or the circumstances they find themselves in that what you're about to say is not necessarily going to be positive. So don't beat about the bush and go straight to what is important. Be direct, while being constructive. To achieve this, there are five key principles that need to be borne in mind.

Before we focus on these principles, however, a fundamental fact: it's extremely important to give both comments (feedback/feedforward) that are positive **and** comments that are constructive. In your private life as much as in your company, association or with your friends.

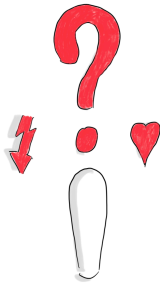
The positive stimulates; the constructive allows people to grow and gives them a framework. Such a framework is equally as important in a family, too, when dealing with your children, for example.

A young person who has heard only positive things throughout their childhood will no doubt encounter problems in their life. They may then not have the necessary framework to allow them to put this into the right perspective and grow. Imagine a child who constantly hears: “Oh you're so great, it's so good, etc.” without ever being confronted with reality or limitations. Sooner or later, there will be consequences that will affect aspects such as this person's integration, psychological well-being, socialization and their construction as a human being.

It's clear that the majority of the input should be positive. Certain cultures believe that every constructive (“negative”) comment should be balanced out by four or five positive comments. Up to us, then, to make sure we give sufficient positive comments.

So now for the five key principles:

### 1. My frame of mind and how I'm feeling now



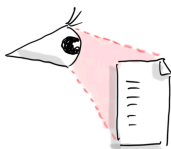
The frame of mind I'm in currently – my physical, mental and emotional state – influence the quality of the comments that I am going to give and the impact these are going to have. Sometimes in-the-moment feedback is necessary. A few deep breaths, a few minutes for a toilet break so that you can look at yourself in the mirror and focus may be required before you can tackle the subject.

### 2. My intention (the desired impact)



What is the desired aim (impact) of the comment I am giving? What is my intention? Am I giving this feedback for me, or am I really trying to help my interlocutor or other people grow?

### 3. Preparation



There is personal preparation, but preparation is also required with regard to facts. To this end, you need to observe and gather clear facts, as opposed to suppositions or hearsay. Don't wait to lump together too many facts. Each comment should be given in connection with one situation and the related facts in the days that follow, without delaying feedback. This means the facts will still be fresh in people's minds and will make it easier for lessons to be learned. Moreover, if you wait several months before sitting down with a list comprising a number of (sensitive) subjects, this will be

demoralizing and will lessen the effect you are seeking to have.

#### 4. Nonviolent communication (Marshall Rosenberg)

As mentioned previously, give positive feedback and constructive feedback. With regard to the constructive feedback, the recommended method is that of Marshall Rosenberg's "nonviolent communication". This method has four clear stages. If you follow these points and regard them as important, the person you're dealing with will not feel attacked and may engage more with your reasoning, understanding why you are in this particular frame of mind and why you want to see action or a change.

##### a) Observation

Make an observation without judgement. Give concrete and specific facts. Avoid judgement-based words such as "always", "never" and "often".

##### b) Feelings

Express what you are feeling, say what's going on with you, what your emotions are. You have to be in phase with yourself. If you are sad or angry, you can say so and sound so. Nonviolent communication does not mean communication that is "neutral". There are three elements to consider here: the verbal (what you say, the content), the non-verbal (your body language and the attitude associated with the content) and the para-verbal (how you say it, your intonation). Don't we sometimes say that "it's not what is said but how it's said" that matters?

##### c) Needs

For the person to understand why you are experiencing these emotions, these feelings that are connected with the observation, it is important to set out what your needs are. Note that needs are not expectations; they relate to you. For example, a need could be for peace and quiet, and your expectation here would be that your interlocutor be quiet.

##### d) Requests/action

Lastly, once you've dealt with these three points, you can set out what action you want to see or, as Marshall Rosenberg proposes, simply say what it is that you would like.

This method is extremely effective, in both the personal as well as the professional sphere. You may need a little practice before you can master it and put it to use spontaneously. Try it out and, as part of your preparation for a difficult situation that you are going to have to handle, share the four elements of the method with a neutral person who can then give you feedback and help you get to grips with the method.

#### 5. Comprehension and reproducibility



The last element that I regard as extremely important within the feedback/feedforward framework is formulating comments as simply and as clearly as possible – with the focus first and foremost on impact.

To illustrate a positive comment, let's take a situation where someone has said or done something good. You then identify what was good and, most importantly, the impact it has had on you, and potentially on others. The person will understand why it was good and will be able to reproduce this attitude or action in a similar situation.

This is better than simply saying "thank you" – which is in itself good, but not enough in my opinion.

Of course there will nevertheless be situations where you will want to add a constructive comment after saying something positive. If this is the case, I suggest you don't use the word "BUT" to continue on with the next part of what you want to say. Continue with "AND" instead, because in this way you'll be adding your point without detracting from the positive that you have just said. In such a scenario, the word "BUT" is equivalent to hitting the "DELETE" button on your computer. As soon as it leaves your lips, your interlocutor will be focusing on what is coming next and will immediately erase what has just been said, and that's a pity.

To round out these five points, my last piece of advice is to give your comments while talking a walk with your interlocutor. The mere act of walking is beneficial in itself, but it also allows you to channel the stress involved.

I hope you have many different opportunities to give positive and constructive comments that will make it possible for people to grow and help others to grow.