



CatchFire Café Newsletter

January 19, 2007

Do You Give Good Feedback?

Whether you own a company, work as a manager, or have a couple of kids – feedback is required...and most of us don't do it very well. We're angry or scared and too humble. Margaret Mead said that the best we can do in life is to "raise the level of conversation." Giving good feedback in an acceptable fashion is the way to start.

We've put together a quiz and some ideas about how to give good feedback – take the quiz and see how you do – we ultimately need to get to the point where we *love* feedback.

Best Practices for Giving Feedback

"It takes the mind of a genius to study the obvious"

Alfred North Whitehead

In baseball there is a ritual so basic and common that very few think about its implications – not just to baseball, but by extension to the fabric of our lives. It's called "the on-deck circle." As anyone who has ever been to even one baseball game knows, the pitcher and the batter are the focal points but there is, hovering in the background, one other person – the player who will be "up" next. And what is he doing? If you watch closely, he is going about a curious set of rituals which help him get ready. He usually holds 2 or 3 bats rather than one; he swings them around, stretches, knocks non-existent dirt from his spikes. All the while he is paying focused attention to the action between the pitcher and batter. What does this strange ritual accomplish? Three important items that I call the "pre performance ritual."

One, it produces energy; Two, it calms the nerves; Three, it focuses the attention. Up to the point where the player realizes he is "on deck," he has been watching, talking, drinking water and paying loose, unfocused attention to the proceedings. All of a sudden, he is on alert – his biochemistry charges to "fight or flight." (Too much dopamine and norepinephrine, breathing becomes rapid, heart rate increases – not a good performance zone.)

When he grabs a couple of bats and starts to swing, his physical activity calms his nerves by changing his biochemistry and he moves from anxiety to anticipation. He moves closer toward the action between the pitcher and batter, his focus becomes more keen, and his energy level raises to meet the moment. He is ready physically, mentally and emotionally to step to the plate with confidence.

Transfer that "on deck circle" ritual to yourself as you get ready for a formal evaluation and feedback session. (You need not purchase baseball bats and cleated shoes). Giving good feedback may be more anxiety ridden than a turn at bat, so mental, physical, and emotional preparedness are a part of the experience.

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"Sit down, Brad—I've got some character-building news for you."

Here is a menu of ideas to choose from as your "On Deck Circle."

- ⇒ Mark your calendar for the year so the 4 formal feedback sessions are set. Check in 2 weeks ahead for time and place clarification. Choose a place that helps the meeting obtain its goal. Could be your office, a meeting room, or a restaurant. Each has a different environment that helps or hinders your purpose. (Sometimes going for a walk is the best discussion environment.) Think feng-shui.
- ⇒ Make sure you have the *content* specifics with times and dates if possible. Have your questions for clarification and dialogue. Think about how you can get creative, where you could use humor, and how you can best make the teach-

ing point. The end result is not simply the delivery of information but to get agreement for change and improvement.

- ⇒ Use your “scouting report” to help you deliver your information in the best way possible for each person. Check your own state of emotions. Remember one of the best ways to get emotionally calm and positive is a walk, a workout, stretching, and deep breathing. Keeping your emotions stable, especially in tough feedback sessions is critical. Once you are set, energized, calm, and focused, the rest is about them: Will they walk out with an understanding of direction for the future?
- ⇒ Remember the 80/20 rule. The psychologist concentrates more on the past, but the coach (that’s you) uses a small reference to the past (20%) and focuses on the future (80%). Start with asking permission – you won’t believe the difference it makes for the tone of the meeting. End with asking if the feedback was helpful.

With practice with your developed on deck circle, you will develop great confidence and a great team.

Self Assessment on Giving Feedback

Answer the questions by circling the number that represents the best response. Then total circled numbers for your results.

	Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree	
1. I schedule formal feedback sessions four times per year.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I prepare the content of my feedback with notes and specifics..	1	2	3	4	5
3. I think about the context of the meeting e.g. the place we will meet as well as the emotional makeup of the feedback participant.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I’m pretty good about checking my own emotions before hallway conversations.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I frequently ask if my feedback was satisfactory and helpful.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I ask permission to give feedback.	1	2	3	4	5
7. My feedback is focused on future performance though based on the past.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I confront poor or non-performance in a timely manner.	1	2	3	4	5
9. My feedback is more dialogue than monologue	1	2	3	4	5
10. I give good feedback.	1	2	3	4	5

Results:

- 10-30 Red alert! Re-invent your approach giving feedback.
- 31-37 Strongly mediocre feedback skills
- 38-44 Good feedback abilities, with exciting opportunities to help others improve
- 45-50 Olympic-level feedback skills, you’ll go straight up the managerial ladder.

-Peter McLaughlin, Founder, CatchFire Café.

Peter was featured in an article on Leadership for Lawyers, by Mark Beese. For more on feedback, take a look at this article http://leadershipforlawyers.typepad.com/leadership_for_lawyers/2006/09/index.html

Wine Review

Karl Lawrence Cab 2003

You want a big red to serve with buffalo steak or a great grilled tuna? It's a bottle of Karl Lawrence. The name of the wine is a composite of two friends' middle names who founded the winery: Mike Karl Trujillo and Bryan Lawrence Henry. They choose grapes from some great vineyards in Rutherford, Oakville, and Howell Mountain California. This wine is then aged for 20 months in French oak barrels. The key tasting words to my mind are spice, balance, and big. When I tasted it, I wanted the atmosphere to match the experience, so I opened a bottle of Rodney Strong Cab (In honor of Rodney, a former dancer and choreographer turned wine maker who had just passed away). I knew it would set me up for the much bigger Karl Lawrence. I put on a CD of Beethoven's 5th symphony (you know "Duh Duh Duh Duuh") and then proceeded with my wine tasting ritual – the big six "S's" of tasting – see, swirl, smell, sip, swallow, savor. Talk about savor, this wine lasted on my palate (what is called the finish of the wine) for a good two weeks – well not quite – but it sure took me through the tuna...and even ameliorated a Denver Bronco loss to St. Louis.

It's Expensive and worth it. A La Votfe.

-Peter McLaughlin, Founder, *CatchFire Café*

(Peter Mclaughlin was the owner of 2 wine stores and was the wine editor for the Rocky Mountain News in Denver.)

Film Review

10 Items or Less is the slightest of films: It takes place within a single day. It has only two principal actors. It is mostly set in a woebegone neighborhood of a forgotten section of Los Angeles. It involves an aging actor and a young grocery clerk, both with achingly modest ambitions. And its plot can best be summarized as "nothing much happens." How's that for a series of "can't miss" studio marketing blurbs?

On the other hand, give me the choice of seeing *for free* such current films as **Flags of our Fathers**, **Casino Royale**, **The Departed**, **Blood Diamond**, and **Déjà Vu** versus paying my usual 9 or 10 dollars for **10 items or less**; and it's a no-brainer that I pass up the freebies. None of those current blockbusters can produce the lingering feelings of satisfaction produced by this small movie and its performances by Morgan Freeman (more or less playing himself) and the wonderfully cast Paz Vega.

The plot seems initially improvised around Morgan Freeman's spending a day at a grocery store doing research for his first role after a screen absence of nearly four years. Although the absence is never fully explained, he contemplates easing his way back to the screen in a low-budget independent film to be set in this out-of-the-way neighborhood. His driver never returns to pick him up, and circumstances compel him to ask the clerk from the 10-items-or-less check-out line for a ride home. She has intrigued him since he arrived. She is self-possessed yet guarded, edgy yet capable. She is also supremely unimpressed with his stardom.

Both have met at turning points in their lives. Hers is in shambles; his is at an impasse. They also couldn't be more different. Yet both begin to connect as they become immersed in one another's lives, a connection that remains tantalizingly ambiguous until the final scene. In the meantime, there are hilarious scenes involving her preparations for a job interview that afternoon, Morgan Freeman's discovery of shopping at Target, his use of Seligman's *Positive Psychology* as he "directs" her in her starring role for the job interview, shoppers reactions to Morgan Freeman's celebrity, his intermittent discovery on store shelves of *discounted* video rentals of his last big movie, acid comments not only about life in the Hollywood studio system, but also about life on the independent film circuit, and a scene stealing cameo by Danny Devito and his wife, Rhea Perlman (playing themselves).

This film has a cinematography that makes sections of this forlorn neighborhood of Los Angeles appear almost romantic and a pace that lingers at all the right moments yet quickens when we least expect it, at least compared to most studio films that seem to do the opposite

-Steve Forness

Our film critic, Steve Forness, is a professor emeritus at UCLA. and is on our board of advisors





Live to 85+ and ENJOY IT!

Most of us will live to 85 – The question is, “Will it be a fun and healthy 85? My mind goes back to Regis High where I was a student. It was a Jesuit School and we studied Latin and Greek – I learned some grammar, but fell in love with mythology. One ancient story is apropos for the “Live until 85+” context.

Aurora, daughter of Jupiter, King of the Gods, falls in love with a mere mortal – a soldier named Tithonus. Aurora asks her father if he will grant eternal life to Tithonus so they can share their love forever. The wish is granted and Tithonus becomes eternal. But she has forgotten to ask for eternal youth and health.

Poor Tithonus, condemned to live as a bag of suffering bones – he grows old and begs for death but cannot die.

We too will grow much older than we thought. But if we don’t start the process of lifestyle change, we too might be condemned to a less than pleasant old age.

[Tufts University Health and Nutrition Letter](#) reports on a study that gives 9 key elements of a group of “exceptional survivors” who thrived to and thru age 85. Here’s the list for you to measure against.

High grip strength

Not overweight

Non-smoking

No excessive alcohol consumption

High education level

Low triglycerides

Low blood pressure

No hyperglycemia

Having a marital partner

Obviously most of these elements are life style related – and it’s never too late to change some habits like getting off your butt for 30 minutes or more per day. That would help with the weight and the hypertension. “No Smoking” is a no-brainer and using 5 pound weights 2 or 3 times per week will take care of your grip problems.

The evidence indicates that we should go back to school and get married (if not already).

This is all too easy, eh? “*We know what to do, We don’t do what we know.*”

By the way, Aurora got so tired of hearing Tithonus complain that she turned him into a grasshopper. Bottoms Up!

-Peter McLaughlin

Founder, CatchFire Café

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