



Making the most of feedback

Many of us take considerable time to process feedback, and most of us can remember instances where we feel feedback has been unfair. To what extent does this continue to influence our judgements?

Many of us take feedback at the personal level and not at the task level. This means that if we haven't done as well as we would like, we take it to mean we are not good enough.

Is that really true?

A better interpretation might be that we didn't quite understand what we needed to do, we were lacking in prior information, we weren't motivated etc. This doesn't mean that we lack the capacity to achieve.

When our calibration is out of sync with someone else's assessment of us, it may mean the information provided was not clear enough, and/or that the methods of assessing the specific task were not up to the job.

The challenge is to assess the personal responsibility we have in attaining good outcomes and also acknowledge when the learning/work context also lets us down. We then need to work how to deal with this professionally.

We can change the way we deal with feedback (and get the most out of it) by adopting what psychologist Carol Dwek calls a 'growth mindset' rather than a 'fixed mindset'. Find out more from [this video](#), or this [short summary](#).

Remember that it is possible to have a growth mindset in one context and a fixed mindset in another. How would a growth mindset change what you can get from feedback?

Linked to the notion of growth mindset is our goal orientation. If we are exclusively focused on performance goals and doing better than everyone else, we may set ourselves up to fail. Successful learning is often associated with setting ourselves mastery goals – doing the best we can in a specific task.

Getting feedback that does not align with our expectations can be hurtful and confusing. We all need time to process the feedback, so give it some time. Think about the key messages of the feedback:

- Are the key messages valid?
- What can you do to address the situation on your own?
- What do you need to ask for help with?

We also come to learning with established schema – what we believe we need to do in order to do well.

It is very stressful when previous ways of being successful - our *schema* - no longer work, perhaps because we are in a new context. Giving up on what has always worked before is also really difficult. Again, give this some time and thought; try to discover the schema that will work best in this new context.

Think objectively about the key message in each piece of feedback. Be prepared to share your work and be willing to receive critique on it.

It is really important to realise that not everything we do will work. Consider the notion of ‘smart failing’, because to succeed we have to take action and learn quickly from our mistakes.

Avoid the ostrich position!

Find your most recent piece of feedback and ask yourself the following questions. Use the answers to guide your actions when you next receive feedback.

- What do I know I could have done better in retrospect?
- What I am still confused about?
- Who can I ask for clarification?
- What resources can I go to?
- Do I not know enough: do I need to go back and research this?
- I have worked hard on this but have misconceptions. Do I need support?
- I do not know of any other way to do this task. I need to see made aware of other approaches. Where can I go for help?
- What is my strategy to address the issues?



These resources were developed by Professors Dawn Bennett and Carol Evans for the Developing EmployABILITY initiative.