

# **Guest Consultant Bob Cooper Asks: Are You Open to Feedback? (a.k.a. Can You Handle the Truth?)**

In the movie "A Few Good Men", there is a famous scene between a marine colonel on trial for war crimes (played by Jack Nicholson) and a navy officer prosecuting the case (played by Tom Cruise). Tom Cruise says to Jack Nicholson "I want the truth!" Nicholson proceeds to say " You can't handle the truth!"

In my experience working with leaders at all levels within an organization, many people do not want the truth. They would like others to tell them what either makes them feel comfortable, or shows that others agree with their thinking. Unfortunately, these leaders are playing a potentially dangerous game. If you are on the road and about to be hit by a truck, wouldn't you want someone to point this out to you? Of course you would. In business, the unwillingness to be open to feedback is similar to being hit by a truck, it could be fatal. Your insistence that others not bring you the truth (even if it's painful) could keep the issue alive with potential negative consequences.

The following are a few suggestions relative to feedback:

## **See Feedback as a Gift**

You should view feedback as an opportunity to gain valuable insight that can lead to positive change. For example, if you listen to feedback regarding your communication style – you might learn that important information is not being understood

by key stakeholders. You can now make the necessary changes that will ensure your future communications are received as intended.

### **Thank Others for Their Feedback**

If someone offers you feedback in a professional manner, you should thank them. If they bring you specific examples of how you could change an issue and you get upset (i.e. you don't want the truth), how willing are they to provide feedback in the future? The probability is that they will only speak to you regarding issues that you want to hear about.

### **Accept the Feedback & Commit to Change**

As you review the feedback, commit to a development plan to achieve positive results. If you need to modify your behavior in some way, make the commitment to do so and accept ongoing feedback. This will improve your overall effectiveness and build stronger business relationships.

### **Promote Feedback Within Your Team**

Encourage team members to give feedback to each other. During staff meetings you could ask individuals to acknowledge others for support they had given to them. You should have them discuss ways in which they can support each other in the future. The key here is to promote an environment where every team member is encouraged to help colleagues enhance their performance (i.e. everyone wins).

### **Commit to Giving Feedback**

Demonstrate that you are a person willing to give feedback with the purpose of sincerely trying to assist others to reach their full potential. When others recognize your sincerity, and know that you are trying to be helpful, the feedback will

usually be appreciated. The more you model what it means to provide timely and valuable feedback (where you specifically describe the situation observed and the impact on others) and offer others advice or guidance as needed, you become a trusted mentor.

Many years ago a colleague said the following – “Your friends are those who after lunch tell you that spinach is stuck between your teeth.” Wouldn’t you want to know this before you leave the restaurant? Who can you trust to tell you this? Your job is to create the want. When others trust that you are open to feedback, grateful for feedback, and willing to help them – you will receive feedback. If others believe that you will judge or get upset by their feedback – you will leave restaurants with spinach in your teeth.

Leadership is all about the desire of others to want to follow. When you treat others with respect (which includes providing timely feedback aimed at helping others to succeed), the desire will be there.

Great leaders model what it means to give and receive valuable feedback. They openly share with others, and are grateful to those who point things out to them that can be quite beneficial.

**The next time someone provides valuable feedback – genuinely thank them. It may very well be the difference between success and failure.**



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