

The Feedback Alternative: FeedForward

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Giving feedback to volunteers is a tricky situation and often fails to produce the outcome we need. The same could be said about giving feedback to staff or your supervisors. Let's explore a technique that shifts the outcome by shifting the focus. It's an approach that also removes the discomfort we often experience in giving/getting feedback. It's called FeedForward and it may well be a gamechanger for volunteer management.

Feedback focuses on the past. Feedforward focuses on future and opportunities.

THE OLD WAY FEEDBACK	THE NEW WAY FEEDFORWARD
Affirms what the person already knows. "You're really good at that."	Regenerates talent. "Would you lead a training on that?"
Points out problems. "That idea won't work because..."	Expands possibilities. "What if we added this?"
Is an "information dump." Think rubrics with 30-20 different measurements.	Is Particular. Is ongoing, unfiltered, and specific, and focused on just a few things.
Tries not to be mean. "Don't ever make that mistake again; please."	Is Authentic. Explains the rationale and its impact, then prompts the person for a solution.
Doesn't always offer a plan of action. Focuses on measurement, not a plan for change.	Has an Impact. Has the person create a specific, step-by-step plan for improvement.
Comes from the top down. Delivered with a strict hierarchy, from people on the same team.	Refines group dynamics. Rich, varied input comes from people with different viewpoints and skill sets.

Learn More:

[Moving from Feedback to Feedforward](#), Cult of Pedagogy

[Try FeedForward Instead of Feedback](#), Growth Coaching

[FeedForward: Coaching for Behavior Change](#) (Youtube), Marshall Goldsmith

Reach out to Peggy Hoffman and the Mariner Team @ phoffman@marinermanagement.com or 301.725.2508 for more ideas, volunteer and staff training.

Figure 1 Source: *The Feedback Fix: Dump the Past, Embrace the Future*, by Joe Hirsch

Try this: At your next volunteer training, use Marshall Goldsmith's experiential exercise described in [Try FeedForward instead of Feedback](#). In the exercise, pair volunteer leaders for conversations where one provides feedforward and the other accepts feedforward.

Ask each person to pick a behavior they would like to change that would make a significant difference in their life. Then share that with a random partner and ask for 2 suggestions that might help them in their quest. The sharer listens intently, taking notes, without commenting or even offering positive judgmental statements such as *I like that idea*. Simply thank the person. These two then switch roles after which, the pair splits. The group forms new pairs and repeats. Repeat as many times as possible. Debrief as a full group.

A twist on the concept comes from Victor Antonio described in his [FeedForward Exercise post](#). Take the behavior you want to change or improve and ask 5 or 10 people to give you two ideas you could begin doing to improve or change this behavior. Prioritize the five most important ones and set a plan to implement one at a time.

Rule #1: No feedback about the past. We spend too much of our time in the past.

Rule #2: The seeker's job is simply to listen intently to what your feedforward gifter is saying.

Rule #3: You can't judge or critique ideas. When you get an idea, treat it like a gift. Say thank you and move on.

Let's build examples of FeedForward!

- For your next board meeting, I suggest you open with an icebreaker like showing all the baby pictures of board members and having them guess who is who, or asking a question like "where would you like to travel to?"
- For your next conference planning meeting, I suggest you come up with several different ideas to showcase and send it prior to the next meeting via email.
- Next time the meeting gets headed down a side road, I suggest you signal the group with a "let's pause and I'll put this on the parking lot." Then redirect them to the agenda item.
- Add your own