



Tell Me So I Can Hear You: A Developmental Approach to Feedback for Educators

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Book Review

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The question, “Can you give me some feedback on this,” is incredibly problematic. It is what some leadership theorists call a “landmine question.” Giving constructive feedback can be a tricky wicket. We may call feedback “honest.” However, it almost always comes across as critical, perhaps even mean. The idea is to focus on the negatives or how others can improve themselves, so we address it in what I call a “combatively collaborative” fashion. However, because of the possibly aggressive or even bullish nature of the one giving the feedback, it can have the reverse effect.

Tell Me So I Can Hear You is a helpful volume for educators and leaders. Rooted in the cognitive-developmental theory of human development as espoused by Robert Kegan, the authors base their entire argument firmly in the “four ways of knowing – instrumental, socializing, self-authoring, and self-transforming” (40). The authors convincingly argue that feedback to colleagues and peers works best when it is understood to be part of the continuing education or professional development process. For them, this results in primarily offering feedback in a way connects with our learning styles. For example, if you are an instrumental learner, you will focus on offering feedback that adheres to the rules, regulations, and expectations of an employee of that organization. Since this approach relies heavily on rubrics, it will positively help colleagues understand where they stand professionally, based on the commonly-accepted careerist markers. However, it does not take into account more abstract qualities, such as emotional health, creativity, or one’s personal background.

Those in administrative educational leadership often offer constructive or critical feedback and tend to process feedback differently than the faculty colleagues and students who are recipients of that feedback. The one receiving feedback may become confused, angry, or

withdrawn because they interpret the administrator's comments differently than the intended meaning.

The benefits of this volume are in the consistent and thorough explanation of the "four ways of learning," as the authors ground their entire discussion on showing how these ways of learning can work together through feedback settings to build a healthy and collaborative environment. To this end, the chapters on how we receive feedback (chapter 4), give feedback (chapter 5), and build a culture of trust in the organization (chapter 6) are certainly worth the price of the book.

The reader should, however, be aware of two minor concerns: First, this volume accepts Common Core Standards as its operating model for understanding competency rather than seeking out a more integrated model of content comprehension and skills application. Second, the authors seem to interchange the concepts of "colleague" and "adult learner," which causes some confusion as to whether this handbook is for the quad office or the adult-learning classroom. If you find yourself being required to offer more and more intense feedback or are in a leadership position, read Henry Cloud's extremely practical volume *Necessary Endings* (New York: HarperBusiness, 2011) before diving into this volume.

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