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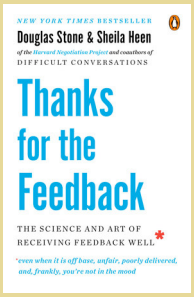

File: Feedback

Thanks for the Feedback:

The Science and Art of Receiving Feedback Well

By Douglas Stone & Sheila Heen (Penguin Books, 2014)

S.O.S. (A Summary of the Summary)

The main ideas of the book are:

~ We receive a deluge of feedback – from bosses, colleagues, friends, family – yet it rarely improves performance. The problem is that we've focused all of our attention and training on the feedback *giver*. Instead, it is the feedback *receiver* who decides whether to make use of the feedback and improve.
~ This book takes a different approach by showing the feedback *receiver* how to best learn from feedback (even when it is off base, unfair, poorly delivered, and, frankly, you're not in the mood).

Why I chose this book:
Douglas Stone and Sheila Heen are the authors of the bestselling book, *Difficult Conversations*, and they've succeeded in writing another book that reads like a funny, yet insightful conversation with a trusted mentor.

This book is tremendously useful for school leaders who are genuinely trying to give more effective feedback. Have you ever wondered why your carefully crafted feedback doesn't lead to more improvements in teaching?

Perhaps you have neglected the most important aspect of feedback – that it is the feedback *receiver* who is key in determining the success of feedback. The feedback receiver decides whether your feedback will be heard, understood, digested, and finally acted upon to make improvements.

This book provides the insights you need to understand the impact of your feedback on the *receiver*. Even better, bring this book to your teachers so they learn the skills they need to use feedback to drive their own learning.

The Scoop (In this summary you will learn…)

√ The three main factors that cause feedback to go awry: truth triggers, relationship triggers, and identity triggers

√ Strategies we can use when we feel the *content* of feedback is off base

√ Suggestions for handling feedback even when the relationship with the feedback giver is challenging

√ How you can get the most out of feedback when it threatens your identity

√ The Main Idea's PD suggestions to improve feedback giving and receiving in your school or school system

Introduction

Stone and Heen, authors of the bestseller *Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most*, found that in researching difficult conversations, the topic of *feedback* always comes up. People state that it is difficult to give honest feedback, and even when they manage to do so, it rarely goes well. The employee inevitably gets upset and defensive and ends up less motivated, not more.

Yet we are drowning in feedback. In just one year, every student will be handed back as many as 300 assignments, papers, and tests, and almost 2 million teenagers will receive their SAT scores. In the world of work, between 50 and 90 percent of employees will face performance reviews that determine raises, promotions, and bonuses. So after all of this, are we any wiser? Looked at from any angle, in any sector, feedback just *isn't* working to improve performance.

Stone and Heen wondered why, when organizations spend so much money to train supervisors to give feedback effectively, is it so problematic? They found that we have been focusing on new and better ways to *give* feedback, when really, the key player is not the *giver*, but the *receiver* of the feedback. Even if the giver has been well trained in giving feedback, if the receiver is unwilling or unable to accept the feedback, then the feedback is useless. It is actually the receivers who are in control of how much of the feedback they absorb and whether they choose to change. *Thanks for the Feedback* is about why it is such a challenge to receive feedback and what strategies can make feedback more useful and insightful for the receiver. It is about how to actually *learn* from feedback – even when it is off base, unfair, poorly delivered, and, frankly, you're not in the mood. This has profound implications for how we lead, learn, work, and even conduct our personal lives!

Feedback is any time you get information about yourself. Overall, it's how you learn about yourself from people and experiences. In addition to that annual review at work, you are getting feedback when your son's eyes light up when he sees you in the audience or when a friend sheds the sweater you made for her the minute she thinks you're not looking. Feedback can be formal or informal, blunt or subtle. If we seem to get feedback all the time, and humans are natural learners, why do we have so much trouble accepting feedback? While we are wired to learn, it turns out that *learning about ourselves* is a different story. When your boss dresses you down or your sister-in-law tells you the family thinks you're an overprotective mother, you realize just how painful it can be to learn about yourself. However, and this is the key behind this book, the ability to accept feedback well is a *learned skill* that anyone can develop. And taking the time to learn this skill is well worth it. When we are able to receive feedback well, our relationships are better, our self-esteem is more secure, and we learn a lot more! Furthermore, people willing to take an honest look at themselves are easier to work with and live with. The flip side is also the case – a person who always responds to feedback defensively is difficult to work with and just plain exhausting. Learning how to respond better to feedback is not just for you. We are modeling for our children how to respond when the feedback we hear is less than perfect. Furthermore, it sends a powerful message when leaders take ownership when receiving feedback. In fact, "Nothing affects the learning culture of an organization more than the skill with which its executive team receives feedback."

Introduction to the Three Triggers That Block Feedback

Something happens when we get tough feedback. It leaves us confused or enraged, and our heart pounds and thoughts race. When we have this type of reaction we try to push it aside and ignore it. However, this isn't the answer. As the authors state, "Trying to ignore a triggered reaction without first identifying its cause is like dealing with a fire by disconnecting the smoke alarm." Triggers are not pleasant, but they help us understand the root of our trouble. The good news is, while you might think a million things could spark a negative reaction to feedback, in fact, there are just *three reasons* feedback triggers us: truth triggers, relationship triggers, and identity triggers.

1. Truth Triggers – The *content* of the feedback is wrong, unfair, or unhelpful
We get triggered when we feel the *content* of the feedback is off base. A husband tells his wife that she was unfriendly and aloof at his nephew's bar mitzvah. Her reaction? *That's ridiculous and just plain wrong. I was plenty friendly.* There are three ways to approach this, each of which will be described in an upcoming chapter.

⇒ Separate appreciation, coaching, and evaluation – At times we don't even know if something *is* feedback. Or we were expecting a different kind of feedback. Imagine finishing a painting and showing it to a friend who's an artist. If she told you twelve things to fix and you were hoping for, "Nice job. Keep working on it," you'd be upset. Alternatively, if you wanted critical comments to improve your work, you would be disappointed if she just said, "Nice job. Keep working on it." Know what kind of feedback you are getting.

⇒ First understand – Sometimes you *think* you understand the feedback you are hearing – and this is why you think it's plain wrong – when really, you don't fully understand the other person's point of view. Instead you need to ask clarifying questions to truly understand what the feedback means.

⇒ See your blind spots – There are certain things about ourselves we are blind to, and what's more, we're blind to the fact that we are blind to these things! Before you resist feedback, realize that it's complicated and others might see something in us that we don't see.

2. Relationship Triggers – I can't hear this feedback from *YOU*
The triggers above stem from the *content* of the feedback. Relationship triggers come from the *particular person* who is giving the feedback. If we believe the person has no credibility or has treated us with little respect ("After all I've done for you, this is the type of criticism I get…"), then this affects how we respond to the feedback. There are two ways to address this type of trigger.

⇒ Don't switchtrack: disentangle what from who – If we feel someone has treated us poorly, it is difficult to separate the *feedback* from the *relationship*. When you respond to feedback with, "Don't talk to me that way," these are really two different issues – the content of the feedback and how the giver speaks to you. It's best to have two different conversations about these two different topics.

⇒ Identify the relationship system – Feedback happens in the context of a relationship. Sometimes both people (the giver and receiver) simply end up pointing fingers at each other. Instead, it's best to understand the dynamic between the two of you and determine what is contributing to the problem.

3. Identity Triggers – The feedback threatens who I AM
This third type of trigger is not about the content of the feedback *or* the person giving it. Instead, it is about *us.* It makes us question our identity, the story we tell ourselves about who we are. We become threatened or ashamed and end up defensive and off-balance. To address this type of trigger, we can do the following:

⇒ Learn how wiring and temperament affect your story – Biologically, we are all wired differently, and we don't all shut down in the same way. Understanding our own temperaments and how we are wired can help us deal with identity triggers.

⇒ Dismantle distortions – Consider Laila who is *highly* sensitive to feedback. Whenever she hears feedback, she distorts it. For example, her boss mentions that she should "be on her game" for tomorrow's meeting. As fifteen years of mistakes flood her mind she wonders, *Does he think I don't know what I'm doing?* Luckily for Laila, and all of us, it *is* possible to keep feedback in perspective.

⇒ Cultivate a growth identity – When we think that our traits and abilities are "fixed," we believe we aren't going to change. If someone gives us feedback, we think this is just "who we are," so it's a blow to our identity. However, those with a "growth" identity believe they are ever evolving and growing, so any piece of feedback is actually welcome because it helps them improve.

Part 1 – Truth Triggers

I. SEE THE TYPE OF FEEDBACK: Separate appreciation, coaching, and evaluation
A dad takes his twin daughters out for some batting practice. He gives them feedback on their swing, their stance, and how to keep their eye on the ball. One daughter finds the experience enlightening. The other slumps over and barks, "You think I'm uncoordinated!" The feedback is the same, yet each daughter hears it differently. One thinks she's hearing coaching, while the other hears evaluation. However, one of the first lessons about receiving feedback is that there are three types of feedback, and it helps to have clarity on which one you are getting in a particular situation.

Three Kinds of Feedback
1) Appreciation – When your boss says he is grateful you are on his team, he is expressing appreciation. Not only does this convey "thanks," but it shows that he *sees* you and knows how hard you have been working. While appreciation might seem to be the fluffiest of the types of feedback, *without it*, good coaching is unlikely to be effective because the receiver is often listening for a compliment.

2) Coaching – Coaching accelerates our learning. It tells us where to focus our time and energy. It aims to help us learn, grow, or change. However, even when people on both sides of the coaching relationship – the giver and the givee – are well meaning, coaching can be very complicated (as with the dad and daughters above). The ideas in this book help people overcome these challenges.

3) Evaluation – Evaluation is used to rank, assess, or rate you. It's what tells you where you stand. Anything from your performance review to your middle school report card or your time in the 5k serves as evaluation. Evaluations compare you to others or to a standard, and there may be important implications of this – such as whether you get a year-end bonus or your time qualifies you for a swimming competition. Evaluation can leave us feeling judged, and yet, when we *don't* receive evaluation, we end up trying to use coaching or appreciation to try to figure out where we stand.

What Helps You See the Type of Feedback You Are Receiving
⇒ Get your purposes aligned – At times, the giver and receiver of feedback have different goals. It helps to take some time, before a conversation, to reflect on the purpose of the upcoming feedback. Then check in during the conversation, "I'm intending to give you coaching, is that how you're hearing it? From your point of view, is that what you need?" Remember the painter and the feedback from the artist friend? Each person should be explicit about what type of feedback would be most helpful.
⇒ Separate evaluation from coaching and appreciation – Evaluation is so strong, it can overpower any coaching or appreciation. If your organization has formal feedback conversations, then evaluation and feedback should occur at different times. Have the evaluation conversation first, so the person knows where she stands, then at least a few days later, focus on what she needs to improve.

II. SEE WHAT THE GIVER MEANS: First understand

Irwin, a supervising attorney in the public defender's office, tells a new hire, Holly, that she's too involved with the personal lives of her clients and she should maintain an appropriate professional distance. Holly says she'll listen to the advice, but she won't. "Look," she explains, "I grew up on these streets. I know what it means to have someone in your corner really fighting for you." We can almost always find something *wrong* with feedback; the challenge is to find what can be useful to us. Below are some common problems we often spot in feedback.

Challenges to Understanding Feedback

1) Feedback is Vague – Feedback is often generic, "Don't be so selfish," "Act your age," or "You need boundaries." This last one is what Irwin said to Holly above. It's too vague to be of help. Would she agree with it if she fully understood what he meant? She might or she might not, but she'd be in a better position to decide if she knew more specifically what he wanted her to change.

2) Giver and Receiver Have Different Interpretations – When I am the feedback giver, I have a clear movie in my mind showing what I mean. However, I forget that when I pass along the feedback, I don't attach the movie. There is often a mismatch between what is heard and what is meant. For example, someone says, "You've received a 4 out of 5 this year." The receiver hears, "Last year I got a 4 and I worked much harder this year and got another 4. Hard work isn't noticed." The giver meant, "No one gets a 5. Few even get a 4 and you got it twice! You are doing outstanding work."

3) It is Unclear Where Feedback Comes From or Where it is Going – People often say that for feedback to be good, it must be specific. But specific about *what?* All feedback has both a past ("here's what I noticed") and a future ("here's what you need to do"). Vague feedback often leaves out both. Get the giver to be more specific about where the feedback comes from and where it needs to go. For example, you say I'm a reckless driver. Well, where does this *come from?* The fact that I always talk to you on my cell when driving or that I tailgate? And where is the feedback *going* – do you want me to wear my glasses at night or slow down?

Feedback usually comes *from* two places: observable data *and* interpretations of that data. Data goes beyond facts and figures; it can be anything that is observed from behaviors to statements to tone to work products. However, most people jump to interpretation when giving feedback. Instead of saying, "I heard you say you were too busy to help," the boss jumps to, "You're not a team player." We tend to jump to interpretations based on our own life experiences, assumptions, preferences, and priorities. While you might wonder, wouldn't life be easier if people just shared the actual data? Why not replace, "Your report was confusing" with "I noticed that you didn't distinguish between online sales and brick and mortar sales." The reality is that most of us unconsciously jump from data to interpretation in the blink of an eye.

What Helps You Understand Feedback

⇒ Ask where the feedback is coming from – Now that you know that people usually jump quickly to an interpretation of the data, when you get vague feedback, ask about the data that led to the interpretation. For example, look at how Margie initially responded to the feedback (evaluation) that she did not get the promotion she wanted *and* what she later wished she had asked:

> **What Margie initially says**: *That's disappointing. Who got it?*
> **What Margie later wished she had asked:** *Can you say more about what you felt I was missing as you looked at my fit for the job? What concerns did people have?*

⇒ Ask where the feedback is going – Someone says, "If you win the Tony Award, make sure your speech sparkles." This is a problem because we don't know what they mean or what we should do. Help the giver become clearer, "Can you describe what you mean?" "Could you show me some examples of speeches that sparkle?"

⇒ Find what's right – Part of the problem might be that the giver and receiver have access to *different* data. Your boss knows what your colleagues earn, but you don't. Peers in the Cairo office understand the local culture in a way that you don't. Furthermore, because you are two different people, you also have different interpretations of the data. For this reason, it is helpful to ask, "Why do we see this differently? What data do you have that I don't?" Once you understand the giver's lens better, you are in a better position to list *what is right* about the feedback. Ask yourself, "What makes sense about what they are saying? What seems worth trying?

III. SEE YOURSELF CLEARLY: Learn about your blind spots

> • *Annabelle says please and thank you, and always remembers birthdays. She thinks she's treating everyone with respect, but when she's stressed, she unconsciously shows that she's full of impatience and contempt.*
> • *Zoe thinks she's supportive of new ideas, but is always the first to shoot down a creative suggestion.*
> • *Jules keeps talking long after you've signaled you need to go. Sometimes even after you've left.*

How can people be this oblivious? Is it possible that we are this unaware of our own shortcomings? Yes, it is often the case that there's a gap between self-perception and others' ideas about us – our blind spots. How does this happen? Although we often start with good intentions, beneath those intentions are often other deeper feelings that may "leak through" and clue others into our true feelings. Below are some ways we inadvertently convey those inner feelings.

Ways We Are Blind to Ourselves

1) Your Leaky Face – People are very good at reading each other's faces. Evolutionarily, people needed to know who was a friend or foe, and respond accordingly. This makes us highly attuned to the ways people's faces reveal if they are helping or hurting you.

2) Your Leaky Tone – People learn a lot not just from *what* we say, but *how* we say it. Unfortunately we don't hear ourselves the same way others do. We focus more on our thoughts and our intentions and don't notice that our tone often betrays how we really feel.

3) Your Leaky Patterns – Bennett watches as his five-year-old son mimics a person barking into a pretend cell phone. His daughter yells out, "That's you, Daddy!" Bennett works hard to minimize his cell phone time around the kids and asks, "How is that *me*?" However, in the children's minds he is always interrupting family time to take a phone call. We are often blind to patterns in our lives that are readily apparent to those around us.

4) E-Mail Body Language – People even read meaning into e-mail messages. Believe it or not, your word choice, timing, who you cc, the length of your message, and more, all convey information about your mood and intentions.

What Helps You See Your Blind Spots

⇒ Use your reaction as a blind-spot alert – Rather than dismissing feedback, use it as an opportunity to become aware of your blind spots. Before you jump to the thoughts, *What's wrong with them? What was their agenda?* take a moment to consider if the feedback is revealing something about your blind spots.

⇒ Ask: How did I get in my own way? When we want feedback, our questions are often too general, "So how am I doing?" or "Do you have any feedback for me?" Instead, ask specifically, "What do you see me doing, or failing to do, that gets in my own way?"

⇒ Look for patterns – When we get feedback we don't like, we often look for other feedback that *contradicts* it. For example, if someone says you interrupt a lot, you bring to mind all of the times you refrained from interrupting. Instead of immediately seeking contradictory feedback, look for feedback that *confirms* what you just heard, *Where have I heard this before?* Patterns provide clues about your blind spots. It's probably not a coincidence if your ex-wife *and* your first-grade teacher complained about your hygiene.

⇒ Get a second opinion – Again, curb that impulse to reject feedback you don't like, and consider bringing it to a trusted friend, "Here's feedback I just got. It seems wrong, but I wonder if this is feedback about a blind spot of mine. Do you see me doing this?"

⇒ Record Yourself – While it can be unpleasant, recoding ourselves can be enlightening. It allows us to hear our tone and see our behavior in ways that we usually miss. After listening to a recoding of her weekly brainstorming meeting, Zoe, who thought she was supportive, became aware that she was often negative. On the recording she heard herself respond to the ideas of others with, "Here's what I'm worried about," or "Here's why I doubt that can work." She was unaware of these blind spots before the recording.

Part 2 – Relationship Triggers

It seems like it shouldn't matter *who* is giving us feedback, it's the *content* that matters, right? But it really does matter. It is often the *person* who is giving us the feedback that triggers us more than the feedback itself. The previous section focused on the content – or the *what* – of the feedback. This section focuses on *who* is giving the feedback, as well as the where, when, and how of the feedback.

I. DON'T SWITCHTRACK: Disentangle *what* from *who*

In the HBO sitcom *Lucky Louie,* Louie comes home after a long day at work with red roses for his wife. Kim reminds Louie that she has told him before that if they are going to be married for 30 more years, he needs to know that red roses just aren't her thing. They end up with the following exchange:

Louie: What is wrong with you? Are you allergic to saying thank you to people?

Kim: How do you expect someone to thank you for giving them something they specifically told you they don't want?

Kim's feedback is a relationship trigger for Louie. Kim is giving Louie feedback, and he responds defensively by changing the topic. Aren't they both talking about red roses? Actually, Kim is talking about feeling unheard and Louie is talking about feeling underappreciated, so now we have two people talking about two topics and no one is hearing the feedback. This is such a common dynamic in relationships that the authors have given it a name: *switchtracking*. One person gives feedback and the second one changes the topic like a train switches tracks. The biggest part of the problem is that the two people involved don't even realize that there are two topics. It is often a *relationship trigger* that causes us to switchtrack. Below are two types of relationship triggers.

Two Relationship Triggers

1) What We Think About Them – When there are people we don't trust or who lack credibility, it just doesn't matter what their feedback is. We discard the *what* based on the *who*. Below are three common cases of this:

(a) **Skill or Judgment** – We often discredit feedback when it seems that the giver lacks judgment in *how, when,* or *where* they give the feedback. For example, "Why would you say that in front of my husband?" or "You waited until now to bring this up?" As a result, we end up switchtracking to *how* or *when* the feedback is delivered, rather than focusing on the feedback itself.

(b) **Credibility** – Another reason we reject feedback is because of the giver's lack of credibility, "He has never started a business" or "She has never coached soccer." It's not that background skills aren't important, but we switchtrack so quickly, we don't consider any benefits of the feedback.

(c) **Trust** – A third reason we switchtrack to avoid feedback is when we believe the giver doesn't have our best interests at heart. Of course intentions are invisible, so we are often guessing about this. However, even if a person is crazy, jealous, or downright mean, the feedback itself could be dead on.

2) How We Feel Treated By Them – In addition to what we think about the feedback giver, we also resort to switchtracking because of how we feel treated *by them*. This often happens as a result of feeling a lack of appreciation, autonomy, or acceptance.

(a) **Appreciation** – Ernie covers for Samantha so she can take time off of work, but when she returns, the first thing she does is to question why Ernie failed to call a client back. He says, "What is wrong with you?" Because he feels underappreciated for taking on Samantha's work, he changes the topic from his failure to make the call and focuses it on Samantha.

(b) **Autonomy** – We feel particularly triggered when people seem to be taking away our autonomy. Your boss does not get to give you feedback on *your* e-mail to *your* team before you send it out. It's *your* team. We can't hear the advice because we are too focused on being told what to do.

(c) **Acceptance** – If we feel people don't accept us for who we are, we find it hard to take their feedback. *Nothing I do is ever good enough for my boss*. Or, *my dad is full of advice, and I might be able to accept it if for once he would say, "You know, kid, you turned out okay."* Of course we all need to be accepted for who we are, but we also need to hear feedback about who we are.

What Helps with Switchtracking

The goal here is *not* to dismiss very important relationship issues. Instead, we want to get better at recognizing when relationship triggers are interfering with us hearing potentially useful feedback. Below are some suggestions to help.

⇒ Spot the Two Topics – When switchtracking occurs, the first step is to *recognize* what the two topics are. For example, a daughter says, "You never let me go out. You treat me like a child." The mom responds with, "You should be grateful you have a mother who cares." The child is bringing up feelings of not being trusted and the mother is switchtracking to the topic of not feeling appreciated. Instead, the mother should *start* with the daughter's concern, "Let's talk about how you would like to be treated." Then after they have had this conversation, she can return to the issue of feeling unappreciated.

⇒ Give Each Topic its Own Track – Ella is a teacher's assistant in a class with students who have disabilities. She spends extra time with the children before and after school and uses her evenings to find additional materials for the class. The teacher she assists never provides any feedback or appreciation for Ella's efforts. Eight months into the school year, the head teacher says, "You're spending too much time focusing on Howard." Ella silently switchtracks as she thinks, *Have you noticed what I put into this job and what I mean to these kids?* Before she says anything, she catches herself, *Oh, there are two topics here. My interactions with Howard AND how I feel unappreciated.* Here is what she could say to the teacher, "Let's talk about how I am spending my time with Howard now because that's important. This is also the first time I've gotten feedback, so after we talk about Howard, I would like to talk about how I get feedback and what you notice about my work with the kids that is positive."

II. IDENTIFY THE RELATIONSHIP SYSTEM: Take Three Steps Back

The Benefits of Seeing Feedback as Part of a Relationship System

Feedback often comes as a result of a problem *within a relationship*, "Because you snore, I can't sleep." I think the problem is your snoring. You think the issue is that I'm too sensitive. The problem is, when something goes wrong, I see the things *you* did to contribute to it and you see the things *I* did that contribute to it. If we want to have better conversations about feedback, we need to see the relationship as a *system* with interconnected parts that form a whole. Each of us contributes, in some way, to the problem (perhaps not equally though). There are several benefits to understanding that there is more than one side of the story. First, it's a more accurate view than only seeing your own perspective. Second, if we think about the perspective of others, we are less likely to jump to judgment. Rather than rushing to blame those "selfish #$%s over in Corporate" we will be able to more neutrally describe the actions of the guys in Corporate. Third, when we think about both sides, we take more responsibility for the problem. Of course it's wrong for your employee to fabricate her time sheet, and there should be consequences for this, but it helps to ask, "How did my role as her manager contribute to this action?"

What Helps in Addressing Relationship Systems: Take Three Steps Back to Gain Perspective

One Step Back: You & Me Intersections – We usually see a problem in terms of what's wrong with the other person. But often the problem comes from how the other person behaves *in relation to* you. For example, your need for down time on the weekends is only a problem because of *my need* for attention. The fact that you only speak Swedish is only a problem for me because I only speak English. The next time you jump to conclusions about someone else's errors, consider what you are each doing in relation to the other.

Two Steps Back: Role Clashes – Sometimes the reason we clash is because of our roles – in an organization, a family, or a team. Part of this clashing comes from a real lack of clarity around where one position ends and the other begins. And sometimes the clashing comes from the nature of the roles themselves. Think about cops and speeders, architects and engineers, Sales and Legal. It's important to distinguish between roles and people. Take two steps back and consider how *your role* and the feedback *giver's role* are contributing to how we see each other and the feedback itself.

Three Steps Back: The Big Picture – When you take three steps back you can see the entire landscape. This includes the other players, physical environment, timing, decision making, policies, and more. For example, if a worker gets injured at a refinery, we often focus only on the injured worker. But what about the policy of workers doing double shifts and then operating equipment? And when was the last time the piece of machinery was repaired? How about the performance evaluation system – does it incentivize safe behavior?

Part 3 – Identity Triggers

The biggest reason feedback rattles us is that it hijacks the most important relationship we have – the relationship with ourselves. Am I a decent person? Can I live with myself? Can I forgive myself? Not everyone reacts to these threats in the same way. This section of the book explores why we react the way we do to *identity* triggers, how to move beyond extreme reactions to feedback, and how to develop a more solid sense of identity so we can withstand and in fact learn from feedback.

I. HOW WIRING AFFECTS YOUR IDENTIFY

Three Ways We are Wired Differently

Krista and Alita respond differently when it comes to feedback. Alita is a popular obstetrician who received glowing reviews from last year's patient's survey. However, a few patients mentioned that they had to wait when Alita's schedule ran late. Her response? "I was so disheartened," even though the majority of the responses contained rave reviews. In contrast, this is what Krista has to say about feedback, "When I hear someone doesn't like something I did, I immediately think, *Really? But do you know how amazing I am?*"

One reason they respond differently is because of their wiring – the ways their neural structures and connections are built. This chapter looks at how our wiring influences our emotional response to negative feedback. Whether we are aware of it or not, we each have our own different tendencies. If people have often told you that you are "hypersensitive" or "totally oblivious," now is the time to tune in and consider that this may be in part due to the way you are built. A lot goes on in both your brain and your body that affects how you respond to feedback. Below are three variables that affect how you respond to feedback: *baseline, swing,* and *sustain and recovery*.

1. Baseline: Where You Start – Of course our life experiences affect our mood – such as winning the lottery or losing a job – but each of us generally returns to our own individual level of well-being. This is why Uncle Murray seems perpetually annoyed and Aunt Eileen is amused by everything in life. Those with a higher baseline of happiness respond more positively to feedback than those with lower baselines. Don't fret: if your baseline is lower, there are things you can do. For now, start by becoming aware of your baseline.

2. Swing: How Far Up or Down You Go – Some of us swing much higher up and down from our baseline level of happiness. These tend to be "highly reactive" people and they are more sensitive to negative feedback. For example, when a client sends the same critical feedback to two people, the one with the bigger swing might respond with frantic anxiety while the lower-reactive one might say, "Well, this means a bit more work now."

3. Sustain and Recovery: How Long Does the Swing Last? – In addition to emotional swing, the other aspect of how you respond has to do with *duration*. How long does it take you to return to your baseline when you receive distressful feedback? Do you recover in minutes, days, weeks, or months? MRIs reveal that people who return to their baseline more quickly have more activity and connections in the prefrontal cortex and amygdala. Their wiring is actually different from those who recover more slowly. The advantage of recovering quickly is that you address the feedback rather than settling in to depression. In addition to *recovery*, how long we *sustain* positive feelings affects our well-being. There is a cycle in the brain in which positive experiences trigger a dopamine response, which triggers more positive experiences, which again, triggers more dopamine. There are things you can do to influence this cycle to help you *sustain* positive feelings for longer. For example, when you need a reminder you are doing *something* right, reread that positive feedback from your child's teacher or the grateful client.

Wiring is Only Part of the Story: Emotions Distort Feedback, Too

Wiring, however, is not destiny. While genetics clearly influences our temperament, neuroplasticity shows that wiring *can* change over time. Practices such as exercise, helping others, and meditation (see The Main Idea's summary of *The Mindful School Leader*) can help raise your baseline over time. Further, research shows there is a 50-40-10 formula for our happiness. That is, 50 percent is inherited, 40 percent comes from how we interpret what happens, and the final 10 percent is attributed to our life circumstances – where we live, our health, etc. It's within that 40 percent that we have a lot of room to grow. How we interpret what happens to us and the stories we tell about ourselves are malleable. However, we need to be aware that our *emotions,* not just our thoughts, have a large impact on how we respond to what happens. Below are three common ways that emotions, triggered particularly by negative feedback, distort our thinking about the past, present, and future.

1. Our Past: We've Never Done Anything Right – When we get upsetting feedback about *today* it influences the story we tell ourselves about yesterday. Someone gives you feedback about one bad choice you just made and suddenly all you can think about are *all the poor choices* you've ever made. You can't even recall one example of a good choice you've made.

2. Our Present: Not One Thing, Everything – When someone tells you just sang that song off key, you think, *I sing off key? I can't do anything right.* Rushing to this type of generalized conclusion prevents you from hearing the content of the feedback – that you sang *one* particular song off key.

3. Our Future: The Forever Bias – In the same way, emotions can affect how you imagine the future. "You had mayonnaise on your cheek during the date," becomes, "I will die alone." This may seem like an obvious distortion to an outsider, but to the person experiencing the feedback, the conclusion is very real.

II. HOW TO DISMANTLE OUR DISTORTIONS OF FEEDBACK

We can become easily overwhelmed by the tendency of our emotions to distort feedback. To understand the actual *content* of feedback, we need to dismantle those distortions. This doesn't mean ignoring negative feedback or pretending it's positive. It means finding a way to turn down the volume so we can take in the actual content of the feedback.

Four Ways to Dismantle Distortions

1. Be Prepared, Be Mindful – When we know feedback is coming, it is helpful to prepare. The first way to prepare is to know yourself. How do you usually respond to less-than-flattering feedback? People tend to have a specific "feedback footprint" – or a typical way they respond. Do you blame others, chatter, apologize, or agree quietly while resolving not to change? Do you initially protest wildly against the feedback but then with time come to accept it? Or do you start by accepting it and then dismiss it over time? It is extremely helpful to know your own feedback footprint. Simply ask yourself, *How do I typically react to feedback?*

Another way to be prepared is to "inoculate" yourself against the worst feedback. In the same way a real inoculation gives you a bit of the virus so your body can protect itself from a larger dose later on, start with exposing yourself to challenging feedback. Imagine the worst possible feedback and what actions you might take if you received it. For example, you imagine that your start-up won't get funded. In response, you decide you'll go with the scaled down Plan B. Once you know how to deal with the worst feedback, when it actually does arrive you will be able to think, *Yes, this is what I feared might happen. I've seen this before. I'll be okay.*

2. Separate the Strands: Feeling/Story/Feedback – When distortions find their way into your interpretation of the feedback, it is helpful to separate your emotions, your interpretations, and the actual feedback so you can see each more clearly. Simply ask yourself: (1) *What do I feel? (2) What's the story I'm telling? (3) What's the actual feedback?*

3. Contain the Story – We tend to distort feedback in a few typical ways. If the feedback is about something I am doing right now, I turn it into *always*. If the feedback is about a specific skill of mine, I make generalizations about *all* of my skills. If the feedback is from one person, I assume *everyone* thinks this way. Instead, we need to remember the three *laws of physics for stories*:

- Time – The present does not change the past.
- Specificity – Being bad at one thing doesn't mean you are bad at all things or that you will always be bad at it.
- People – If one person doesn't like you, it doesn't mean that everyone doesn't like you.

Below are three tools to help you stick to the laws of physics for stories.

a. Use a Feedback Containment Chart – In this chart, disentangle what the feedback *is* about from what it is *not* about.

What the feedback IS about	*What the feedback is NOT about*
Whether *this* person still loves me.	Whether I'm lovable, whether I'll find love.
Whether I get *this* job.	Whether I'll get a job in the future. Whether I will ever work in my field.
Whether I'm as productive as I might be on the publications front.	Whether I'm a good clinician, a smart colleague, a valued team member.

b. Draw a Balancing Picture – When you know you are overreacting to *one* negative comment in comparison to the dozens of positive ones, create a pie chart or a pictorial representation to actually visualize the ratio of positive to critical feedback.

c. Right-Size the Future Consequences – While consequences are a very real result of negative feedback, people often overestimate how awful they will feel in advance. For example, you don't get the pay raise, so you conclude that your spouse *will* leave you. The goal is not to pretend serious consequences don't matter, instead we should "right-size" them so we have a more accurate sense of how we will feel. *My spouse might leave me, but that's unlikely.*

4. Change Your Vantage Point – Finding ways to see your situation from a different point of view is extremely helpful in dismantling distortions. Feedback to us always seems more potent than feedback to others – our sister, colleague, or friend. Next time you receive challenging feedback, imagine how you would react if you were the sibling or the colleague of the feedback receiver. Or, take the feedback to a friend and get the different perspective directly from her. Received a disturbing email from your colleague? Bring it to a friend and see if he finds it as troubling. Another suggestion is to imagine yourself ten or twenty years in the future. How does the current feedback seem now? Is it less significant from the vantage point of a friend, a colleague, or the future?

III. CULTIVATE A GROWTH MINDSET

The previous chapters looked at how wiring and emotions affect our reactions to feedback. This chapter explores how our *mindset* also affects our response to feedback, and how we can cultivate a mindset that makes the best use of feedback. As this whole section of the book reiterates, how we tell our identity story is crucial in whether we have a robust or brittle sense of self. You would assume that two people with the exact same set of abilities, life experiences, and wiring would each have the same sense of their identity. In fact, they very well may not. Some people tell their identity stories in ways that leave them with a strong sense of self and others tell it differently and end up with a frail one. However, the way we tell these stories is *not* set in stone. Below are two crucial shifts you can make that will strengthen your identity and your ability to take in feedback.

1. Give up Simple Labels and Cultivate Complexity

Sometimes we view ourselves in black-and-white terms. *I'm good. I'm competent.* These simple terms have us believe that we are *all* or *nothing.* When we get feedback that suggests we are not *all*, then the only other option is to believe we are *nothing*. There is no *partly*. When this happens, our only choice is to reject the feedback. Instead, we can work to develop a more nuanced view of ourselves. Yes, you were trying to help your aging mother by putting her in a full-time care facility, and this was a noble act, but at times you were impatient and part of your decision was based on self-interest. It is not helpful to have the cut-and-dried view of yourself as "someone who would do *anything* for those you love." Instead, recognize that you are not that simple.

No one is perfect, so it's best to give up the belief that you are perfect. At a minimum, thinking you are perfect makes you less likable at parties, but more importantly, it makes it harder for you to learn from feedback. One way to relinquish this false view of yourself is to acknowledge three things that are true about you (and about everyone!):

a. *You Will Make Mistakes* – It's easy to forget this and become defensive when someone is pointing out an error you've made. Once you accept that you will make mistakes, this takes off some of the pressure when receiving feedback.

b. You Have Complex Intentions – Just like in the example with helping the aging mother, mixed in with our noble intentions are some less lofty ones. We can be vain, we cut corners when tired, and we can be self-promoting.

c. You Have Contributed to the Problem – As was mentioned earlier in the book, in most situations, we have contributed in some way to the problem. Accepting this makes it easier to get something out of the feedback.

2. Shift from a Fixed to a Growth Mindset

In addition to the problem of seeing ourselves in simple terms, we sometimes have another problem with our sense of self. We may see our traits and skills as "fixed," or set in stone. As Professor Carol Dweck found, people with fixed mindsets see all feedback as a determination of whether they have the abilities, or they don't. If you learn you don't have the ability, then you might as well quit. In contrast, those with a *growth* mindset pay attention to feedback because they believe that the feedback is key to helping them improve. Those with a growth mindset not only bounce back more quickly from feedback, but they actually learn more. In school, after receiving negative feedback (such as a low grade), students with a growth mindset say they will study more or study differently, whereas those with a fixed mindset say they "felt dumb, would study less the next time, and seriously consider cheating."

So, how *do* you move from a fixed to a growth mindset? The first step is awareness. Do you generally think of failure as a dead end *or* a step in helping you make necessary progress? Do you see challenges as threats to your identity *or* opportunities? There are three specific practices you can use to develop a growth identity:

a. Sort Toward Coaching – When people hear feedback, they either sort it into the "evaluation" bin or the "coaching" bin. This decision greatly impacts how you make use of the feedback. For example, Elsbeth finishes the first half of her three-hour presentation. During a break, a client says it's going well, but suggests she increase the energy level. If she reads this as evaluation, she may think, *I am boring everyone. Maybe I'm not up for this.* However, if she sees it as coaching, then she might think, *I should have a cup of coffee and think about how to make the second half more engaging.*

b. Separate Assessment, Consequences, and Judgment – There are three parts to evaluation. Assessment tells you where you stand: you placed fourth in the race with a time of 5 minutes and 19 seconds. Consequences let you know what happens as a result of the assessment: you qualify for the regionals but not the nationals. The last part, judgment, is the story givers and receivers of feedback tell: you are thrilled by your performance, but your coach thinks you should have done better. When you separate these three things out, you can decide which you want to focus on with the giver.

c. Give Yourself a "Second Score" – Everyone has received a negative evaluation – you got rejected from a school, a job, a team, a client. However, you still have the opportunity to give yourself a "second score." Rate yourself on how well you responded to the first score. Even if you got an F on the first score, you can still get an A+ for how you handled it. Do you give up or do you see what you can learn from the failure? Arguably, this second score is the more important of the two. Make this second score a life habit.

Part 4 – Feedback in Conversation

I. HOW GOOD DO I HAVE TO BE

While the previous sections focused on how to become better at receiving feedback, this chapter introduces ways to turn down or put limits on feedback. Whether you don't want the feedback *right now*, or never, there are ways to set boundaries. Because this summary focuses primarily on how to improve your ability to learn from feedback, it includes little information from this chapter. If you want to learn how to turn away feedback with grace and honesty, see Chapter 10 in the book.

II. NAVIGATE THE CONVERSATION

Most feedback conversations have three parts, and you will get a lot more out of the conversation if you skillfully manage each part:

Opening – A piece often skipped. Clarify what kind of feedback you want and what kind the giver is intending to give.
Body – A two-way exchange in which you need to skillfully listen, assert, manage the process, and problem solve.
Closing – Clarify commitments, action steps, benchmarks, procedural contracts, and follow-up.

Manage the OPENING -- The following two suggestions help you set up a feedback conversation for success.

A. Clarify the Purpose – In some conversations, it is unclear what kind of feedback the giver is giving you. As the receiver, think about what kind of feedback would be useful for you. If you want encouragement, then you may be seeking appreciation more than feedback.

B. Influence the Agenda – Sometimes the giver jumps right into an evaluation or an accusation and you feel your only role is to react. Instead, say, "Can we take a minute to step back so I'm clear on our purposes" or "I want to hear your perspective, and then I'll share my view, and we can figure out why our views are different."

Manage the BODY -- If you can develop the four following skills, you will be better able to navigate a feedback conversation.

A. Listening – Listening may be the most challenging skill when receiving feedback, but it certainly has the greatest benefits. To improve your listening, know that a feedback conversation is actually not a one-on-one chat. Each person comes with their "internal voice" – their thoughts and feelings about the topic. And if you are busy listening to your internal voice, it's hard to listen to others. Part of what activates this voice is when we are triggered. Remember we can be easily triggered by truth, identity, and relationship issues. You need to identify which you tend to fall prey to. Then have a conversation *with yourself* ahead of time telling yourself to tame this trigger and instead, look for what is right about the feedback. Try to remain intensely curious about what the giver says and why you see things differently.

B. Asserting – Feedback is like a puzzle in which both participants have some of the pieces. While it might seem out of place to assert yourself in a feedback conversation, if you don't, then you are withholding some of the pieces. The goal in asserting is *not* to convince the other person that you are right, "That advice is wrong" or "I'm not the real problem here." Instead, try to share what has been left out, "I agree that I've contributed to the problem, but there are other inputs that are important for us to understand" or "It's hard for me to focus on your feedback. I think we need to discuss how I'm feeling, as well as the feedback itself."

C. Managing the Process –Exceptionally skilled communicators, in addition to listening and asserting, have one more skill – the ability to step outside the conversation, observe what's going on, and intervene to get it back on track. You, too, can get better at diagnosing where the conversation is getting stuck, describing it to the other person, and proposing how to move forward. Here are some examples of process moves, or managing the process:

- *"We're both making arguments, but I don't think either of us is listening to the other person. I'm not doing a good enough job of trying to understand your point of view, so please tell me more about why this is so important to you."*
- *"I see two issues here, and we're jumping back and forth between them. Let's discuss them one at a time."*

D. Problem Solving – Problem solving during feedback conversations is a skill that can be learned. First, it helps to identify the underlying interests of the feedback giver. When people provide feedback, they usually have one of three types of interests: they want to help you, they want to help themselves and the relationship, or they want to help the organization/team/family. Once you understand someone's true interests, you can better devise possibilities that will help address these interests.

Manage the CLOSING

At the end of a feedback conversation, it helps to close with a commitment. Be explicit about what you've agreed to and what you will do next. It doesn't mean you have solved the entire problem, it just means that you are attempting to achieve clarity. The commitment might simply be, "I want to think about what you've said, and let's talk tomorrow." To articulate what you plan to do, you can create: **Action Plans (**Who does what tomorrow?), **Benchmarks and Consequences** (How will progress be measured and when?), **Procedural Contracts** (What is the process for working on agreements?), and **New Strategies** (What new strategies will you try?)

III. GET GOING: Quick suggestions to solicit feedback, test the advice, speed up your learning, and gauge your progress

1. Name One Thing – Even when feedback is spot-on, sometimes there are simply too many pieces of advice to stay on top of. Instead, see if you and the feedback giver can *name one thing* – identify the most important piece of feedback for you to start with. As the receiver, you can help by changing your request from, "I'd like some feedback" to "What's one thing I could work on?"

2. Try Small Experiments – Sometimes we're not sure if feedback is a good or bad idea. Feedback can be threatening because it's asking us to give up what's already comfortable. So, if your wife suggests that you wake up earlier and practice yoga, it seems easier and more familiar to simply sleep late and forgo the yoga. Instead, try a small experiment – that is, try it *once*. You might think, *I can try yoga* **once** *and if I don't like it, I still have 10,999 mornings left to wake up late.* This changes the decision-making from, *Should I wake up early for yoga for the rest of my life?* to, *Should I try yoga for one morning to see what I think?*

3. Ride It Out – When we implement feedback that requires a change, there is a typical pattern in which things usually get worse before they get better. It's uncomfortable. There's a learning curve. But then things get better. The problem is that people often give up before things turn around. To prevent this, put things in place so you don't quit before seeing the benefits. Some people make the change social. They enlist a friend, a colleague, or someone online to check in with to report progress and commiserate. This not only provides a human connection, but it holds you accountable to someone else. The second way to avoid quitting prematurely is to keep score. Find some way to track your progress – through an app, a pedometer, paper charts or something online – to keep you motivated.

4. Coach Your Coach –"Coaching the coach" lets the coach know what helps you learn and accelerates your learning. Keep in mind what you've learned about your own response to feedback from the rest of the book and speak explicitly about your patterns with your coach. For example, "I'm really sensitive to negative feedback…" or "I tend to get defensive about feedback at first…" This doesn't mean dictating how the feedback giver speaks to you, but it's about having a conversation to figure out together what works best.

What happens when you want feedback but you are the boss? It can be difficult to get honest feedback, but there are ways to learn from your subordinates. They have a perspective no one else has. They see how well your message is getting through and they know when you are creating unnecessary extra work. However, it can be challenging to get honest feedback from subordinates because they worry about their job security. As the boss who would like to be the feedback receiver, it helps if you take a few steps. First, show that you are in fact interested in and will listen to feedback. Then, consider setting up a few "reverse mentor" relationships in which you look to the younger generation to provide you with feedback so you can see your role and the organization through their eyes.

IV. PULL TOGETHER: Feedback Systems in Organizations

There is no feedback system that is perfect for any organization. The people in the organization respond differently to feedback and what works for one person, most likely won't work for another. Because we all work in places with imperfect feedback systems, and imperfect people, the only thing we *can* do is to help people within the system communicate more clearly around feedback. This entire book centers on the premise that it is the *receiver's* skills that have the most influence in driving their own learning. With this in mind, below are suggestions for what we can do to empower receivers to maximize their learning.

1. What leadership can do

The leaders of an organization often trumpet the benefits of their feedback system and stop there. This leaves employees to grumble and complain about the drawbacks. Instead, rather than just proclaiming the benefits, take the time to be honest and discuss the challenges with your current feedback system. Honestly discussing these problems changes the role of employees from victim to shared decision-maker in thinking about and addressing these concerns. In addition, to ensure that feedback receivers get the most out of your feedback system, create a *culture of learning* at your organization. Below are ways to do this.

⇒ *Highlight learning stories* – When staff make great strides due to hard work or endurance, even in the face of great challenges, share these stories with everyone at the organization. Emphasize stories about learning and learning from mistakes whenever possible.
⇒ *Cultivate growth mindset* – As was mentioned earlier, people with growth mindsets react more productively to feedback. Teach your staff about the growth and fixed mindsets and discuss how these affect one's reactions to feedback.
⇒ *Discuss second scores* – Also mentioned earlier in the book, "second scores" are often more important than first ones. As a feedback giver, encourage the receiver to reflect on her second score —that is, how she responds to challenging feedback.
⇒ *Create multitrack feedback* – Be aware that in addition to formal mechanisms for receiving feedback, receivers also have informal ways of getting feedback: coaching conversations with friends and peers, discussions of best practices and skills that don't help, and stories of success and failure. Support these activities by giving time for people to meet with each other and discuss.

2. What team leaders and feedback givers can do

Rather than *preaching*, a much more effective way to get people to respond positively to feedback is to *model* this type of learning yourself. Be transparent about asking for coaching and help. Be explicit about the ways you still find it challenging to receive feedback. Next, be aware of your own tendencies as a feedback giver – do you hold back feedback because you fear the receiver's reactions? Even if it's difficult in the short-term, giving feedback will help in the long-run. If you want your employees to learn, you need to get comfortable giving feedback. Finally, it is helpful to ask receivers what is the best way to coach them, rather than simply relying on your own feedback style.

3. What Receivers Can Do

The entire book has been about what the feedback receiver can do. As the feedback giver, remember that the most important person in learning from feedback is the feedback *receiver*. As the receiver, know that nothing can get in the way of your learning – you are surrounded by sources of feedback and it's up to you to take the reins and get the feedback you need to grow and improve.

THE MAIN IDEA's PD ideas for *Thanks for the Feedback*

I. Take an Honest Look at Your Feedback System

"Nothing affects the learning culture of an organization more than the skill with which its executive team receives feedback."

A. Discuss the pros and cons of your current feedback system

If you want your teachers to take an honest look at the topic of feedback, it helps to start by engaging them in a thoughtful discussion of the feedback system you currently have in place – both the pros and the cons. Rather than preaching the benefits of the school or district feedback/coaching/evaluation system, let those on the receiving end *give the leaders* some feedback. Then *you* model a sense of comfort with receiving feedback. This discussion will also provide the groundwork to show why the feedback *receiver* is so important in moving practice forward. Discuss (in pairs or a large group):

- What is the school's current approach to providing teachers with feedback and coaching?
- What works about this approach? (Consider the feedback's content, frequency, accuracy, usefulness, as well as accountability for implementing changes.)
- What do you think could be improved?

B. Why the feedback *RECEIVER* is so important

Tell the teachers that as leaders, we have been focusing on new and better ways to *give* feedback, when really, the key player is not the *giver*, but the *receiver* of the feedback. If the receiver is unwilling or unable to accept the feedback, then the feedback is useless. It is actually the receivers who are in control of how much of the feedback they absorb and whether they choose to change. However, it is challenging to receive feedback. These PD ideas will focus on why it is hard to receive feedback and what strategies can make feedback more useful and insightful. The goal is to actually *learn* from feedback – even when it's off base, unfair, poorly delivered, and, frankly, you're not in the mood.

- Have teachers discuss what they think about the idea that the feedback *receiver* is the key player in making feedback useful.

II. Understand Feedback Triggers

This section introduces teachers (or school leaders) to the three main triggers that get in the way of making good use of feedback.

A. Discuss a time when receiving feedback was challenging: Have teachers think of a time they received feedback and responded to it in a less-than-ideal-way (or they gave feedback to someone else and that person responded poorly to it). Ask them to try to remember why the feedback might have rubbed them the wrong way.

B. Overview of the three feedback triggers: To introduce the three triggers, I highly recommend you copy and have the teachers read the introduction of the book (just 10 pages) and the overview of the three triggers (chapter 1 – another 10 pages). It is written in a very captivating way – this is *not* dry textbook reading. I guarantee everyone will like it (OK, 90% of the staff will). Or ask a few teachers to read it and present the content to the others (a leadership opportunity…) A third idea is provide teachers with the ***Cheat Sheet*** from The Main Idea – basically a 2-page summary of the three triggers, so they can read an overview.

C. Understand the three triggers

After teachers have read a bit about the three triggers, and perhaps discussed them, give them an opportunity to think about feedback in an educational setting. Use my examples below or create your own. Ask teachers to work in groups to fill out the chart – how might a *truth* trigger look when, as a teacher, you receive feedback about the rigor of your lesson? How would your reaction differ if you experienced an *identity* trigger for the same feedback? The goal is to help teachers (or leaders) become better at *identifying* when these triggers happen to them.

Examples of feedback to a teacher	Truth Trigger	Relationship Trigger	Identity Trigger
[classroom management] "4 students were completely off-task for 10 minutes of the lesson, 1 student was texting under the desk, and 2 other students had their pencils out but never started the Do Now."	"That's ridiculous! My students were completely engaged and on task during that class period."	"My principal *never* gives me feedback about all of the good work I do with my students, and then after the first visit, *this* is the feedback he gives me?!"	"It's three months into school and I'm still having classroom management problems. I'll never be able to get my class in order."
[rigor] "The majority of questions you asked were lower level (at the comprehension level). When you did ask a more analytical question, no one immediately raised a hand, and you answered the question yourself."	(Have teachers fill in the rest of the chart with examples of how different responses might look based on different triggers.)		
[Put your example here.]			

III. Manage Your Triggers to Learn From Feedback

"We often learn the most from the feedback that in the moment is the most distressing."

A. Introduce different ways to deal with feedback triggers

Part of what I love about this book is that there are great, concrete suggestions for turning around feedback that is distressing, so you can learn from it. Have teachers read and discuss this brief summary of some of those suggestions for *receivers:*

Suggestions for Feedback Receivers – How to deal with TRUTH triggers

Separate appreciation, evaluation, and coaching -- It can be disappointing if your principal says, "Nice job" after observing you when you wanted more critical feedback. As the receiver, try specifying if you don't get what you want, "Thank you for the appreciation, but I was hoping you might provide me with more of a critique."

Seek to understand the feedback itself – If feedback is vague, ask to clarify, "Can you tell me what you observed that makes you say that?" or "So, what specifically do you think I should change to improve?" Sometimes the feedback giver has different information or a different interpretation, so try to get this view, "My understanding was that my class was deeply engaged. What makes you say the students were off task?"

Suggestions for Feedback Receivers – How to deal with RELATIONSHIP triggers

Don't switchtrack, give each topic its own track – When there is an issue with the feedback giver, we often change our focus from the content of the feedback to the problems we have with the giver. Instead, separate the two issues. For example, Ella, a TA who has put a lot of effort into her students with disabilities feels she never gets feedback from the head teacher. Eight months into the year, the teacher says, "You're spending too much time focusing on Howard." Ella silently switchtracks as she thinks, *Have you noticed what I put into this job and what I mean to these kids?* Before she says anything, she catches herself, *Oh, there are two topics here. My interactions with Howard AND how I feel unappreciated.* Here is what she could say to the teacher, "Let's talk about how I am spending my time with Howard now because that's important. This is also the first time I've gotten feedback, so after we talk about Howard, I would like to talk about how I get feedback and what you notice about my work with the kids that is positive."

Suggestions for Feedback Receivers – How to deal with IDENTITY triggers

Understand your wiring – Look at the ways wiring impacts how you receive feedback (see the **Cheat Sheet** – baseline, swing, sustain, and how you think about the past, present, and future). Identify which of these sounds most like you (your feedback footprint) by simply asking, "How do I typically react to feedback?" Then you will be more prepared to respond to feedback in the moment.

Dismantle distortions – Contain the feedback by separating the *content* of the feedback from your *feelings*. Take the time to write down: 1) What you *feel*, 2) What the actual feedback is about. Or, create fill in the prompts like the example below:

What the feedback *IS* about: Whether I incorporated rigor into *this* class well.
What the feedback is *NOT* about: Whether I teach low-level lessons in general or whether I'll ever challenge my students.

Cultivate a growth identify – To ensure that you learn from feedback, give yourself a "second score." Rate yourself on how well you responded to the first round of feedback. If you received a low rating or lots of critical feedback from your principal, would you give yourself a *D* for how you responded ("He never taught science so he doesn't know what he's talking about!") or would you give yourself an *A* ("Wow – I didn't realize I wasn't checking for understanding. I'd like to observe Gaby because she's great at this.")

B. Experiment with solutions for handling feedback triggers

• Have teachers practice ways to deal with triggers *during* the PD session. You can create examples of feedback and have teachers practice responding. *Or*, have them write down how they might respond. Below is an example for dealing with *truth* triggers:

Feedback	How might each side see things differently?	What might the receiver find that is *right* about the feedback?
"4 students were completely off-task for 10 minutes of the lesson, 1 student was texting under the desk, and 2 other students had their pencils out but never started the Do Now"	Principal: For the 10 minutes I was there, it seemed like classroom management got in the way of the learning. Teacher: The principal was only there 10 minutes and it was right after gym. Once he left, I addressed the off-task behavior, the kids settled down, and we got right to work.	Perhaps I am too lax about giving the kids time after PE to settle in. Even though they got to work after 10 minutes, if I made better use of the start of class, perhaps the Do Now would only take 5 minutes *and* the whole class would complete it.
"The majority of questions you asked were lower level (at the comprehension level) and when you did ask a more analytical question, when no on immediately raised a hand, you answered the question yourself."	(Have the teachers fill in the rest of the chart after providing the example above.)	
[Put your example here.]		

• Over the next two weeks, have everyone commit to try *one* of the approaches in the chart above and report back at the next meeting.