

Fuel your growth

Use feedback to become the leader you want to be.



“Congratulations, Bill,” I said as I began the performance review. “You’ve done an outstanding job in leading this project. You’ve met every goal and delivered one of the finest examples of leadership I’ve ever seen.”

“Thank you,” Bill said, smiling. “I appreciate this recognition, and I’m glad that we were successful.”

He paused for a moment, and then opened his notebook, saying, “I’d like to review every point in the project where I struggled or failed in my leadership, so that I can be sure I’ve learned all that I can. Will you help me?”

It was a remarkable response but not surprising from an individual who has long been a top performer and growing leader on my team.

Can you imagine actually asking your boss to review your mistakes? While some people will spend tremendous energy avoiding mistakes and even hiding them when they happen, wise leaders know that mistakes are inevitable and will use them as opportunities to improve. The difference is in how they seek and apply feedback.

Think about the last major project you managed at home or at work. When the project was over, did you go back and ask the people involved to help you learn where you could improve? Or were you satisfied with simply achieving the result?

If it’s the latter, you may go on to achieve similar results in the future, but you’ve missed a real opportunity for growth — one that could ultimately limit your success.

In the end, your true growth as a leader will not be based on what you achieve; it will be based on what you learn. If you want to succeed at higher and higher levels, here are three ways to seek and apply the feedback you need to help you grow.

Change your mindset about feedback. I still cringe when someone says, “Would you like some feedback?” because this question is seldom followed by a compliment. But over the years, I’ve learned so much from this type of advice that today I can easily accept the offer.

If you’re resistant to feedback, start by imagining that the person is really saying, “I’d like to help you become a better leader and have even greater career success. Will you let me?” Mentally reframing the individual’s offer in this way will instantly lower your defenses.

Make it easy for others to help you. Not everyone will have the courage to offer his or her feedback directly, particularly if what he or she has to say is difficult. And yet, this type of feedback will often be the most valuable.

Years ago, I was hired to lead a very troubled team on which there existed many issues and little trust in leadership. My first act was to put a small suggestion box in the break room with the promise that I would publicly answer any comments or questions placed there. The next morning, the box was overflowing. Many of the questions were difficult, but by continuing to answer them in the days and weeks that followed, I learned what I needed to successfully lead that team for several years.

Create a way for others to offer feedback within the safety of anonymity, and you will receive the candid and direct advice you need to hear.

Really apply what you’ve learned. No matter what methods you use to seek feedback, people will stop offering it if you never apply it to your actions. Of course, not all of the advice you receive will be correct, and you must always be discerning about both the content and the source. But if you continue to make the same mistakes over and over again despite the attempts of others to help you, they will eventually give up.

Begin to keep track of the changes you’re making as a result of feedback. This log will show whether you’re applying what you’ve learned and, over the years, can also become a valuable journal of personal growth.

An airplane in flight relies on navigational feedback and constant adjustments to finally reach its destination. In the same way, feedback on where you can grow is the homing signal that keeps your career and your life on track.

Use feedback to fuel your growth to become the leader — and the person — you want to be.

JIM HULING is CEO of The Jim Huling Group, a strategic consulting company enabling leaders and their teams to achieve extraordinary results. Jim’s leadership experience spans over three decades, including eleven years as CEO of a leading technology company named multiple times as one of the “25 Best Small Companies to Work For in America.” Jim is a nationally recognized keynote speaker and is also the author of *Choose Your Life!* a powerful proven method for creating the life you want, now available on Amazon.