



**The Power of Feedback**  
**35 Principles for Turning Feedback from Others**  
**Into Personal and Professional Change**

**Notes by Frumi Rachel Barr, MBA, PhD**

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**Author's big thought:** The process of review and feedback is common in most organizations. At one time or another, we will all likely receive feedback on our performance. But, unfortunately, most organizations and individuals don't know how to use the feedback they receive to improve their performance. As a result, nothing ever changes. The quality of the feedback isn't the problem; it's what we do with it that counts.

For business leaders and their organizations, as well as professionals in any industry, listening to and acting on feedback is the best and most effective way to become more competent, capable, and effective. Highly effective people use feedback differently than the rest of us. Rather than focusing on the negatives feedback reveals, the most effective people focus instead on the positives feedback uncovers. They use feedback to discover their professional strengths, increase their skills, and turn their strengths into long-term advantages. After all, the most successful people don't do everything well; they do a few things very well. That's the true power of feedback.

**Introduction:**

- Feedback can be very powerful. Those who look for and accept it position themselves to be more competent and capable. Those who resist, reject, or avoid it doom themselves to the limitations of their own personal insights – which may be right or wrong, but they will never know. They fail to see the power in feedback.
- Without feedback we are flying blind. Others see things we can't see. Those who are the least effective at accurately predicting their strengths and weaknesses are the individuals themselves.
- Most people do not feel they lack feedback from others on how they could improve their performance at work, how they could be a better parent, how they could be more considerate and caring spouse or friend, or simply how they could become a better person. For many

people, the typical reaction to new feedback is to say, “So what, I’m too busy to do anything about it anyway.”

- Most people receive much more feedback than they are willing or able to implement. To cope with all this information, some stop listening; others become defensive. Some blame others, and others simply ignore or don’t understand the feedback.
- A growing trend is to provide people with more performance feedback on their strengths and weaknesses. Companies institute performance appraisal processes with more feedback, including upward evaluations, 360-degree or 4-way feedback, and peer valuation systems.
- Getting feedback from multiple sources is an effective way to discover the strengths and weaknesses in our performance.
- Although people are receiving more feedback, changes in their behavior do not seem to be taking place. Also, later in their careers, as people become managers, the feedback seems less open, honest, and straightforward, and more politically loaded.
- For most people, giving and receiving feedback has been more of a negative than a positive experience. Most people focus on the negative and believe that the key to self-improvement is found in fixing their weaknesses.
- The result of the author’s research made it clear that developing a moderate strength into a profound strength would have a far greater impact on performance than fixing something that was slightly below average.
- The great learning from the analysis was that people who have exceptional skills in a specific area are also skillful in performing some of what he calls “*companion behaviors*”. He also found that improvement in companion behaviors have a remarkable impact on perceived performance.
- The purpose of this book is to help you prioritize, plan for, and change as a result of the feedback you receive. By following a few simple principles and steps, lasting and effective change is possible.

### Chapter 1: Reacting to Feedback

The process of giving thousands of people feedback on their individual performance has uncovered several clear and defined principles of feedback that generally apply in most interactions involving feedback.

- **Principle 1:** Asking others for input increases their expectation that you will change in a positive way.
- **Principle 2:** If you receive feedback but do not change for the better, you will be perceived more negatively than if you had not received feedback.
- **Principle 3:** You will not change what you do not believe needs to be changed.
- **Principle 4:** Rather than accept criticism, we tend to denounce not only what is said, but those who say it. The extent to which you have developed your denial skills determines the extent to which you accept feedback or question its accuracy.
  - To protect ourselves, each of us has developed a useful skill called *denial*. When you receive feedback from others, if you are like most people, you will pass through some level of denial.
  - *Minimal denial* presents itself as rationalization. People in minimal denial are generally more aware of their rationalizations, and often can be persuaded to accept the feedback.
  - *Moderate denial* is less conscious. In this situation, people react to feedback, but they usually do not know why they are reacting.
  - Those who experience *advanced denial* are not at all conscious they are in denial.

- One key to understanding the feedback you receive is to work through your denial, and accept that that the perceptions of others are, in fact, reality.
- **Principle 5:** All perceptions are real, at least to those who own them.
  - The most productive approach to handle feedback is to assume they are real. Even when perceptions are completely inaccurate, they still represent reality.
- **Principle 6:** Balancing your normal but counterproductive reactions to feedback is essential in effectively dealing with feedback.
  - Balance is the key to effectively dealing with feedback. You must be able to balance between rationalization and taking feedback too literally. Effectively dealing with feedback may require some rationalization, but it may also require you to take some results at face value.
  - The following are four extremes or common coping strategies used un processing feedback that require balance
    1. *Rationalization versus Literal Acceptance.* To accept feedback from others, you must balance rationalization with taking feedback too literally. Rationalizing typically involves making excuses, justifying behavior, or discrediting the feedback, and is a counterproductive behavior. People don't always completely agree on the meaning of feedback results, because we all respond differently to the same experiences. To accept feedback, we frequently need to balance what some people say against the differing opinions of others.
    2. *Flight versus Fight.* To accept feedback from others, you must balance the reaction to fight against feedback with the desire to run away from it. Although fighting feedback or trying to prove it wrong may be counterproductive, the other extreme, "flight" can also be counterproductive. People who engage in flight or escape behavior often believe that negative feedback is more negative than actually reported. Why is the process of receiving feedback so threatening? Most people spend an exorbitant amount of time and energy trying to hide any evidence of incompetence. Most people have a few fears tucked away in the back of their minds about what could happen if others knew they were not competent.
    3. *"That's Interesting" versus "that's terrible."* Although some people believe receiving negative feedback means the end of the world, other people read their results as if the data were an unrelated technical report. To accept feedback from others, you must balance under reaction with overreaction to feedback. People who don't feel a very strong need to change, but who continue to get negative feedback, often begin to make plans to find another position in the company or to move to another company. They will do anything rather than discuss the results and consider appropriate changes.
    4. *Paralysis of Analysis versus Ignorance is Bliss.* To accept feedback from others, you must analyze the results well enough to understand the data and its implications, without getting so caught up in the analysis that you never reach any conclusions.
      - If perceptions are reality, and striking an appropriate balance is important, what is the most effective way to process feedback? One way is to improve your attitude toward receiving feedback. We should perceive feedback as a welcome opportunity to learn and improve rather than as a dreaded obligation.
- **Principle 7:** The process of change begins with accepting the feedback given.
  - Consider the following helpful ideas about how to look at feedback:
  - Enjoy feedback because of the learning opportunity
  - Know that feedback is difficult to give, and it is often uncomfortable for others to provide.

- Prefer negative feedback to none at all.
- Consider the positive feedback first to reinforce the things you do well.
- The only people who are truly incompetent are those who refuse to listen and accept feedback from others.
- Receiving negative feedback means that someone cares enough to tell you how to improve.
- Believe that you CAN change and improve and then report to those who provided the feedback about the things that you have chosen not to change and the areas that you would like to change.

## Chapter 2: Why Did I get That Feedback?

- **Principle 8:** Others see us differently than we see ourselves.
  - Understanding how impression formation and attribution work also helps us make the process work for us instead of against us.
  - The perceptions others have about us are real. People cannot be talked out of their impressions. Those impressions are created from what they observe and experience.
- **Principle 9:** To change the impression another person has of you, you must change your behavior.
  - By understanding and working with the attribution process, we can create for others a more accurate perception.
  - Solomon Asch found that, rather than looking at individual traits, we see the interaction of traits and form an overall impression of the entire person. We see others as a total package and do not usually focus on individual parts. People do not objectively judge individual issues; they bundle them collectively.
  - Inconsistencies in performance cause us to search for sensible ways to rationalize inconsistencies. Either we change our overall impression of the person, or we ignore performance on some traits to maintain our overall impression. The reality is that ignoring some traits is easier than changing an overall impression.
  - As we observe the behavior and performance of others, we tend to “package” the information we receive. You may observe in receiving feedback from others that people may perceive and attribute positive or negative traits to you that you do not believe you actually have.
  - The ‘halo’ effect refers to the way our perceptions may be altered, either positively or negatively, because of our overall impressions.
- **Principle 10:** Once people form an impression, they are not as open to information that contradicts the original impression.
  - Our perceptions are also heavily influenced by position, status, roles, and responsibilities.
- **Principle 11:** When we provide feedback, we tend to base our perceptions on our own performance and personality.
  - Harold Kelly of UCLA describes four techniques people use to judge whether a behavior should be attributed to the person or the environment.
    1. *Is the behavior distinctive?* Does this behavior occur separate from other behaviors
    2. *Is the behavior consistent over time?*
    3. *Is the behavior consistent over situations?*
    4. *Is there consensus?* Is a person’s behavior similar to others who are known to have these qualities?

- As people judge your behavior, they use criteria similar to these to determine whether what you do is a function of your skill (or lack of it), or the situation.
- **Principle 12:** We tend to perceive the reasons for our own failure as having to do with the situation, but we see failure in others as having to do with their effort, ability, knowledge, or character.
  - When people begin to understand the attribution process, they may begin to conclude that their feedback is not correct. They think that rather than being the “truth,” their feedback is riddled with attributions, packaged impressions, and halo effects. But such conclusions are misleading.
- **Principle 13:** The feedback we receive reflects how others really feel about us and our performance.
  - As you understand more about the attribution process, you learn that the process has as much potential to work for you as against you.
  - The attribution process is as follows:
    1. *Once people form their first impression of you, they strongly resist changing those impressions.* One way to persuade them to change their first impression of you is to ask for their feedback and their help in making a change.
    2. *People form general impressions about you and then rationalize your specific characteristics and behaviors to fit those impressions.* People with highly negative feedback need to consider, “What can I do to change the overall impression others have of me?” This kind of change is referred to as *frame-breaking change*.
    3. *People do not give equal attention to all attributes.*
    4. *Small changes in specific areas can have a significant impact on others’ perceptions of you and create a halo effect.*
    5. *We tend to blame our own failures on factors in the environment, but we tend to blame the failures of others on the individual.*
    6. *Your associates do not want to believe that the source of your problems is the environment.* One of the best ways to help others understand the impact of your situation is to have them pass through the experience with you. Obtaining situational feedback from others helps balance your attributions.

### Chapter 3: Improving your ability to Accept Feedback

- If you are having trouble accepting feedback from others, or if you just want to improve your ability to accept feedback, how do you go about improving and making desired changes? Although having passion and energy is a good great start, sometimes these aren’t enough.
- Research reveals that people who become highly competent at performing a certain skill also become competent at several companion skills.
- **Principle 14:** One way of improving a skill is to improve your performance in companion skills.
  - The combination of the two skills- the desired one and a companion one – increases effectiveness and is often easier to carry out.
  - Improving performance in companion behaviors facilitates improvement in the specific behavior. Seven companion behaviors were found that were strongly associated with accepting feedback. People who were effective at accepting feedback also rated highly in each of these seven behaviors. As you review the following companion behaviors, look for the one or two behaviors that might help you in your current situation.
- 1. *Integrity and Honesty.* Those who were rated highly were: honest in their dealings with others, consistent between their words and actions, walked the talk, and were trusted. We all need to work at being honest and ethical. We all need to question our motives and

examine our behaviors against reality. We all need an objective voice to help us synchronize our self-talk and improve our relations with others. This objective voice is feedback.

2. *Shows Consideration and Concern for others.* People who were rated highly on concern and consideration for others are described as: friendly and approachable, develops positive working relationships with others, responds to others with empathy, when there are disagreements finds solutions that benefit both parties.
3. *Values Differences.* Those who do not value differences tend to accept people and ideas similar to their own, while rejecting or discounting those that are different. They create for themselves a filter that discredits anything different. This automatically eliminates any feedback that does not validate their preconceived perceptions. People who were rated high on valuing differences are described as: respects others, has no bias or favorites, open to new ideas and ways of doing things, works effectively with people who have different points of view. When people value differences in others, they create the opportunity to value feedback from different people with different perspectives.
4. *Develops Others.* When people participate in the development of others, some of that work is bound to rub off. People who were highly rated on developing others are described as: effective at coaching others to improve, encourages people to continue to learn and develop themselves, gives honest and direct feedback, inspires others to develop stretch goals, and is committed to helping others become successful.
5. *Optimism.* The relationship between optimism and accepting feedback is not difficult to see. Pessimists tend to view feedback as a rebuke, scolding, condemnation, or rejection because they fail to see how they can change anything. Optimists, however, tend to view feedback as a helpful suggestion or even encouragement. People who are highly rated on optimism are described as: has positive expectations about others, remains positive when given a difficult task, reacts positively to problems, and maintains a positive perspective in times of crisis.
6. *Demonstrates Willingness to Set Stretch Goals.* People who rate high on willingness to set stretch goals are described as: energized to take on challenges, gets others to establish and pursue stretch goals, willingly goes above and beyond what needs to be done, and sets high standards.
7. *Listens.* Poor listeners have a more difficult time accepting feedback and may not even hear or understand feedback. They begin to react to feedback before it is fully delivered and stop listening. Good listeners take the time to really understand the feedback given, and for them, the message becomes more clarified as they listen. People who rated highly on listening skills are described as: listens carefully, takes time to understand others' needs and problems, listens even if the perspectives of others are different, and avoids criticizing others' ideas before giving them a fair hearing.
  - By taking action to improve performance in a few of these companion behaviors, a person's ability to accept feedback is also improved. Improvement in any one of them will improve your ability to accept feedback.

#### **Chapter 4: Why Change?**

- As soon as people receive feedback, they frequently begin to wrestle with the question, "Why should I change?"
- Feedback usually gives us some good news and some bad news. Most people are willing to acknowledge their weaknesses, but they do not always try to improve them.
- **Principle 15:** Change is only easy when you combine a high level of commitment with a low degree of difficulty.

- The first key to making lasting changes is to increase your level of motivation and commitment to making the change. Without commitment, only the easiest issues can be resolved, and then only with some difficulty.
- **Principle 16:** Over time, people tend to maintain the same level of performance that they had when they first mastered their job.
  - The law of *performance homeostasis* predicts that most people would rather perform their jobs in a relaxed and comfortable state than in a stressed-out, exhausted state,
- **Principle 17:** To maintain a perception of high performance, you must change over time.
  - Since expectations increase over time, performing at the same levels and doing the same kind of work throughout your career predictably results in lower performance evaluations from others as time goes on. Others will always want and expect more.
  - We should replace our goals of performance homeostasis with goals of increasing contribution. Over the long term, the only sane way to increase your contribution is to change the way you work: Work smarter, not harder.
- **Principle 18:** “Average” managers are not good enough to make a significant impact on employee satisfaction and motivation.
  - Average is never good enough to create excellence, and seeking to maintain average performance promotes mediocrity. As employees begin to differentiate themselves by excellent performance in critical areas, especially in a down economy, average performance begins to look bad.
- **Principle 19:** Everything you do makes a difference.
  - As you consider the feedback you receive, you might say to yourself that a particular issue is not significant, or that it doesn’t count. But it does count. It may not count much, looking at the weakness in light of all your strengths, and it may seem totally insignificant, but it definitely counts. Highly effective people believe this; average people do not.
  - Change has to start now, in the present job and in the current situation.
  - Performance problems are a function of three things:
    1. The person (including the person’s ability, character, attitude etc.,)
    2. The environment or situation of the work group (the kind of work, the setting, the interaction with other groups, organizational factors, etc.)
    3. The people who interact with the person (bosses, peers, those who report to the person, etc.)
- **Principle 20:** Involving others in your efforts to change increases the likelihood that change will occur.
  - For the average person, asking others for help is often perceived as a sign of weakness. Most of us view ourselves as rugged individualists making our own decisions, charting our own courses, and mapping our own futures. We tend to underestimate the influence of others in our decisions and actions. One of the best ways to learn new skills and better ways to interact with others is from a coach or mentor- someone we can observe who has the right skills and who will observe us and provide feedback, encouragement, and suggestions for change.
  - Learning to change begins with the right attitude toward change. Some of the following attitudes may help you as you navigate the change process:
    1. If I am not changing and improving, I am standing still (or possibly even degenerating).
    2. Change is a skill I can master.
    3. There will never come a time in which some change will not be useful.

4. Successful people continually change and improve. The reality of having a productive career is that you must continuously look for new ways to add value and increase your effectiveness. The key to career success is finding new and different ways to contribute, and this requires change.

## Chapter 5: Deciding What to Change

- **Principle 21:** The most critical skill in making change based on feedback is deciding what specific issue to work on first.
  - Many feedback experiences are very similar. Often, people identify the issue that appears to be the most negative and conclude it is the most important issue to change. This is faulty logic. Issues that are most negative or most complained about are simply the ones that are most noticeable. Evaluating what issues to change ought to be a completely separate decision-making process, independent from how negatively people react to issues.
  - People face limitations in terms of how many issues they can successfully address at the same time. A guaranteed way to fail in making changes based on feedback is trying to change too many things at the same time.
  - Spreading your efforts between several change efforts might prevent people from noticing that things are changing, because they will see little difference between where you started and where you are now. Focusing your efforts on changing one issue increases the likelihood that people will see a difference.
  - It is critical that you learn how to prioritize issues discovered through feedback according to which will yield the greatest benefit.
  - To manage these expectations, follow these four steps:
    1. Thank anyone and everyone who gave you feedback
    2. Even though you may not be able to respond to every issue, acknowledge that you have received the feedback and that it is valid
    3. Tell the people who gave you feedback that you intend to focus on one or two of the most critical issues
    4. Find a way to demonstrate that you are changing
  - To prioritize issues, rate each issue against three criteria: felt need, ease of change and relative impact.
    - *Felt Need.* As you think about issues raised during feedback, ask yourself the extent to which you have a high, medium or low felt need to change this issue. Do not confuse your felt need for change with the needs and desires of others. Having a high felt need for change is the most important factor in predicting whether change will occur.
    - If you receive negative feedback, take the feedback you received and restate it in your own words, thoughts and feelings. Start the reinvention process by examining how you look at a particular issue, being totally honest with yourself in terms of the impact this issue has in you and others. Try to understand why others become frustrated by the issue while you don't.
    - If you can't reinvent the feedback and take ownership of the perceptions and feelings of others, you will feel no need to change that issue. It frequently helps to have frank, open discussions with others about the issues, especially the one for which you continue to feel little or no need for change.
    - Your need for change is affected by two perspectives: First, how the issue negatively affects you and your associates (the *push*) and, second, how making

the change will have a positive impact (the *pull*). The pull can provide greater motivation. As you focus on the pull, you begin to consider the benefits of making a change. This change of focus can turn guilt into proactivity and frustration into action.

- *Ease of change*. In planning your change process, select at least one issue you know will be easy to change. This not only gives you confidence in your ability to change, but it sends a positive signal to others that you have responded to their feedback.
  - Most of the time we provide feedback based on our overall impression and the packaged bundle of traits that fit the impression, instead of on the specific behaviors that led to our conclusions. Clarity regarding what needs to be changed can significantly improve a person's chance of changing.
- **Principle 22:** Issues dealing with things are easier to change than issues dealing with people.
- *Relative Impact*. The most critical question in prioritizing issues is: "If you were to change one issue, which one would make the most significant difference in how you are perceived?" When you make changes on high-impact issues, others notice a big change. But when you change a low-impact issue, others do not notice the change or they do not see it as very important. To evaluate the relative impact of a change, you need to ask and answer two questions:
    - Which issues are most important? To assess the relative impact of a change, you first need to distinguish between essential, necessary, and nonessential skills, knowledge, and activities.
    - *Essential skills, knowledge, and activities*, if demonstrated well, lead others to perceive high performance.
    - *Necessary skills, knowledge and activities* are those that need to be performed and are a required part of the job but are not as closely linked to perceived high performance.
    - *Nonessential skills, knowledge, and activities* are things that are not required, nor are they linked to high performance as perceived by others. They may be important to you or to the execution of other jobs, but they do not impact your perceived performance on the observed job.
  - From your list of activities, knowledge areas, and skills, choose five that you feel are most essential. To help you make the selection, ask yourself the following questions:
    1. Which of the skills or activities could I perform at an average or good level and still be considered a top performer overall?
    2. If I only did one or two of these things well, which one would make the biggest difference or have the most significant impact on the way others perceive my performance.
    3. Which activities, skills or areas of knowledge do people notice and recognize when I do them well?
    4. Which one or two activities would my boss, peers, or direct reports place in the nonessential category?
    5. Which skill, area of knowledge, or activity is more highly correlated with my ability to influence my central mission?
  - Focusing your efforts on areas you feel are important, but others do not value, only compounds the problem of perceived poor performance. If you think some issues are essential, but others do not, your performance won't be perceived positively. Paying attention to activities that make a difference is critical.

- Reach an agreement with your boss, peers, and direct reports about which activities are essential.
- Finally, link your feedback to your list.
  
- A person's performance and effectiveness are usually judged in comparison to others. Your performance relative to others may be described in three ways:
  - *Competitive advantage*: Excellent performance compared to others, well above average.
  - *Parity*: performance at about the same level as others, average.
  - *Competitive disadvantage*: Inadequate performance compared to others, well below average.
- If a particular issue is essential and your performance gives you a competitive advantage, you should maintain that level of effectiveness. If your performance is average, you should work to improve your effectiveness. If you feel you have a competitive disadvantage, you should begin to make major changes.
- As you select issues to work on, consider these four criteria:
  1. Do not select more than two issues to work on at a time.
  2. If the two issues you select are both difficult to change, consider selecting the one issue that will be easier.
  3. Do not select an issue that others want changed more than you do.
  4. Find one essential issue that will give you a competitive advantage.

#### Chapter 6: Fixing Weaknesses or Building Strengths?

- In a study of the factors that underlie leadership failures, Zenger and Folkman reviewed the feedback assessments of leaders described as "failing." It was clear that feedback surveys could accurately identify significant problems to those who were failing, and that those people should pay close attention to the feedback and work hard to make corrections.
- After reviewing thousands of 360-degree feedback reports, they found that, although some people receive strong negative data, the majority of feedback assessments with negative items might be more accurately characterized as "least positive" items.
- People universally concede that the best way to improve personal performance is to work on eliminating weaknesses. This belief is reinforced by experiences in our families, education, training, and performance reviews.
- **Principle 23:** Most people believe that, to improve, they have to eliminate their weaknesses rather than build on their strengths.
  - Advising people to work on improving their weaknesses is only good advice if one of the weaknesses is a "fatal flaw." The key to improving individual effectiveness is developing a few profound strengths.
  - One of the reasons we work so hard on fixing our less positive issues is we don't want to be embarrassed by our weaknesses.
  - In working on their least positive issues, most people end up investing their time and effort in changing issues for which they have little passion – with the net result being little change.
  - The alternative to working on weaknesses is to build on strengths. To test this assumption, the author analyzed 12 feedback data sets, with results from thousands of people, to examine the competencies used to evaluate effectiveness.
  - Those perceived as having no strengths were found, on average, to be at the 33<sup>rd</sup> percentile in overall perceived effectiveness.

- They then isolated the people who had one competency rated at the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile or higher and calculated the overall perceived effectiveness for this group. Those perceived as having one strength were found to be, on average, at the 57<sup>th</sup> percentile. This huge jump is difficult to explain: How does having one strength create such a dramatic effect on overall perceived effectiveness? Part of the answer seems to be the halo effect that comes from doing something well. When a person is highly competent in one area, people assume the person has strengths in other areas,
- Continuing the analysis, they isolated the people who had two or more competencies rated as strengths. On average, people with three strengths were found to be at the 77<sup>th</sup> percentile in overall perceived effectiveness.
- In additional studies, they found that leaders with strengths tended to be rated as more likely to be promoted, receive a greater number of stock options, and have direct reports who are less likely to quit. These studies demonstrate what we already intuitively knew: Doing something well has a substantial impact on overall perceived performance.
- **Principle 24:** Doing something well has a dramatic impact on perceived effectiveness.
  - Although they tested multiple data sets, the results showed incredible consistency. It didn't seem to matter which competency people had strength in, as long as they performed that competency extremely well – at the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile or better. For the author, this was the most significant implication.
  - In their research, Zenger and Folkman identified a new process for building strengths called *nonlinear development*. They found that people who were the most effective in performing a particular competency also tended to be effective on a series of companion behaviors. In theory, companion skills may be used to create an extremely high level of competence. Companion behaviors leverage your ability to perform a competency well and develop it into a profound strength.

## Chapter 7: Making Change Happen

- The purpose of getting feedback, understanding it, and prioritizing the critical issues is to turn the feedback into change. Rather than focus on one perspective, the author presents many different perspectives and approaches to change, so that you can choose the approach that best fits your particular situation and personality.
- **Principle 25:** A critical step in personal change is to change the strategies, structures, and systems that support or reinforce the behavior you desire to change.
  - To understand the organizational implications of your feedback, ask yourself these five questions:
    1. How is this behavior rewarded by others in the organization?
    2. Who encourages or discourages this behavior and why?
    3. If I do this unwanted behavior, what good will happen? What bad will happen?
    4. Is there something in the way this organization is designed and structured that reinforces this behavior?
    5. Is there something within the systems (compensation, rewards, promotion, and communications) of the organization that reinforces this behavior?
  - Often, when we receive feedback, we generalize the feedback into a global expression of the problem. E.g. “I am going to improve my...” and end their sentence with an all-encompassing term: communication, motivation, consideration, performance, or results.

- By creating specific goals, we force ourselves to consider what it will actually take to change. You will not take action until you set a more specific goal. Specify action plans, and then measure your performance against those plans.
- Making general goals more specific can be difficult, because it forces you to make your goals actionable and measurable. When you create specific plans, make sure your smallest actions impact the overall goal.
- When responding to feedback, many people automatically assume they have to solve the problem themselves. Getting others involved in our changes greatly increases our chances of success. Asking others for assistance helps you in two ways: First, it alters the relationships you have with people who may have been rewarding the behaviors you wish to change, because you are asking those people to help you stop or start a particular behavior. Second, by asking people who are good at a behavior for their help, you begin new relationships with people who will reward your new behavior.
- **Principle 26:** Close observation of others who have demonstrated skills will help you develop the same skills.
  - Developing good observation skills is essential for learning. Few people are careful enough to watch and learn the subtle skills needed to move up in the organization.
  - Making your own mental video – we all need to be programmed. You need to create your own internal action movie and rehearse your part. You cannot just make up your mind to behave differently in a given situation and expect to succeed, without first having a rich sense of what the new behavior looks like, how you will react, and what you will say. Mental movies begin with observations and research. Determine what the correct behavior looks like. Then play it out in your mind.
  - By imagining detail people often find that they do not always know what the appropriate behavior looks like. This usually encourages them to go back and study or observe. Visualization is a valuable tool that allows us to plan our behaviors before we act.
- **Principle 27:** redefining negative feedback in a positive light creates increased motivation to change.
  - *When we receive negative feedback, we tend to deny that we have failed.* Since the feedback comes from others, by accepting negative feedback at face value we feel that others are in control. By redefining negative feedback, making it positive, we can accept their feedback and apply it to *improve our motivation to change.*
  - All of us have labels that define who we are. (e.g. “I am organized”). Some labels motivate and inspire you to achieve goals, but others serve as a ball and chain, causing you to resist progress. If your change goals confront preexisting labels, you may need to give up some of the old labels and take up some new ones.
- **Principle 28:** Those things we persist in doing eventually change our feelings and appetites.
  - What was not satisfying and fulfilling in the past can become satisfying and fulfilling in the future, if we persist.
  - We can simply accept ourselves the way we are, or we can choose to change the way we are and design the new person we want to be. Although we cannot change our circumstances, we can change how we choose to respond to them.
  - At first your actions will seem foreign. You will not feel comfortable with how you are acting. You will not be effective for a while, but if you persist, over time you will begin to love your new behaviors. They will feel natural, normal, and appropriate. You will be even more effective and happy than you were before, and you will recognize that you can influence your situation.

- **Principle 29:** Changing behavior often requires changing core beliefs.
  - We can develop new beliefs that support and reinforce positive behavior. As you consider changing some of your behaviors, ask yourself: “What beliefs, values, or rules do I have that support and reinforce the behavior I am attempting to change? Sometimes, to change your behavior, you have to change your beliefs.
- **Principle 30:** Rewarding successive approximations of a desired new behavior increases the likelihood of acquiring the new behavior.
  - To be a confident and comfortable public speaker, you might begin by making short comments in front of other people. As you become more comfortable, increase the steps and try something harder. Lay out a plan of successive steps that will help you accomplish your goals. During the shaping process, do not forget your ultimate goal of performing a desired behavior.
  - As you look over your goals for change, consider giving yourself rewards for achieving interim goals in the plan.
  - To continue changing you need to build your self-esteem. If negative ego-damaging experiences continue to occur, everyone eventually gives up.
  - In planning for change, most of us underestimate the impact of negative experiences. Because of this, our attempts to change must provide support as well as challenge.
- **Principle 31:** For many changes, you can increase the likelihood of positive change by persuading others to change with you.
  - The key is not to get others to change, but first to become personally committed to the change, and then ask others for help in changing with you.
  - Because changes in you will affect others, as changes begin to occur, others will react either positively or negatively to your change. The key to having others support your change is to ask them for their assistance in your change and for your commitment to also change.
  - Change does have something to do with diligence and effort, but it has more to do with creating new desires, attitudes, passions and emotions. If you can change your desires, you will not feel deprived.
  - The key to avoid feelings of deprivation is to focus on the benefits of the change, rather than on the loss caused by the change.
  - Sometimes practicing change is fairly straightforward. At other times, we may not know how to practice. Here are some practice tips:
    - Read an article or a book
    - Attend a training course
    - Listen to an audiotape
    - Role play different situations
    - Watch people who are very good at a behavior, and try to model your behavior after theirs
    - As someone who is very good to be your coach or mentor
    - Look for chances to work on a team with others who do this behavior well
    - Take a temporary assignment that will allow you to practice the new behavior
  - The difficult part of selecting just a few issues to work on is that it requires us to make trade-offs. As we make changes, we need to be clear about what we will lose in exchange for what we will gain.
  - Making trade-offs can create great power in the change process, whereas not making trade-offs may substantially reduce a person’s chance of making significant change.

- What you change has to become a part of you, or others will perceive that what you are doing is fake. This does not mean you cannot try new things, but ultimately the behavior on the outside has to fit the person on the inside.

## Chapter 8: Making Change Stick

- **Principle 32:** Changes that last are those that feel natural and consistent with our core character and personal style.
  - Our true character and personality is always good and positive, but in attempting to learn from and imitate the style of others, we sometimes lose track of our individuality. Personal greatness comes when people build on the foundation of their core character.
- **Principle 33:** Lasting changes often require implementing new systems or structures.
  - Sometimes significant changes are accomplished by setting up structured conditions and circumstances that lead to desired change. This structure makes change easier to accomplish and longer lasting.
- **Principle 34:** Increasing your knowledge and skill base, especially in new technologies, will make your efforts to change more effective and increase your self-confidence.
  - Here is a list of some high-tech tools that can help you make your changes stick. They are basic to your effectiveness in making lasting change and can help you improve in areas such as communicating regularly, keeping others informed, staying up-to-date, maintaining organization and managing time:
    - Personal computer
    - Word processing program
      - a. Spreadsheet program
      - b. Presentation program
      - c. Database program
      - d. Email and internet program
    - Voice mail
    - Cellular phone
    - PDA
    - Email, internet or online service.
- **Principle 35:** You can only make significant life changes if you have the necessary desire, strength, and motivation to cause those changes to happen.
  - Change requires energy, strength, and motivation. Often, people want to change, but they lack the strength to make it happen. When people lack the strength or motivation, the following can help: removing large distractions, increasing mental strength, getting shape, maintaining a crystal clear vision of the desired result, describing models for success and failure, focusing on the benefits of change, and planning for success.

## Chapter 9: Working Harder or Working Smarter?

- Zenger and Folkman found that those who were most successful at accepting feedback were also successful in several related areas, called *companion behaviors*. They also found that people who were successful in actually making changes had a similar list of companion behaviors when they analyzed the people who'd had the most success in making changes.
- The process of going from good to great is much less obvious and often requires improvement in these companion skills.
- A high level of personal effectiveness requires three things: First, you cannot have any *fatal flaws*. A fatal flaw is a behavior that has an overpoweringly negative impact on your overall

perceived effectiveness. If you have a fatal flaw, you have to fix it. Second, you need to have a few strengths. To be effective, we all must have skills that will be valued in some way by the organization. Third, being good at something is very different from being great.

- They found that people who are most effective at making change were also competent at eight companion skills. Improvement in the companion skills may improve an individual's ability to make a change. They called this approach *nonlinear development* because the companion skills are sometime counterintuitive. The eight companion skills are:
  1. *Passion and willingness to make a difference* – having passion, being excited and believing in what you are doing makes a huge difference in being totally successful. If you feel you lack the passion needed to succeed in making a change, first focus your efforts for change in areas where you have some passion. Second, keep focused on the goal and third, don't procrastinate.
  2. *Accepts feedback*
  3. *Trust* – trusted people can be counted on to keep their commitments. Change involves risk taking. Building strong, trusting relationships creates the kind of environment where people are more willing to take risks.
  4. *Shows concern and consideration for others* – realistically, if people only changed those things that would personally benefit them, the list of changes that would be made would be very short. Most of the changes people make are for the benefit of others.
  5. *Innovation* – innovative people are more effective at making personal changes. Think of ways to approach the change that are new and exciting. Ask others for ideas on different ways of making the change.
  6. *Develops others* – those who are interested in helping others change and improve their skills are more likely to improve their own skills. Those who help others to develop learn from the experience.
  7. *Optimism* – people who are optimistic are willing to attempt change because they assume their efforts will be successful. Even if they fall short, they believe they will benefit in some way. However, pessimists assume their efforts will be futile and will only increase their frustration.
  8. *Establishes clear goals and priorities* – those who are effective at establishing clear goals and priorities are also more effective at making personal changes.
- These eight companion behaviors provide a nonlinear approach to change. As you review the companion behaviors, identify one or two areas where you see an opportunity to improve. Improvement in any of these skills will increase your ability to create personal change.

**Recommendation:** Feedback is an important topic. There is no greater force to improve the quality of human relationships or improve the way organizations function than to multiply the amount and improve the quality of feedback. Folkman is a highly qualified author who delivers content that is practical and easily comprehended in an entertaining way.

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**About the reviewer: Frumi Rachel Barr, MBA, PhD**

Many CEO's find themselves asking "What now?" to sensitive situations that only an experienced former CEO can understand. Frumi is brought in to solve problems and often remains to work with you, as your confidante and secret weapon. She has an uncanny knack of getting to the heart of your corporate climate and maximizing your team's performance, profitability and sustainability.

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