



**THERE'S A GOOD REASON ATHLETES SPEND THE MONDAY AFTER THE BIG GAME POURING OVER FILM WITH THEIR COACHES AND TEAMMATES, DOCUMENTING AND DISSECTING THEIR EVERY MISTAKE.**

Feedback is essential to improving performance, and there are only two sources of feedback: one's own imagining, which is inherently delusional, and actual feedback from others. The advice offered by much of the current psychology and self-help literature is to shake it off. Although it may be spiteful and painful, if you want to improve, maybe it's time to start embracing and even encouraging negative feedback. Unfortunately, when you're a leader, that may be easier said than done.



# **NOBODY LIKES NEGATIVE FEEDBACK, ESPECIALLY LEADERS**

When is the last time you met someone in a position of power who was good at asking for feedback? In an analysis of more than 1,200 New Zealand business leaders, assessment and consulting firm Winsborough Limited found that the chief complaint against poorly performing managers was that they didn't seek or accept feedback.

"With every move up the ladder, you're more impressed with yourself," says Geoff Trickey, managing partner at Psychological Consultancy Limited. "When you're massively successful, you no longer feel that you need to make any concessions to anybody because you're top of the heap."

**WHEN YOU'RE MASSIVELY SUCCESSFUL, YOU NO LONGER FEEL THAT YOU  
NEED TO MAKE ANY CONCESSIONS TO ANYBODY.**

Few employees are willing to risk their careers to give their boss negative feedback. As North Jersey Community Bank CEO Frank Sorrentino III said in an article for *Fortune*, "When people look at you, they look at your title first. They're not coming in to talk to Frank, they're coming in to talk to the CEO."

"People are not always able, or willing, to provide honest and critical feedback," said Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic, Hogan's Chief Executive Officer. "In most cultures, social etiquette rewards white lies and condemns honesty as tough and somewhat antisocial. Ironically, it's those straight-talking individuals who are most valuable in helping us overcome our self-deceptions."

"Nobody is speaking truth to power," says Trickey. "No one's telling you you're a fool or that's a stupid idea."

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# PEOPLE CAN'T ALWAYS HANDLE NEGATIVE FEEDBACK

Finally, when people do get honest feedback, they don't always handle it well.

"When most people are confronted with the fact that they have made the wrong decision, they are unwilling to admit it," says Chamorro-Premuzic. "Our attempts to maintain positive self-views undermine our ability to accept negative feedback from others. From school kids who blame their poor grades on their teachers to employees who blame their poor performance on their bosses, there is no shortage of real-life examples highlighting the default human tendency to distort reality in their favor if it helps them feel good about themselves."

**OUR ATTEMPTS TO MAINTAIN POSITIVE SELF-VIEWS UNDERMINE OUR  
ABILITY TO ACCEPT NEGATIVE FEEDBACK FROM OTHERS.**

**ALTHOUGH AN UNWAVERINGLY POSITIVE SELF-VIEW CAN HELP YOU SLEEP AT NIGHT, IT CAN BE DETRIMENTAL TO YOUR CAREER.**

For most people, there is an important difference between their identity, how they view their behavior, and their reputation, how their behavior is viewed by others. This disparity causes people to seem to say one thing and do another, ignore feedback, and eventually derail their careers. Here are some ways to raise your self-awareness and avoid derailing your career.

# START WITH DATA

As a manager, it's unlikely that your peers or employees will give you honest feedback and even more unlikely that you will seek it out. Personality assessments and 360° feedback provide valid, objective, and most importantly anonymous data about how your peers and employees view your behavior.

"When performance feedback comes directly from another individual, we tend to react badly," says Chamorro-Premuzic. "We feel attacked, and we react by deflecting. Showing people objective data from personality assessment or that there is a consensus about their behavior can give them information about their strengths and weaknesses around which you can build feedback and coaching."

**OBJECTIVE DATA FROM PERSONALITY ASSESSMENT GIVES INDIVIDUALS INFORMATION ABOUT THEIR STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES.**

Much of the blame for the extraordinary levels of self-deception evident in today's top brass lays with the positive psychology movement, which seeks only to accentuate strengths without addressing people's shortcomings. The truth hurts, but it's the key to self-improvement, so the best advice is to ignore any program designed to make you feel better about yourself.

"If a psychological tip attempts to boost your self-esteem, it will probably increase the gap between your self-estimated and actual abilities," said Chamorro-Premuzic. "Commit to seeking negative feedback from people you respect. Ask what you could do better and what you are missing compared to the people they consider the best and take the answers seriously."

# EMBRACE NEGATIVITY

**THE TRUTH HURTS. THE BEST ADVICE IS TO IGNORE ANY PROGRAM DESIGNED TO MAKE YOU FEEL BETTER ABOUT YOURSELF.**

# **MAKE FEEDBACK EASIER**

“You can incentivize others to give you negative feedback by explaining to them that you won’t take it personally, that you respect and value their views, and that you are trying to get better,” said Chamorro-Premuzic. “You can also ask them to combine their critical feedback with some positive comments by asking what they think are your two biggest strengths and your two biggest opportunities for development.”

**MOTIVATE OTHERS TO GIVE YOU NEGATIVE FEEDBACK BY EXPLAINING TO THEM THAT YOU WON’T TAKE IT PERSONALLY.**



“Without an effective developmental framework, it’s difficult to translate negative feedback into measurable improvement,” said Trish Kellett, director of the Hogan Coaching Network. “Organizational coaches can provide the context and development advice necessary to achieve real results.”

**USE A  
COACH**

**COACHES CAN PROVIDE THE CONTEXT AND DEVELOPMENT ADVICE  
NECESSARY TO ACHIEVE REAL RESULTS.**



**SELF-AWARENESS DOESN'T IMMUNIZE LEADERS AGAINST MAKING MISTAKES. EVERYONE MAKES A BAD CALL OR HAS AN EMOTIONAL OUTBURST AT SOME POINT IN HIS OR HER CAREER.**

However, gaining an objective, data-backed view of their strengths and weaknesses can help executives cope with the stress, pressure, and isolation of an executive position, and help ensure that even when the dark side shows, it won't derail their careers.

