

Do you have a personal feedback system?

Margaret Beaton 08 July 2012

High performing leaders regularly give themselves feedback. What's really exciting about this is that we can all learn to use their methods.

Whether they are sportspeople, artists, academics, or businesspeople, high performing leaders observe themselves closely, continuously and honestly. They are adept at looking from the outside at their own behaviour, analysing their thoughts and getting in touch with their feelings. They search for, find, learn from and act on internally generated signals.

In contrast average performers tend to look externally. More often than not they attribute failure and errors to factors outside their control. 'If only she'd warned me' 'Why didn't the Board back me?' 'It's all too hard' 'It's not really one of my strengths' and 'How was I to know the policy would change' are reasons average performers give for not anticipating situations or succeeding.

Put another way, top performers take personal responsibility for their mistakes (and successes), whereas others absolve themselves and blame something or someone else.

Digging in to the [research](#) that illuminates these characteristics of top performers is exciting. Why? Because we can all learn to use the methods. Excellent leaders systematically reflect, more often than not in real time, asking themselves questions such as 'Am I being blind-sided by my emotions?' 'What options do we have?' 'Do I have to make a decision *now*?' 'Should I leave this to some one else?'

And in doing so they observe themselves in a *particular* way. They have precise goals, values and standards against which they give themselves personal and *specific* feedback. For example, in reflecting on how they conducted a performance review with a member of staff, an excellent leader does not simply think 'that could have gone better'. Rather she says to herself: 'I made generalisations about X's lack of teamwork, rather than describing X's specific behaviours in certain situations. These general statements lacked impact and left X unable to act on them. Next time I will provide factual examples of behaviour. And what's more I will do this when they occur, not wait for the next formal review'. With heightened self-awareness generated in this way, a top leader practises giving concrete, real time, actionable feedback to others, gauges the results and tries again. In other words, a top leader closes their own learning loop.

Another way top performers set themselves specific standards is by identifying a leader they regard as being best practice in some thing—maintaining composure under pressure is an example. This role model may be a sports team captain, like Australian Diamonds [Natalie von Bertouch](#), an international leader, like [Hilary Clinton](#), or simply a colleague in the same office.

Top performers are brutally honest with themselves. Not only do they acknowledge their failings, they also self-evaluate the causes. And when necessary, they are open to and solicit feedback from others; they are not defensive.

Self-feedback is integral to Stepping Up. Is self-feedback part of your self-learning and continuous improvement? Do you have your own personal feedback system?

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