

Strategic Human Resources

Article Series for Managers and Supervisors

Doing a 180 on 360° Feedback

by Julia Menard, B.A., Certificate in Conflict Resolution

“Truly great leaders spend as much time collecting and acting upon feedback as they do providing it.” – Alexander Lucia

The use of 360° assessments has become a popular management tool, showing employees and managers where they are strong and where they need to grow. The 360 involves feedback from a number of people with whom you work, usually supervisor, peers and direct reports. At the end, a coach debriefs you on their responses.

But what should you do once you're debriefed? Many clients I've worked with thank their respondents, but that's about it. To them, the process is complete, when in fact, it should be just beginning.

Choosing Your Reviewers

Choosing people is an art in itself. Usually, your supervisor is automatically part of the process. However, there is much latitude for who you choose as your "direct reports" and your "peers." If you choose people who will only say nice things about you, that's all you will hear. If you want a more well-rounded perspective (a true 360° view of your work), carefully choose people who can provide unique points of view.

Making the 360° feedback work for you

Research by Marshall Goldsmith, an executive coaching firm dedicated to developing business leaders, suggests you can make 360s much more effective by responding to the feedback, implementing an improvement plan and reporting your progress:

1. Note your key strengths and pick one to three key areas for improvement that could make the biggest difference to your work and/or company and develop an action plan for desired change;
2. Set up a 15-minute discussion with co-workers by thanking them for the feedback, discussing the action plan and involving them in the change process;
3. In the following months, let your co-workers know how you're progressing and ask for further assistance.

In Goldsmith's survey of 8,000 direct reports whose managers followed this feedback review process, the data was clear:

“The higher the level of response and follow-up, the higher the direct reports rated their bosses' effectiveness. Leadership effectiveness is dramatically affected through asking for, responding to, and following up on feedback.”

[*The Heart of Coaching*](#), Thomas Crane

How to ask for and respond to feedback

It often takes planning to know what to say and how to say it.

Use your initial meeting with one of the people who provided feedback on the 360° review to let them know in general terms that you've completed your assessment, to outline what you learned about your strengths and what you want to do to grow. Allow them more opportunities to speak with you about what they see and provide insight to areas in your 360 that aren't clear to you. And, most importantly, you want to keep them in the loop as you formulate your plan and carry it out.

Tips from Goldsmith include:

1. Keep it positive.
 - State that you want to get better
 - Don't act hurt or beat up
 - Don't say that "it's confusing" (denies the validity)
 - Remember that their responses during the survey are confidential. Never ask, "What did you rate me and why?"
2. Keep it simple. Don't go through lots of details.
3. Keep it in focus.
 - Thank participants for taking time to provide honest feedback
 - Let them know there are many items you feel positive about
 - State the things you want to do better:
 - Talk about what you'll focus on
 - Talk about how you'll do it
 - Ask for further recommendations/suggestions.

How to report your progress

What's most important is to formulate a post-360 plan and to keep the feedback discussions focused on what behaviours people notice and on what you can do differently.

1. Develop an ongoing follow-up process.
 - Remain efficient and focused on the future: "Based upon my behaviour last month, what ideas do you have for me next month?"
 - Within six months, conduct a two to six-item mini-survey with key stakeholders. Ask whether you have become more or less effective in the areas you targeted for improvement.
2. Review results and start again.
 - If you've taken the process seriously, stakeholders almost invariably report improvement. Build on that success by repeating the process for the next 12 to 18 months. This type of follow-up will assure continued progress on initial goals and uncover additional areas for improvement.
 - Stakeholders will appreciate the follow-up.

Read more on this topic at www.marshallgoldsmithlibrary.com/cim/articles_display.php?aid=112.

"The leader of the past was a person who knew how to tell. The leader of the future will be a person who knows how to ask." ... Peter Drucker

Julia Menard specializes in helping middle-level managers and executives navigate difficult conversations and debrief 360s. She also publishes a regular monthly ezine and can be reached through her Web site at www.makeandbelieve.com.