

Farr Associates is a Leadership Development and Organizational Effectiveness consulting firm located in High Point, North Carolina. Farr delivers a range of services that improves performance by enhancing the quality of leadership at all levels of the organization.

## Perspectives of the CEO

### How Feedback Gets a Bad Name

Mark Ernsberger  
Farr Associates: President and CEO

If you have experienced Farr Associates' consulting, you know that one of the primary vehicles we encourage leaders to utilize is Feedback. Feedback not only has the potential to improve the power of an individual leader, but also the potential to move the organization itself to greater effectiveness.

#### Challenge

Feedback is a tricky thing, far from what the simple definition would suggest. It's tricky for several reasons. Feedback requires much from both the giver and the receiver. From the receiver it requires a genuine interest and belief that the feedback can make a difference in their leadership. Second, leaders who desire to receive feedback must have a healthy sense of self so they can hear the feedback as "data". The goal is to avoid stimulating their defense mechanisms, yet, at the same time stimulate their interest in processing the "data" and then creating a plan for making corrections. This is not for the faint hearted. Human beings, as we all know, are not computers. Feelings get in the way of this. Feelings of insecurity, resentment, anger, etc. When this process goes wrong, it can become a real mess. And, it's one of the reasons leaders don't like to do it.

#### Case In Point

I recently had the opportunity to observe a leader who had all of the criteria for utilizing feedback effectively, but was seen as saying they wanted feedback, but not really wanting to hear it. After taking a little time to explore, I found out what the problem was.

The problem lay not in the leader's purpose or sense of ego, but in the area of what feedback requires of the giver, in this case, the followers. The followers were not educated sufficiently in what feedback is and how to give it. They also didn't understand that they needed to be as responsible in this process for how the information is delivered as the leader was responsible for what they did with the information: If the responsibility for the success of the entire process is given to the leader (or receiver) alone, the chances of the process working correctly decreases dramatically.

The followers equated Feedback with "venting," which is the release of negative feelings. Usually, venting is done indirectly: at the water cooler, in the hallways, or privately to friends. While, venting can be a healthy way of releasing those feelings and moving to a positive state of mind, it is not productive to vent directly to the person in question. Being in a neutral or positive place is a prerequisite for delivering effective feedback and solving problems - both for the leader and the follower. And that is when Feedback works.

Leadership  
Development

[Mastering Leadership  
Dynamics](#)

[Executive Coaching](#)

Team Performance

[Next Level Teams](#)

[Team Optimization](#)

Organizational  
Performance

[Leading Change](#)

Contact Farr

800-395-3277

[Contact Farr](#)

Leadership Quote:

The first responsibility of  
a leader is to define reality.  
The last is to say thank you.  
- Max DePree

---

Watch this quick video to  
learn about the power of  
[Conscious Leadership](#).

## How Feedback Gets a Bad Name Continued

When venting is done directly to the person involved (under the guise of Feedback), the end result is usually hurt feelings and a defensive response. Relationships can deteriorate and what needs to be communicated is lost. The followers needed to learn that their responsibility in the process is to start from a neutral or positive place before they gave their feedback. They needed to do a “self check” to make sure they weren’t about to vent. Where am I on scale of +10 to -10 right now? Am I upset or angry? If so, I need to hold on to my feedback until I can deliver it from a place of positive or neutral intent (0 to +10). This will significantly improve the odds that what I am about to say is seen as positive intent and does not cause a defensive reaction. It also improves the odds that the leader actually hears the information and acts on it.

And when a leader actually hears the information and acts on it, employees are more motivated, problems get solved and organizations move forward. And that’s a good thing.

---

## Did you know?

### Competitors want your top talent

Even in a down market you top talent is desired. Last year there was a 23% drop in engagement amongst top level employees; meaning that employers are focusing less on their employees needs. And, as we all know, employees that are not engaged will leave. Companies that continue to focus on developing and engaging their talent, especially in a down market, will better retain their top producers. Hansen, Fay. Special Report: Compensation and Salary Forecast: Money Talks. Workforce Management. November 16, 2009. pp. 27-31.

## News From the Field

### A Great Leader is a Smart Coach

Ramonda C. Kyser, LPC  
Assistant Vice President

#### Challenge:

How do you fix a team when one member is bringing it down?

During a recent coaching session it was discovered that Don, a member of an IT team, was negatively impacting the attitudes and productivity of everyone on the team. Specifically, the other members perceived that Don often ignored policies and processes and was not being held accountable for that, which created resentment across the team.

While Peter, the team manager, was providing coaching and feedback to Don. it was having little effect on improving Don’s behavior or the attitude of the team. Peter was becoming frustrated because he couldn’t draw upon the right strategies to improve the situation. This is when Peter sought help from Farr Associates. He was hoping we could provide an alternate solution to terminating a staff member who was having a negative impact on his team, but who was otherwise a valuable employee.

#### What Was Done:

From Farr, Peter learned some key feedback strategies to help Don recognize the negative impact he has on the team. Peter was also taught how to coach Don in avoiding the behaviors that cause the issues. Specifically, he learned two simple yet powerful strategies that turned the tide on Don’s behavior.

## A Great Leader is a Smart Coach Continued

First, Peter got Don's permission to give him feedback and then simply stated the specific behavior and outcome he was seeing. He said, "Don, when you cut short the development process yesterday, it left out other key team members and created some pretty sore feelings." Secondly, Peter asked an open-ended question that would allow Don to solve the problem himself. "Don, what could you do to keep the other team members involved?" Next, Peter acknowledged to Don's teammates that he was working with Don. This acknowledgment alone let the team members know that Peter was aware of the problem and that he, too, wanted to correct it.

Finally, Peter showed the interested team members how to effectively give feedback. By simply engaging the help of these team members, Peter reinforced to Don that others did notice his behavior. Consequently, the members' feedback to Don enforced the new, positive behaviors the team wanted to see.

### Change:

The team members felt empowered by helping in this constructive feedback process. Their involvement placed ownership on them as well as on the team leader to improve the situation. This ownership and the knowledge that the problem was being addressed improved the team's attitude and performance.

Don received constructive feedback and was able to discover for himself new behaviors that not only improved the work environment for the team but created greater rapport, trust and collaboration between team members and himself, which made his job easier.

In the end, by learning a few powerful feedback and coaching techniques, the manager learned how to empower his team and save an employee at risk.

While these techniques seem simple it takes diligence and the awareness to know when and how to correctly apply them. To learn how you can optimize your company's leadership and improve team performance, call Farr Associates today.

---

## Leadership Tip

Who is responsible for effective communication? The Conscious Leader takes 100% responsibility for ensuring that her/his message was received and interpreted in the way that (s)he intended. It requires being intentional, follow-up, clarification, and, perhaps most importantly, 2-way communication. Because, in the absence of information, people fill in the blanks with their own interpretation. And, this is where misunderstandings occur and positive intentions get derailed.

### Mastering Leadership Dynamics

Nothing is more critical to being seen as an effective leader than self-awareness and self-management. Understanding how you impact others and having the ability to manage your leadership actions effectively is critical to engaging those who follow you to deliver their best work. See our video to learn about Farr's leadership perspective, Conscious Leadership and discover why our Mastering Leadership Dynamics program is so well acclaimed.