



Evaluation and Feedback in the Coaching Relationship

Most coaches are taught to seek feedback from clients midway through the coaching relationship or at an agreed-upon milestone, as well as during an evaluation at the conclusion of the relationship. At times, especially in executive or business coaching, performance feedback is also expected from the coach. Although feedback and evaluation for leaders and others are strongly influenced by the Direct/Indirect value continuum, they are also impacted by Status/Equality.

In Equality cultures, leaders and individuals can be challenged. Self-evaluations, performance evaluations, and 360 evaluations (a process of anonymous evaluation from one's subordinates and peers as well as superiors) are common leadership development tools. Equality culture individuals expect feedback and even debate from their supervisors and colleagues. They will not generally feel threatened when asked directly for feedback that will help the coach grow and help the coaching relationship be more effective. Performance feedback, when anticipated and given in the context of an executive coaching relationship, will be expected.

In Status cultures, as you might guess, it is difficult and uncomfortable for subordinates to give feedback to leaders or mentors to whom they owe respect and allegiance. 360 evaluations are problematic. In fact, some experts suggest in strong terms that they are ineffective in Status cultures.¹ Peer-to-peer feedback is often seen as less threatening compared to formal feedback

¹ Chris W. Coulter, Wendy L. Bedwell, C. Shawn Burke, and Eduardo Salas, "Values Sensitive Coaching: The Delta Approach to Coaching Culturally Diverse Executives," *Consulting Psychology Journal* 63, no.3 (September 2011): 155.

from a supervisor, as are comments about skills and behaviors vs. personal qualities. Receiving feedback in the coaching relationship can also be a sensitive matter.

So how does a coach address this issue? Here are a few suggestions.

For Status Coaches Working with Equality Clients

Ask for feedback from your clients about what is working for them in the coaching process and what is not. They will likely tell you! Adjust accordingly. This may be more uncomfortable for you than for them. Also, do not be surprised if your Equality clients volunteer feedback of their own accord. Because Equality clients will approach coaching as a partnership, they will expect to have input into how the process and relationship is built and works.

For Equality Coaches Working with Status Clients

Do not expect unfiltered feedback from a Status client about your performance as a coach, especially at the beginning of the relationship. Approach giving and receiving feedback casually rather than formally and build plenty of relational capital first. When asking for feedback, focus on specific behaviors rather than character attributes. Or consider asking for feedback indirectly by using the third person (ie, “What might a leader in your culture/situation want in a coaching relationship? In a coach?”)