

Achieving the LOOK & SOUND of LEADERSHIP

By Tom Henschel



ESSENTIAL
COMMUNICATIONS

A DIVISION OF ESS COMM INC.

TELE 818.788.5357
info@essentialcomm.com
www.essentialcomm.com

EXECUTIVE COACHING TIPS



Listen to the podcast

Soliciting Feedback ▶ 08/01/13

Good news—maybe

Prashant's coaching had gone well. The feedback I'd gathered about him at the beginning of our coaching had identified him as grumpy and argumentative. Now, six months later in a meeting with Jeannie, his boss, we were hearing nothing but good news.

"Things have turned around," Jeannie told us. "Everything I hear tells me that all the behaviors that prompted the coaching have essentially disappeared."

Later, alone together, Prashant looked thoughtful.

"Aren't you pleased?" I asked him.

"Sure," he said. "But Jeannie's not hearing from everyone. I can't imagine she knows what my direct reports really think. And I'm sure she hasn't heard from the manufacturing teams I interact with. She barely knows them."

"So you're worried that the good news may not really be as good as she thinks it is?" I asked.

"Yeah," he agreed. "And what about six months from now? Or a year? How will I know if I've gone back to my old ways?"

"Well, you could collect your own feedback," I suggested.

"Oh, right," he said sarcastically. "As if people would give me honest feedback. They didn't before!"

"It takes some commitment," I said, "but it's possible. I have a three-step formula for how to do it. You want to hear it?"

"You bet!" he said.



Step One: Ask Often

"The first element in the formula is this: ask often."

He clicked his pen and wrote down, "Ask often."

"Imagine something, Prashant. Imagine Jeannie comes up to you this afternoon and, out of the blue, says, 'Hey, Prashant, how am I doing as your boss?' Now, I know what you really think of her. Would you tell her the truth?"

He laughed. "No way!"

"Why not?"

"Well, I wouldn't know why she's asking. Plus, I don't believe she really wants to hear it."

"Makes sense," I said. "But if she came up to you, let's say, once a month and asked you the same question, month after month, how many months would it take before you gave her some genuine feedback?"

"I don't know," he mused. "Three, maybe."

"And, in that third month, would you tell her everything you've told me?"

"No!" he said with a laugh. "I'd probably give her one little drop and see what happened."

"That's how it's going to be with the people you ask. If you ask them once, you probably won't get any feedback at all. But if you ask consistently—not every day, but with some regularity—you'll begin to get little drips of feedback."

He underlined the words "Ask often" on his pad. "OK," he said. "That's the first part of the formula. What's next?"

Step Two: Ask for Behavior

"Let's go back to imagining Jeannie coming up to you and asking, 'How am I doing as your boss?' If that was the question she asked you, and if you were ready to give her some feedback, how would you answer?"



"Oh, boy," he said, rolling his eyes, "I don't know." He rubbed his chin as he thought about it.

After a moment, I laughed. "My point exactly! It's a lousy question. It asks you to rank her or evaluate her. That's not helpful. So part two of the formula is, ask for feedback about behavior."

"I know this," he said enthusiastically. "This is how you taught me to *give* feedback."

"Right!"

"Start, stop, continue!" he said like a proud student. "Right?"

"You got it, Prashant."

He and I had discussed the "Start, Stop, Continue" model as an effective way for him to give his people feedback. What weren't they doing that he wanted them to *start*; what were they doing that he wanted them to *stop*; and what was going well that he wanted them to *continue*?

"But for soliciting feedback, Prashant, I'd suggest a slight change in the language, but it's still Start, Stop, Continue."

He poised his pen again. "OK. What should I ask?"

"First, 'What can I do more of to be a better boss for you?' That's just a different way of asking what you should *start* doing. Then, 'What can I do less of to be a better boss for you?' That's a way of asking what you should *stop* doing. And 'As your boss, what's going well that I should keep doing?' That's *continue*."

He wrote the three questions, then asked, "Should I apply the same rules as when I'm giving feedback? Only ask one question each time so each question is a separate conversation?"

"Yep," I said. "You're going to ask often and ask for behavior *over time*. So one month you might ask someone, 'What can I do more of?' and the next month you'll ask that person 'What can I do less of?' and the third month you'll ask 'What should I keep doing?'"

"And what if I'm still not getting anything after three months?"



"Keep the door open. Tell them that if they think of anything you'd like to hear it. And tell them you'll be asking again soon. And then, the next month, ask one of the three questions. You'll get some feedback sooner or later."

"OK," he said. "What's the final part of the formula?"

"Ah." I looked at him. "This is the hardest part. A lot of people can't do this."

"OK. What is it?"

"It's about how you respond to what they say," I said.

Step Three: Respond Short

I continued. "Let's go back to imagining Jeannie asking for feedback. Suppose you take the risk to offer up a comment and she says, 'Oh, no, you don't understand! The reason I do that is because...' and she gives you some explanation. How would that be for you?"

"Well, I probably wouldn't ever give her much feedback again," he said with certainty.

"And with good reason," I agreed. "So how you respond when someone gives you feedback is going to set the tone for all your future interactions. When someone takes the risk to give you feedback, there are really only two things you can say. Only two. With no variations."

"Yikes," he said with a laugh. "This sounds pretty strict!"

I laughed with him. "Well, it has to be strict—if you ever want any feedback again."

"OK. So what are these two pearls?"

"The first one is, 'Thank you.' Just that. No explaining. No dialogue. Just 'Thank you.' Period."

"Really? What if someone tells me I've gotten grumpy again? I say 'Thank you' like they just gave me a birthday present?"



"You don't have to jump up and down like a kid with a puppy. But, yes, this is when you treat feedback like the gift that it is. You say, 'Thank you.' Or 'Thanks, that's really helpful.' Or 'Thanks for taking the risk.' Or 'Thanks for being honest with me.' What you don't do is challenge what you've heard. You don't say, 'Grumpy? Really? I don't think I've been grumpy. When was I grumpy?' You don't make them defend or explain their feedback."

He took in a big breath as if he was bracing himself. "OK. If you say so. What's the second thing I'm allowed to say?"

"You can ask a clarifying question. You can say, 'Can you help me understand that?'"

"Wait! I thought I wasn't supposed to make them explain their feedback."

"That's right, *if* you understand it. But suppose someone says, 'I'd like you to lead the staff meetings better.' What the heck does that mean? In that case, it's fine to say, 'Tell me more about that' or 'What would that look like?' or 'Help me understand that.' But you're only trying to understand. The instant you understand what they mean, then you say 'thanks' and you stop."

During our coaching, Prashant had proven adept at implementing new behaviors. I had no doubt that if I checked with him in a year or so, he'd know his feedback.

If you want to know the feedback about you, here are the three steps for soliciting feedback about yourself:

ONE Ask Often

Whether people are cautious or forthcoming, ask consistently. Put it on your calendar to ask at regular intervals.

TWO Ask for Behavior

"What can I do more of?" and "What can I do less of?" and "What should I keep doing?" are three simple questions you can ask your direct reports, your boss or your peers. These questions help people think behaviorally.

THREE Respond Short

"Thank you"—or "Help me understand that" and *then* "Thank you"—are the only responses if you want to keep the channels open.



**ESSENTIAL
COMMUNICATIONS**

A DIVISION OF ESS COMM INC.

TELE 818.788.5357
info@essentialcomm.com
www.essentialcomm.com

If you'd like to have those three steps in a little reminder card, [click here](#) and ask for the Soliciting Feedback steps. It'd be my pleasure to send it to you.

Managing how you're perceived in the workplace is at the heart of each of these Executive Coaching Tips. But you can't manage how you're perceived unless you *know* how you're perceived. So getting an accurate reading of the "word on the street" about yourself is crucial if you're going to achieve *The Look & Sound of Leadership*™.

Read related Tips:

[Delivering Tough Feedback](#)

[Getting Growth Acknowledged](#)

[Giving Powerful Feedback](#)

[Handling Feedback Effectively](#)

To SUBSCRIBE or to CONTRIBUTE an idea for future Executive Coaching Tips, email us at:
info@essentialcomm.co

To SUBSCRIBE to the Podcasts (iTunes), [click here](#)

To SUBSCRIBE to the Podcasts (RSS), [click here](#)

To VIEW the searchable archive of Executive Coaching Tips, visit:
<http://www.essentialcomm.com/tips/execcoachtips.html>

To CONTACT [Tom Henschel](#) or learn about the Essential Communications team, [click here](#)

To UNSUBSCRIBE to future Executive Coaching Tips, email us at:
unsubscribe@essentialcomm.com

"The Look & Sound of Leadership" is a trademark of Essential Communications. We believe you are receiving this email in response to a subscription request. If you are experiencing difficulties with the above HTML graphics, [click here](#).