

A photograph of two women sitting on a wooden dock by a large body of water. The woman on the left is wearing a grey and white patterned sweater and glasses, looking towards the woman on the right. The woman on the right is wearing a red hoodie and has her hair in a ponytail, looking back at the first woman. On the dock between them are a smartphone, a notebook, and a green-lidded container. The background is a vast expanse of blue water under a clear sky.

your best resource

Am I dismissing helpful feedback from someone because I don't know them well enough or, even more often, I don't think they really know me?

■ by Mary Bowers

# Listening to Feedback

As a leader, it is easy to get caught up in the feedback that I need to deliver — coaching tips for my teammates, encouragement for a co-worker who is struggling, a seasonal check-in on metrics and goals with a direct report, controlling my nonverbal messages with someone I am losing patience with — the list goes on.

Over the past several months, I've been thinking about how I receive, interpret and make a change with feedback that I am getting. While I would describe myself as curious and a lifelong learner, if I am honest, I am not making the most out of the input that is coming my way.

Here are three things I'm learning that may be helpful as you receive feedback from the people who cross your path.

First, I am trying to understand how I see myself; why do I believe or value the things that I do? What are the important experiences in my life that have shaped my identity? What qualities was I just born with? When feedback conflicts with how I see myself or challenges a value I hold, do I dismiss it?

Second, how is the relationship with the person giving the feedback affecting how I receive it? Am I dismissing helpful feedback from someone because I don't know them well enough or, even more often, I don't think they really know me? In a relationship where there has been conflict or disagreement, am I digging my heels in, trying to stand my ground?

Finally, is it the validity of the feedback itself that I am reacting to? Is my understanding of "truth" or "fact" in conflict with the feedback that is coming my way? What if I am wrong?

My first professional job was working with at-risk teenage girls in a locked residential facility. Many of them had stories filled with abuse, pain and hurt. They were angry; the last thing they wanted to do was listen to anything anyone had to say to them. They believed they had no value because that was what they had been told all their lives. They had little trust in any relationship because so many had failed them. Together, we talked a lot about feedback — developing the ability to listen, to take it in, to thank the person who was giving the feedback. Taking time later to reflect and process the input — the power to decide what to keep and hold and what to let go. The ability to accept feedback was often one of the most important skills that these amazing young ladies learned.

Thirty years later, I am reflecting on how I let that simple truth slip away, and I am refocusing on listening to the feedback I am getting.

"The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom, and whatever you get, get insight"  
Proverbs 4:7 (ESV). ■



*After spending most of her career working with at-risk teens living in residential treatment, Mary Bowers joined the SpringHill Team in September of 2013 as the AVP of people and organizational development. Mary has a significant background in training and development as well as a heart and passion for creating diverse work places. Email her at [mbowers@springhillcamps.com](mailto:mbowers@springhillcamps.com).*