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How Effective Are Your 360-Degree Feedback Assessments?

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I write about leadership development and building strengths.

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The Advisory Council at the Stanford Business School asked its members what attributes they believed business leaders needed most to become more effective. The consensus within the group was the need for greater self-awareness by leaders. Yet we all know that as leaders move upward in organizations, the likelihood of them receiving accurate information about their behavior spirals down.

I have been involved in a good deal of executive coaching in recent months. I've been struck by the fact that I seldom encounter an executive who receives high scores on self-awareness and a willingness to seek and receive feedback from others who is also not receiving high scores on most other competencies as well. They appear comfortable getting feedback from their colleagues about their ongoing leadership

behavior. In fact, they go well beyond comfortable; they actively seek feedback out.

Getting Comfortable With Receiving Feedback

There's an old Swedish proverb that says, "With the eating comes the appetite." People appear to become increasingly comfortable with feedback the more they receive it. For many, the very word "feedback" connotes something negative. It takes time for people to realize that feedback can be an extremely valuable gift to them and is not painful when it is sought and received on a regular basis.

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That's one of the reasons I've become such a big believer in the value of 360 feedback as a central part of leadership development programs. It's a practical way to get a large group of leaders in an organization to be comfortable with receiving feedback from direct reports, peers, bosses and other groups. Once leaders begin to see the huge value to be gained, in fact, we see them add other groups to their raters such as suppliers, customers, or those two levels below them in the organization.

Focusing On Strengths

Feedback seems especially important in the process of developing strengths. Our research



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has clearly shown that leaders are not highly attuned to seeing their weaknesses, but are equally unaware of their strengths. This latter phenomenon may be because strengths are often behaviors that come more naturally. Because they were acquired without deliberate effort, leaders are often unaware of how good they are at something like problem solving, being a good team player or thinking strategically.



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Yet it is a combination of several strengths that creates extraordinary leaders. We have found that when leaders emphasize the discovery of their strengths and put the identification of weaknesses second, it gives the entire feedback process a more positive aura.

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