

How to Capture Useful Feedback

by [Matt H. Evans, CPA, CMA, CFM](#)

October 5, 2015

Capturing feedback is important to the success of every business. Feedback represents a conversation with your employees and your customers. These conversations keep you within a zone of reality and best of all, these conversations create relationships. And in the world of business, **relationships matter**.

If you are not getting the results you expect, then chances are you are not capturing feedback. You need to engage in conversations. Become a great listener, be open-minded and welcome criticism. You should ask follow-up questions, probing for an action time that compels you to improve.

Businesses that do a good job with feedback have a passion for great service. These businesses hire people with great attitudes for servicing customers, creating a culture for feedback. Your business should be transparent and visible with everything you do. This gives others an opportunity to identify what's wrong and give you the feedback you need. This also forces accountability from outside since many companies are prone to an inward view.

“Feedback – both the act of giving it and taking it – is our first step in becoming smarter, more mindful about the connection between our environment and our behavior. Feedback teaches us to see our environment as a triggering mechanism. In some cases, the feedback itself is the trigger.” – Triggers: Creating Behavior that Lasts by Marshall Goldsmith

In her book Seven Principles of Fierce Conversations, author Susan Scott recommends having the courage to interrogate reality and treat every conversation as though it was your most important conversation. Scott also recommends making conversations real and focusing on the most pressing issues confronting your business.

Some of the more common methods for collecting feedback include:

1. **Focus Groups** – Interviews with 6 to 10 people over 1 or 2 hours, facilitated by a professional
2. **Surveys** – A fixed set of questions directed at a sample of customers who are representative of the entire customer base. Keep your surveys short and to the point for a good response rate.
3. **Visits** – Personal visits with major key customers to identify pain points and opportunities for better service. *Get out of the office and visit your customer!*

“Understanding customer needs and making decisions to profitably serve those needs is derived primarily (80-90%) from a firm’s recorded information. Therefore, the ability to apply this information is probably the single most important factor in acquiring and profitably serving customers and shareholders.” – Information Masters: Secrets of the Customer Race by John McKean

Feedback is also important for your internal customers, namely your employees. In their book Thanks for the Feedback, authors Douglas Stone and Shelia Heen describe three types of feedback:

1. **Appreciation** – Positive feedback that keeps people motivated and productive. If you never get or receive positive feedback, then your performance will decline over time.
2. **Coaching** – Personal feedback that helps guide and support someone, helping them improve performance.
3. **Evaluation** – A more formal approach to managing feedback using surveys, assessments, and rankings.

“All businesses are engaged in a war to acquire customers. That war, however, has turned very bizarre with the advent of online reviews. Realizing the benefit that multiple five-star reviews can have on a business, common sense would dictate that every business would want to develop and deploy an online review strategy to maximize customer acquisition.” – Everyone’s A Critic: Winning Customers in a Review-Driven World by Bill Tancer

In summary, feedback creates a conversation that leads to improvements and better results. Feedback is the engine behind a data driven company which removes ambiguity. And don’t forget to invest in the soft skills such as communication and processes that build customer relationships. All of this is part of how you capture feedback.

“With the constant change we face today, we may be forced to spend less time on autopilot, more time in questioning mode – attempting to adapt, looking to re-create careers, redefining old ideas about living, working, and retiring, reexamining priorities, seeking new ways to be creative, or to solve various problems in our own lives or the lives of others.” – A More Beautiful Question by Warren Berger