

## Being Stretched: are we up for what it takes? Pt. 4

Australians love their sport. In sport we enter a performance relationship regardless of our role: coach or player. In effect, we are in a performance and feedback relationship. As players, we are expected to be open and willing to learn; to increase knowledge, skill and performance. Similarly, coaching staff need to be competent in developing that knowledge, performance and skill; in each player and within the team as a whole. Being in the business is no different.



Calvin and Hobbes are in a performance relationship (with all the usual hallmarks of a disaster!). From the outset, Calvin imagines that to 'just trim the part that sticks out and taper it a little' will do the job. Hobbes, on the other hand, either doesn't recognise or doesn't want to admit that he hasn't the skill to do the job. Either way, it is a comedy of errors - Hobbes attempts to reassure Calvin, whilst being pretty certain that the outcome will not be good.



What if (before picking up the scissors) Hobbes said that he had never cut hair before, and that the likely outcome would be that Calvin would have 'really short' or no hair at all (OOPS!) and that it would end up looking like a two year old had done the job? Or what if Calvin had said, 'Hobbes, I'm going to shave all my hair off this afternoon - I'm sick of combing it every day. Do you want to have some fun and play hairdresser and see what happens?'

Here, the performance conversation is quite different, because the goal (the desired outcome) is stated clearly and honestly before action is taken.

### **The feedback culture**

Performance reviews are self-evidently about the past (what's to review *except* the past?). Feedback on the other hand, is about this present moment.

To increase the likelihood of more effective future performance, high performance companies articulate their expectations clearly, and rely on feedback to gauge the HERE and NOW.

Thus, in these companies, the tendency is for people to welcome feedback and serious analysis of their performance. Does that mean they always agree with the assessments? No. But what is important is that they accept the opportunity to learn and use the information to act differently if necessary.

Well intentioned, honest and reliable feedback is absolutely key to the whole process. But what about the person who finds it difficult not to react badly (as we talked about in Part 1) regardless?

The responsibility for that, in large part, lies with the Directors and Managers. It they who set the tone (the culture). It is they who must develop the collective will and potential inside the business so that people are able to move from reactivity to embracement and re-examination of feedback. To that end, they must find ways to create a less fearful milieu (see Part 3).

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Fear is the elephant in the room. Fear is **NOT** ignored by companies who want empowered and engaged people. Fear does not engender personal and professional growth. The *absence* of fear creates self-reliant, self-aware, energetic, liberated and healthy employees. Commonsense dictates that under that premise they are more likely to meet their own (and the company's) goals.

They are also more likely to see healthy and timely feedback as a key requirement in their own development.

Just as on the playing field, feedback should not be left to chance. Neither should it be impromptu, 'personal' or opportunistic. We spend so much time and money on KPIs - intuitively or consciously, high performance companies will ensure their efficacy and success through the development of a culture which understands the dynamics of human performance. Now that's teamwork! ■ ■

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