The Right Way to Respond to Negative Feedback (It'll Save Your Career)

When it comes to giving and receiving negative feedback, most of us would rather have a root canal. In fact, many of us are so uncomfortable with negative feedback that we'd rather not even call it "negative feedback". We'd prefer to describe it as "developmental feedback", "constructive feedback", "corrective feedback", etc. And we don't just bristle against what we call it -- we chafe against the feedback itself.

Nevertheless, any professional who is committed to getting better at his or her current job, and to career advancement down the road, knows that negative feedback, when delivered appropriately, is critical to growth and improvement. Negative feedback is crucial not just for individual leaders and teams, but for organizations as well.

Far too often, we fail to digest negative feedback because we're more committed to protecting ourselves -- and our egos -- against it. We'd rather be right than have something to learn. We'd rather catastrophize than put it in perspective. We'd rather make it about someone or something else than make it about ourselves. We'd rather shut down than listen. We'd rather say to ourselves about the feedback provider "what do *YOU* know?" than admit that they might be offering up a perspective worth considering.

Do any of these behaviors sound like you when receiving negative feedback?

1. **Dread**: I make up the worst possible story about the feedback I am about to get.
2. **Discount**: I minimize the importance of the feedback.
3. **Direct:** I change the topic to something else, or make the feedback about someone else.
4. **Denial:** I don't consider what could be true, even in a small way, about this feedback.
5. **Dissect:** I argue about each element of the feedback rather than focusing on the whole message.
6. **Depart:** I walk out of the conversation.
7. **Distract:** I talk about other accomplishments to minimize the impact of the feedback.
8. **Defy:** I reject the credibility or authority of the person giving feedback.
9. **Defend:** I make excuses and/or reject the content of the feedback.
10. **Distort**: I turn small pieces of feedback into big deals, and/or experience them as an attack on my character.
11. **Dramatize:** I get highly emotional when receiving feedback.
12. **Disengage**: I shut down emotionally and stop listening.
13. **Dwell:** I ruminate about the feedback.

In order for negative feedback to have positive benefits for us, our colleagues and our companies, we need to stop stopping the feedback from having an impact, and start inviting it to teach us what we need to learn to grow personally and professionally.