

## Exec Team feedback with Matt Mochary

In my coaching, I have found that a key value-add that I can bring is increased transparency and efficiency in the communication between the CEO and Exec Team, as well between Exec Team peers.

As members of the Exec Team, we want to share our experience and observations with the CEO and our peers to help each succeed (and therefore make our collective equity more valuable). But we don't want to offend or embarrass those people (imagine the pain of creating an enemy out of any one of them!), so we rarely give our full critical feedback, and certainly not in the group setting of an Exec Team meeting.

As a CEO, we want to get full value (and therefore the full thoughts) out of our incredibly knowledgeable Exec Team. But we often forget to ask for this specifically, and almost never do we ask for it in writing.

Both the withholding by the Exec Team, and not asking for feedback from the CEO, causes an inefficiency in the communication. With this one-time exercise, hopefully we will eliminate that inefficiency from our collective communication.

The exercise:

1. We schedule 90 minutes together. All Exec Team members, the CEO and Matt.
2. All attendees do this pre-work:
  - a. Read this doc (3 min)
  - b. Read [Feedback](#) (15 min)
  - c. If you are the type of person that likes to do more pre-work, please do Step 3a before the meeting.
  - d. If you run best by acting in the moment, you can do Step 3a live in the meeting.
3. During that meeting/call
  - a. Each Exec Team member writes down (in a private note that only they have access to, so that they are not influenced by each other's writings) what actions the CEO has done that they LIKE, and what actions they WISH THAT the CEO would do (or not do). **[10 minutes]**
    - i. Please give the rawest WISH THAT feedback that you can think of. The CEO will unpack only the rawest. Yes, it's a competition!
    - ii. During this writing time, the CEO can respond to emails.
  - b. Matt creates a shared Doc. At 10 minutes, all paste into that doc.
  - c. The CEO reads through all of the feedback. **[10 minutes]**
    - i. She first reads the LIKES. Summarizes and gives thanks for each.
    - ii. She then reads all the WISH THATs.
  - d. The CEO picks the juiciest WISH THAT feedback and fully unpacks it **[10 minutes]**

- i. CEO thanks the feedback-giver for being willing to share this information. It took bravery.
- ii. CEO summarizes what she thinks he read, and asks “Is that right?”
  1. If the CEO wants to go to the advanced level, she will summarize what the person is really thinking (with swear words!) and feeling, as that is usually much bigger than what they are willing to write/say.
    - a. If author says “No”, then author restates, and CEO tries to summarize again. Repeat until author says “Yes.”
    - b. Once author says “Yes”, then CEO asks “Is there more?”
    - c. Once author says “No, that’s it”, the CEO asks “Do you feel heard?”
    - d. Once author says “Yes”, move to the next step.
- iii. CEO declares whether or not she accepts the feedback.
  1. There is no requirement to accept. She only does so if the feedback resonates with her.
- iv. If the CEO accepts the feedback, then she declares what action she will take.
  1. She can also brainstorm with the feedback-giver on what the best actions would be.
  2. When declaring an action, it is critical to **write** down:
    - a. What the action is
    - b. The date by which it will be done
    - c. Who will do it
- e. The CEO continues to unpack the other juicy WISH THATs until the meeting time is over, or all of the juicy feedback has been processed. **[40 minutes]**
- f. Wrap up. Appreciate one other person in the group for something they did during the meeting. **[5 minutes]**
- g. Give feedback to Matt about the meeting itself **[5 minutes]**

“Why is it necessary to have Matt attend this? This seems very simple and could be done without Matt.”

Absolutely, it could be. But there is a reason that we don’t give full feedback. We don’t know how the recipient (in this case the CEO) will receive that feedback. There is a chance that she might get very angry, defensive, hurt, etc and then take the feedback as an attack, not a gift. This rarely happens, but sometimes it does. And that is why Matt is there.

If this happens, then Matt will jump in and help the CEO quickly release her anger and see the feedback for the gift that it is. That is Matt’s only role. Think of him as a lion-tamer. Most likely, the lion will stay in the cage, and Matt won’t be needed. But if Matt is needed, we’ll all be glad that he’s there.

Notes:

1. I have done this exercise at Plaid, Coinbase, Brex, Sonder, etc. Each of those exec teams and CEOs have found it to be worthwhile.
2. The full version of this exercise takes 90 minutes. We can do a quick-and-dirty version that takes 50 minutes. But the shorter version rarely feels as successful as the full version.
3. If the exercise proves to be useful for all, then there is follow-up:
  - a. CEO asks for feedback in all 1-1s and Team Meetings going forward:
    - i. CEO asks for written feedback at the end of every Exec Team meeting or 1-1.
    - ii. CEO treats all feedback as the gift it is.
    - iii. After the CEO has read the feedback (can be after the team meeting), she lets the team know what actions he will be taking against that feedback.
    - iv. At the beginning of the next team meeting, she lets the team know which of these actions he has completed, and what the results were.
  - b. Peers give each other feedback in the Team Meeting
    - i. After several successful cycles of giving the CEO feedback, ask the Exec Team if they would be open to giving feedback and receiving feedback to and from each other in the group. If yes from all, add this to the next team meeting. Start with pairs. Rotate to a new pair each meeting.
    - ii. Do it in writing. Either:
      1. Each pair creates a shared doc that they use, following the same format above. Or
      2. Create a group shared doc, and each pair puts their feedback in the group doc.
        - a. *This requires pre-approval by every team member that they will view all feedback as a gift and not feel shame if brutal feedback is given in this group setting. Be skeptical. Many will say yes, but mean no.*