Who am I?

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- From Columbus Ohio (Galena)

What are we going to cover?

- Why (frequent, actionable) feedback is crucial to your success/growth
- Who you should get feedback from
- Why your specific company matters
- What you should be asking
- How you should follow up

Who is this talk for?

- Thinking your career growth is too slow
- Feeling "stuck" at your current level
- You are "winging it" and want a plan
- Geared toward ICs but can also work for manager+

What do I mean by career growth?

- Increased responsibility, impact, and scope

- Going from mentee to mentor, leadership

- Promotion and making "the big bucks"

"At every job, you should either learn or earn. Either is fine. Both are best. But if it's neither, quit." Garry Tan

WHY do I need feedback?

- Receiving a "good job" does not always lead to growth
- Your view of growth !== your manager/company
- Reduces repeat (and unknown) mistakes
- Allows you to course correct
- Incremental success and tiny wins = demonstrable growth and compound over time

WHY do I need feedback?

- Over 75% of employees value frequent feedback
- Less than 30% report receiving it
- 3x more engagement from those receiving daily feedback vs annual
- 3.2x more likely to be motivated to do outstanding work

WHY do I need feedback?

- 14.9% lower turnover rates for companies that provide consistent feedback experience
- Those receiving inadequate feedback 21.5% more likely to actively pursue job interviews.
- Employees who feel "in control" of their careers are 20% more likely to stay in their roles.

WHY do I need feedback?

- Hear directly from people that HAVE grown
- Increased opportunities
- No surprises
- Know what leadership expects and values
- You will know if you are in a good place or not.

WHO do I get feedback from?

- Software development is a "team sport"
- More than one person typically is evaluating your performance
- Not everyone is helpful when giving feedback
- Multiple perspectives and experiences are key
- "in the **multitude of counsellors** *there is* safety."

MENTOR - Why have one?

- You should have a mentor!
- This can be formal or informal
- You don't report to them. Can be very transparent.
- They have advanced & have skills/knowledge that you don't
- They know the "lay of the land"

MENTOR - Who should I choose?

- Someone ahead of you career-wise (but not too much)
- Someone that wants to help (and has the time)
- They have the skillset you want to improve in
- Feel free to switch up if needed

MENTOR - the benefits

In depth case-study on a formal mentoring program at Sun Microsystems found that:

- Participants were 5x more likely to advance in pay grade
- Mentees promoted 5x more than those not in the program, and mentors 6x more.
- Retention rates 20%+ higher for mentors/mentees

MENTOR - what to talk about?

- YOU should drive the conversations!
- Both micro and macro issues
- Pick an angle: documentation, architecture, project planning, specific language/technology, soft skills
- Situational

MANAGER

- They work closely with you
- Should know strengths and weaknesses
- Best person to provide you with opportunities
- Can YOUR manager support your growth?

SKIP-LEVEL

- Hear from a different perspective
  - What is this person thinking?
  - What do they care about and value?
- They also can support your growth
- This person can move you if needed (why would this be needed?)

PEERS

- Want to know how folks perceive you as a team member
- Folks will be hesitant to provide negative feedback
- Must frame the ask properly (and repeatedly)
- Ask for something specific and small (if there was ONE thing you think I could do better in that presentation…)
- Documentation, code reviews, project related stuff

Who else?

- Other roles/departments (Product mgmt, QA, Devops, etc)
- High seniority folks or senior leadership

Frequency (**WHEN** should I be having these conversations?)

- If you are having growth conversations once/year, STOP IT!
- Meet as frequently as you feel is actionable
- YOU are driving these meetings (to an extent)

WHERE do I work? (know your company)

- Can an identical performance at one company yield entirely different results at another?
- Different companies **value** different things
- Leaders have differing management styles

Company Differences

- Large vs small company
- Startup vs established
- Cash infused vs strapped
- Org structure - flat vs many levels
- Personalities/leadership

Potential company values

- Client relations
- Speed - how fast can you churn out code
- Influence - What influence do you have on other engineers?
- Testing - do you write tests for all of your code? TDD?
- Quality - Do you frequently have production issues?
- Impact - how large scale is the work that you do? days vs months
- Ambiguity

FAANG company examples: Meta

- **Collaboration:** Strong teamwork and cross-functional collaboration
- **Impact Focus:** Engineers are encouraged to work on projects that demonstrate measurable outcomes.
- **Move Fast:** Preference for those who can iterate quickly and learn from failures.

FAANG company examples: Apple

- **Attention to Detail:** A meticulous focus on design, performance, and user experience.
- **Polish and Perfectionism:** Engineers are expected to deliver high-quality, finished products with minimal bugs.
- **Differs from "move fast and iterate"**

FAANG company examples:Amazon

- **Ownership:** Engineers are expected to take end-to-end responsibility for projects (including deployment and monitoring).
- **Frugality:** Preference for solutions that maximize impact with minimal resources.
- **Data-Driven Decision-Making:** Evidence-based problem-solving and decision-making.
- Differs from "move fast and iterate" and collaboration at Meta

FAANG company examples: Netflix

- **Independence:** Engineers are given autonomy and are expected to act with maturity and accountability.
- **High Performance:** Preference for exceptional talent that *delivers results quickly*.
- **Candor:** Open communication and giving/receiving feedback are cultural norms.
- **Innovation:** Encouragement to challenge the status quo and think creatively.

Personal example (All at the same company)

- 2004-2009 - Startup vibe
  - Stay late and troubleshoot customer issues
  - fast iterative fixes - "we test in prod"
- 2009-2011- Agile transformation
  - How open am I to change?
  - How closely am I following the new practices?
- 2012-2015 - teams and structure
  - Mentorship
  - Influence across teams
  - Embrace and use new tech

So, **what** should I be asking?

HABITS

HABITS

What are the **qualities** and **daily habits** of those that you would consider **top performers?**

Purpose

- Ask your manager this

- Also good for skip-level and mentor

- Find out what your company values from an engineer

- What are these folks doing that I am not

Purpose

- Ask your manager this or anyone that works closely with you

- Determine my weaknesses or my gaps in performance

HABITS

What am I doing well that I should continue doing?

What do you care most about on a day-to-day basis?

What do you want to hear about from me on a regular basis?

IMPACT

IMPACT

What is a task/project I could work on that would really be a **stretch** to complete and **challenge my skillset?**

Purpose

WHY?

- Ask your manager or skip level

- Ask to do that thing or be involved somehow

- You will be at the top of mind for the next big project

- This is "self-infused" growth

- Don't balk when offered opportunities

IMPACT

What are some problems that have gone unsolved that you would really like to see solved?

Purpose

- Ask your manager or skip level

- Identify real pain points and areas for large impact

- Work on this as a side project or come up with a plan and ask if you can go solve it

- Might be some ambiguity here that you will have to research

IMPACT

What does **going above and beyond** look like for my role?

Purpose

- Am I actually doing the bare minimum?
- Meets vs exceeds expectations
- What boss thinks vs what I think
- Follow-up: Which of these things would you most like me to work on in the near-term?

IMPACT

What is the most impactful problem the **team** is having right now? What is the most helpful first step toward fixing that?

LEADERSHIP/ COLLABORATION

What are ways I can help make the **entire team** get better (What are things that others have done to make the entire team get better)?

Purpose

WHY?

- Team impact > individual
- Force multiplier
- What has been hard for folks to learn – become the expert and teach it
- Think about adoption – make it easy for folks
- Improve tooling, lunch and learns, book club, study group, team presentations, documentation

Purpose

- Shows that you care about more than just individual contribution

- Great way to take the lead in a small way

LEADERSHIP/ COLLABORATION

What expectations do you have of leaders in the org that you do not have of others?

Purpose

- Ask your manager, skip-level, maybe mentor
- Identify new skillsets or habits that you need to develop
- Excellent tech chops is not the same as leadership

LEADERSHIP/ COLLABORATION

Can I take the lead on X project? What is coming up that I can get involved with early on in the process?

PROMOTION WORTHINESS

PROMOTION WORTHINESS

3) What are some things that people are doing at the ___ level **that I am not doing right now?**

Purpose

- Can ask manager, SL, or mentor
- Discover your gaps
- Learn what it takes to perform at that level
- What additional responsibilities can I take on?

PROMOTION WORTHINESS

What about my performance would stop you from saying that I am ready for a promotion TODAY?

PROMOTION WORTHINESS

What **specific** areas do you want me to improve on before I could be considered ready for promotion?

Purpose

WHY?

- Am I close or not?

- What does the timeline look like?

- Find out specifics and understand how you can **demonstrate** if you have accomplished what is being asked.

TIPS

- ADAPT these questions to your specific needs
- Get clarity if your feedback isn't actionable
- If you want to be promoted, bring it up (early)!!
- Be willing to leave your comfort zone (that is where growth happens)
- Make it abundantly clear that

How to follow up

Learn to filter

- Not all feedback will be actionable (immediately)
- Not everything is top priority

Identify actionable items

- Is this something that I need in a specific scenario? OR
- Is this something that I can apply to my daily workflow/habits?
- Is what I need to do unclear? Ask follow-up questions.

TAKE ACTION

Incorporate these into your daily workflow and decision making

Put time on your calendar to review

- How have I changed my habits as a result of the feedback I've been given?
- Am I failing to take action on the advice I'm given? Why?
- Am I tracking my results?

REVISIT

- Bring these up in subsequent meetings
- Share actions you've taken
- Ask "am I on the right track here"? or "what's the next step"?

What if I'm not making progress?

- Is it you?
- Do you need a new mentor/team (manager)?
- Is your company unsupportive of growth?

General tips for owning your career growth

Use the rubric!!

- Many companies have a leveling guide
- Make notes of what you are already doing
- Add to it with each project you do
- Generate action items for what's missing
- Get clarity if something doesn't seem actionable

Share your desired career path

- Be transparent about this

- Don't expect folks to read your mind

Keep track of successes

- What are you "winning" at?

- How have you implemented the feedback you were given and what were the results

- Schedule a personal weekly retrospective and review at project end

- Track missteps also

Demonstrate how receptive you are

- Send the message "I'm open to this".

- Your response is everything

- Don't argue. Reflect first.

- Ask for nit-picky things

Demonstrate how you're taking action

- "You said X, so I did Y and Z, and Q was the result"

- Is this the right idea?

- What else should I be doing?

Will this work?

- In between meetings and conversations is a bunch of work
- You will know what expectations are
- You will have a clear path
- If you don't, you know what to do
  - Talk to someone else
  - Change teams/managers
  - Find another job

QUESTIONS?

References

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