




7-26-2018

Finding the Silver Lining: How Positive Psychology Can Help You Use Critical Feedback to Flourish

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Finding the Silver Lining: How Positive Psychology Can Help You Use Critical Feedback to Flourish

Abstract

We all need feedback to grow professionally and improve our skills. Our cognitive biases and limited perspective mean it is imperative that we draw on others to help us see what we cannot, and point us to new strategies to achieve our goals. But, even if you agree with that sentiment, you might find it emotionally wrenching to hear that your work falls short or could be improved: many of us avoid or reject beneficial, but critical, feedback. And, sometimes negative feedback is inexpertly delivered, making it even harder to hear. Positive psychology aims to help people flourish; while it's sometimes hard to remember this, critical feedback is usually intended to promote flourishing, too. This capstone describes a model for thinking about how to flourish from feedback. It provides tools which can be used to make us more receptive to feedback and influence our feedback environment; these same tools can be used to prepare for, engage in, and process feedback conversations. Finally, the model offers guidance for selecting the right tools to help everyone reap the benefits that can come from hearing the wisdom that others can share with us.

Keywords

positive psychology, feedback, critical feedback, interventions, organizational psychology

Disciplines

Industrial and Organizational Psychology | Other Psychology | Psychology

Finding the Silver Lining:

How Positive Psychology Can Help You Use Critical Feedback to Flourish

Mary Beth Rettger

University of Pennsylvania

A Capstone Project Submitted

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Masters of Applied Positive Psychology

Advisor: Jan Stanley

August 1, 2018

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Acknowledgements

First, thanks to my MathWorks friends and colleagues, especially Jennifer Lymneos, Josh Tillotson, and Jack Little, for writing recommendations, and generously giving me the time to do this program. I hope to repay that generosity by sharing what I've learned at MathWorks. Special thanks to Rashel Masters for her helpful proof-reading, and Joe Smith and Barbara Jordan for their early help (and patience) with my application.

To my MAPP family, it's been such an honor to spend this year with you, and I've learned so much from all of you. Special thanks and love to my fall cohort: Elizabeth, Anna, and Susie; my friends Krista and Lara; my rockstar spring cohort: Sharon, Rebecca, and Joe; and Ashley and Ericca for providing great ideas for improving the flourishing model. Thanks to all the AI's and stellar faculty and staff for creating an awesome program, and supporting us through it. Also, big thanks to Jan Stanley, my advisor for this capstone; little did she know what she'd signed up for; thanks Jan for reminding me about that whole "positive" thing.

Thanks to all my siblings, Mike, Phil, and Joan for being supportive, and especially Cathy and John, who had to listen to me whine... a lot... and were unfailingly patient.

Thanks to Daniel and Emma for being awesome kids, and being understanding about mom taking over the basement, not having as much time, trying to do positive psychology things with you etc. I love you both.

And finally, thanks to Roy, love of my life, for always saying yes, and always being surprised when I doubt myself.

Preface

"All research is me-search." -- Krista Logelin

For over 20 years, I've been lucky to work at a great company. Profitable, stable, sensibly run, its awe-inspiring mission is to advance engineering and science in the world.

Part of what makes the company work so well is that it embraces solid core values and common cultural practices. One of our most important practices is "design review."

Shortly after I started at the company, my manager asked if he could "design review" an email before I sent it. I was surprised: I was fairly senior, and my managers at previous companies had left me alone. Before I could decide if I was insulted, Josh, sensing my hesitation, gave me a little introduction into the culture, explaining that at this company, letting other people review your work was highly valued, and the expectation was that all work could be improved with more eyes. Skeptical, I sent him the email. He made it better, and I never looked back.

Well, sort of never.

For the next fifteen years I built and rebuilt several teams, managed key functions, oversaw over 120 employees, and relied on design review as a key tool to make my own work and the work of everyone around me better. I regularly enlisted other people to give me feedback on work ranging from emails, to presentations, to annual plans, to major redesigns of key products. I expected others around me to do the same. And it was great.

Really.

Except when it wasn't.

I didn't love when senior management second-guessed... ooops, I mean design reviewed, my hiring plans, or group priorities, or employee reviews. Many of those bits of feedback sent me into a tailspin that would require a lot of chocolate, and reassurance from my husband who agreed, yes, I could quit today if I wanted, but maybe I should give it one more day.

I'm a perfectionist, and I like to work independently, and this feedback often felt like a gut punch. It didn't matter what the feedback was, my panicked self-talk almost always boiled down to "I can't do that. I don't know how to do that." Worse, I beat myself up because I knew I *should* like the feedback, as it was intended to help me.

In my last management role, I took over a struggling group and was asked to oversee the redesign of a key feature. Because the feature was so important, the design review process was much more formal, involving the most senior people in the company. The stakes were much higher, the process of responding to feedback was much more complicated, and the stress was significant. And, again, partly self-imposed. Although the feedback was presented professionally and was full of good ideas, I often found it demoralizing and frustrating. I delivered the feature (which was, admittedly, much better because of the design review process), and several months later resigned, burned out, in part because I never wanted to sit through meetings like those again.

Happily, my manager found me a less stressful way to continue to contribute at the company, where I still work, and I continue to rely on feedback from design reviews to make my stuff better. And it's always great. Except when it isn't.

From the moment I knew I needed to do a capstone, I wanted to learn if positive psychology could help me embrace feedback in the way I would like to be able to. As I thought about doing this project, I shared the ideas with others. My unscientific poll is that 90% of the

people I talked to said, "Oh, I need to know that too." The other 10% were mystified, "What do you mean by negative feedback? All feedback is good." I want to be like that last 10%; this capstone is for me and the other 90%.

Situation Analysis

“Not all gifts arrive in neat packages. This is definitely true for feedback.”

-- Deborah Peterson

Getting feedback at work is a regular part of people's experience. When it's positive, it makes you feel good (Ilies, De Pater, & Judge, 2007), bolsters your motivation (Larson, 1984), and makes you feel more engaged with your organization (Shriar, n.d.). Critical, constructive, and negative feedback is also really important to helping you improve performance (Belschak & Den Hartog, 2009). Negative feedback helps you build skills (Locke & Latham, 2002), helps you assess how you are doing with respect to goals (Larson, 1984), and can help you understand how you rate professionally (London, 1995). Unfortunately, discussing negative feedback is uncomfortable for both the giver (Wagoner & Waldron, 1999) and receiver (Rudawsky, Lundgren, & Grasha, 1999). So much so, that givers will delay providing important critical feedback (Wagoner & Waldron, 1999), soft pedal the bad news (Wagoner & Waldron, 1999), and downgrade their opinion of the person to whom they are providing the feedback (Larson, 1984). For receivers, negative feedback can adversely impact motivation (Kluger & DiNisi, 1996), self-esteem, and mood, leading to anger, shame, or other feelings that adversely impact well-being (Belschak & Den Hartog, 2009).

Here's the challenge then: how can someone get the feedback they need to improve their performance when their managers are ill-trained to provide that feedback (Harms & Roebuck, 2010), and reluctant to engage in that conversation (Wagoner & Waldron, 1999)? And, how can a receiver of feedback hear and accept valid and helpful suggestions for improvement while not ending up feeling criticized or even helpless (Sparr & Sonnentag, 2008)? In fact, is it possible to

embrace those criticisms and suggestions and use them to grow, achieve, and even flourish?

Positive psychology offers an array of interventions that can be applied before, during, and after receiving feedback to help reach through the clouds of negative feedback to find the silver lining of insights, ideas, and actions that will help you flourish.

What Do We Mean by Feedback?

“Success is achieved by developing our strengths, not by eliminating our weaknesses” --

Marilyn vos Savant

The term "feedback" is used extensively in management and business research, but there is no commonly accepted definition of the term (Ramaprasad, 1983). The term originates from cybernetics and control theories, which suffer from a similar lack of consistent definition (Ramaprasad, 1983). Ramaprasad offers this definition: "Feedback is information about the gap between the actual level and the reference level of a system parameter which is used to alter the gap in some way" (Ramaprasad, 1983, p. 4). He argues further that the information about the gap is not feedback; it's only feedback if the information is used to alter the gap (Ramaprasad, 1983).

Stone and Heen (2015) describe feedback as "any information you get about yourself," offering non-professional examples ranging from SAT scores and college application results, to online dating and divorce data (2015, p. 4). While the assessment of work performance dates back hundreds of years (DeNisi & Murphy, 2017), the term "feedback" entered use as part of management theory after World War II, when businesses began introducing formal appraisal systems to assess performance (Cappelli & Tavis, 2016). Researchers make a distinction between formal and informal performance appraisal activities (London, 1995). Formal evaluations typically include narrative descriptions of positive and negative performance, as well as a rating that has implications for salary and promotions. Formal appraisals are influenced by a range of policies, activities and interventions intended to improve employee performance, while also being shaped by regulations intended to protect employees (DeNisi & Murphy, 2017). All

types of organizations (education, government, corporations) offer formal assessments of employees (London, 1995). Many companies use a "360" review format that includes feedback not only from supervisors, but also from peers, subordinates, and sometimes customers: the intent of this style of appraisal is to provide a more well-rounded description of an individual's performance (London, 1995).

Less formal feedback is also an important part of work life. Supervisors can give informal feedback either privately in planned or unplanned 1-1 meetings, or publicly in the context of other work (London, 1995). Peers, subordinates, and even customers can provide informal feedback as well (London, 1995). Feedback comes in many media (written, phone calls, verbally, private, in meetings), and may be expected or spontaneous (London, 1995). Feedback can also be inferred by actions of others, for example, customers failing to renew contracts, or peers intentionally excluding a co-worker from meetings (London, 1995).

Why does it matter? Feedback can provide an individual with information about their performance that helps them understand how effective they are being, how they are progressing toward their goals, and what they can do to adjust their performance to better meet their goals (Larson, 1984; Belschak & Den Hartog, 2009).

Feedback helps employees learn. For an organization, it can provide guidance to employees to help keep them aligned with organizational goals and ensure that their efforts are advancing the interests of the organization (Larson, 1984). When effective, feedback can help employees improve performance (Larson, 1984), motivate them to higher levels of performance (Larson, 1984), and promote employee engagement with an organization (Shriar, n.d.).

Feedback is especially important because people are often ineffective at judging their own performance. Studies have shown that people consistently overrate their skills, their

likelihood of success, and even how long it will take them to complete a task (Dunning, Heath, & Suls, 2004). Improving performance on any task depends on accurate information about the gap between current and desired levels of performance (Locke & Latham, 2002); self-assessments simply fail to provide that (Dunning et al., 2004).

Even when formal performance appraisal systems exist, employees don't always find them helpful in improving their performance. Aguinis, Gottfredson, and Joo (2011) report only 3 in 10 employees believe their performance review system helps them improve their performance. Despite the many potential sources of feedback available, when queried, employees report being eager for more information about how they are doing. One study noted that only 52% of employees reported being fully or moderately satisfied by the amount of informal feedback they received at work (Coffin, McGivern, Underwood-Price, Xiong, & Zander, 2012). Another study found that 82% of employees appreciate regular feedback, whether it's positive or negative, and 65% of employees said they wanted more feedback (Shriar, n.d.)

Unfortunately, accurate and timely feedback from others is hard to come by. Only 58% of managers think they give enough feedback (Shriar, n.d.). Further, 32% of employees say they sometimes wait more than three months to get feedback from their managers (Shriar, n.d.). Surprisingly, there is evidence that providing feedback often doesn't beneficially impact performance. Kluger & DiNisi (1996) reviewed 100 years of research on feedback interventions intended to improve performance, and found that interventions have "highly variable" impact on performance (Kluger & DiNisi, 1996, pg 254). While some interventions do have a beneficial impact, other don't; in as many as one-third of studies, feedback interventions were found to have an adverse influence on performance outcomes. Data showed feedback had a conflicting impact, regardless of whether the feedback is intended to praise or correct (Kluger & DiNisi, 1996).

Much research focuses on the impact of critical feedback aimed at improving performance. Most researchers refer to this as "negative" feedback, reflecting its intention to draw attention to performance that falls short of goals or performance standards (Kluger & DiNisi, 1996). Researchers refer to this characteristic as the valence or sign of the feedback (Kluger & DiNisi, 1996; Ilies et al., 2007).

Critical or negative feedback is especially important to understanding gaps in performance, ineffective performance strategies, and opportunities for improvement (Kluger & DiNisi, 1996). But negative feedback also has the potential to adversely impact an individual's well-being. Aguinis, Joo, and Gottfredson find that negative feedback often leads to "employee dissatisfaction, defensive reactions, a decreased desire to improve individual performance, and less actual improvement" (2012, p. 106). Negative feedback sometimes causes an increase in negative affect in the recipient; it is often perceived as threatening information that impinges on one's self-concept (Green, Gino, & Staats, 2017). Critical feedback can threaten an individual's self-esteem and feelings of competence (Audia & Locke, 2003). It can cause feelings of anger and increase conflict (Audia & Locke, 2003), and result in physiological distress (Besser, Flett, & Hewitt, 2004). For this capstone, "negative" and "critical" feedback will be used interchangeably to reflect the message "your performance needs to improve," but shouldn't imply an inevitable impact on the recipient's affect.

Feedback is essential, yet hard to find, and often ineffective, or even painful. What works or doesn't when giving or receiving negative feedback? And what can we learn to help make receiving it not only not detrimental, but helpful for well-being?

What Works and Doesn't When Receiving Negative Feedback

"Negative feedback is the conundrum of feedback."

-- Ilgen & Davis, 2000, p. 550

Responses to negative feedback depend on personal characteristics of the recipient (e.g., personality, goal orientation, self-esteem), the nature of the message, and characteristics of the source of the feedback (Ilies et al., 2007). Best practices for providing critical feedback are challenging to identify: advice sometimes appears to conflict, cognitive biases have an impact, and an individual's personal characteristics filters feedback so that it has varying effects.

When confronted with negative feedback, people have five choices: work harder, work differently, withdraw from the task, lower their standards, or ignore the feedback (Ilgen & Davis, 2000). For feedback to be useful, the recipient has to be able to hear, understand, and accept the information (Crommelinck & Anseel, 2013). Steelman and Rutkowski (2002) found that negative feedback evokes feelings of defensiveness, which may cause employees to reject the message. In fact, the more critical the feedback, the more negative the recipient's response, and the more likely they are to reject it (Lam, Yik, & Schaubroeck, 2002). Feedback must be perceived as fair and accurate: people reject criticism which they think is unfair (Aguinis et al., 2012), while feedback that is considered valid, accurate, and reliable is more likely to be accepted and perceived as useful (Steelman & Rutkowski, 2002). On the plus side, the perceived fairness of feedback cushioned the affective impact of negative feedback (Aguinis et al., 2012).

Managers attempting to provide negative feedback are working against their employees' inherent prejudices against receiving negative feedback. In general, employees forget details contained in negative feedback, misinterpret the message they have been given, or dismiss

negative feedback altogether (Lam et al., 2002). Further, Steelman and Rutkowski (2002) found that employees tend to view negative feedback as less accurate than positive feedback. This perception of inaccuracy is related to several cognitive biases that factor into performance discussions. Attribution bias leads supervisors and employees to view the same event differently: supervisors tend to attribute causality for poor performance to the employee, while employees may attribute causality to external factors when things go wrong (Cannon & Witherspoon, 2005). 360 reviews are an attempt to address this concern, by providing a variety of sources to support comments about performance. A meta-analysis on 360 reviews demonstrates the problem: while peer and supervisor ratings tend to align, both vary significantly from self-review ratings, which are typically higher (Harris & Schaubroeck, 1988). Studies have shown that people consistently overestimate their skills and likelihood of success, in part because their lack of skill makes it difficult for them to assess their deficits (Dunning et al., 2004). The combination of inaccurate attributions of cause by managers, and overestimation of performance by individuals, leads to a mismatch in assessment that can precipitate a difficult conversation between supervisor and employee (Cannon & Witherspoon, 2005).

Feedback that is considered valid, accurate, and reliable is more likely to be accepted and perceived as useful (Stelman & Rutkowski, 2002). Liden and Mitchell (1985) find that recipients treated feedback as more credible when it contains specific examples from their past behavior, which are helpful to both the feedback giver and recipient in making an accurate diagnosis of the problem. Ilgen, Fisher, and Taylor (1979) found that feedback with suggestions of how to improve was better accepted. Suggestions for different task strategies after negative feedback can reduce wasted effort: researchers recommend that negative feedback that contains

advice about how to avoid future errors or that recommends alternative strategies is beneficial to improve performance (Goodman, Wood, & Hendricks, 2004).

The degree of specificity however, needs to be customized to the experience level of the employee. Goodman and colleagues (2004) found that when an employee is learning a task, they benefit from very specific instructions. However, receipt of detailed instructions is negatively related to exploratory behavior; too much detail prevented systematic exploration, and that lack of exploration reduced learning. Other researchers concluded that being too prescriptive about the right way to complete a task reduces beneficial learning-by-experimentation and is detrimental to employee development in the long run (Fong et al., 2018).

Timeliness is also important. The longer the delay between an event and feedback about the event, the less likely it is that the feedback will have an impact (Ilgen et al., 1979) More frequent feedback is generally helpful (Ilgen et al., 1979). Except when it's not: when negative feedback is provided too frequently, the individual experiences a kind of learned helplessness. In one study, Mikulincer (1989) gave subjects unsolvable problems, and then consistently negative feedback about their answers; subjects performed more poorly in subsequent tasks. Repeated negative feedback acts like a punishment and leaves recipients feeling that they have no control or ability to influence their performance (Mikulincer, 1989). When subjects believe they have no response to guarantee successful performance, they are less inclined to take action (Mikulincer, 1989).

Christensen-Salem, Kinicki, Zhang, and Walumbwa (2018) found feedback was more likely to be accepted when it is task-, goal-, or future-oriented, and focused on learning and improvement. They found that people are more likely to accept feedback when it is supportive and appears to pose no threat to self-esteem or job security, when it is presented in a non-

threatening way, and was viewed as helpful. Feedback positioned this way lowers defensiveness because it focuses attention on learning and improvement.

Researchers also suggest that information about the "why" behind critical comments can influence their effectiveness. For example, Aguinis and colleagues (2012) suggest that helping employees understand how their poor performance may adversely impact their team or organization can increase their acceptance of feedback. Loftus and Tanlu (2017) found that performance evaluations that included causal language (e.g., "this is problematic behavior because it causes this problem...") beneficially influenced employee's reactions to information in performance evaluations. Employees who receive negative reviews that contain a higher amount of causal language were more likely to address the feedback they received, as they were better able to understand the rationale behind it (Loftus & Tanlu, 2017). Leung, Su, and Morris (1998) found that when employees focused on the meta-level meaning of the feedback (e.g., trying to infer their supervisor's intent) the outcomes were less positive, either because they were confused by the message (and so forced to spend time deciphering it) or because they became distracted by perceived threats to their self-concept and were unable to focus on the specific suggestions for improvement.

Finally, constructive negative feedback is different from destructive feedback (Fong et al., 2018). Constructive feedback is well-intentioned, targeted appropriately, and provides guidance about how the work can be improved (Baron, 1988). Destructive criticism, including attacks on the person, increases conflict, lowers self-efficacy, and negatively impacts attitudes towards supervisors (Anderson, Buchko, & Buchko, 2016). In contrast, constructive criticism was found to lower anger and tension, and resulted in higher goal achievement and self-efficacy (Fong et al., 2018).

What's the Role of the Manager in Effective Delivery of Critical Feedback?

"We all need people who will give us feedback. That's how we improve."

– Bill Gates

While negative feedback can come from peers or subordinates, the feedback that comes from managers is particularly significant to most employees. Managers' personal qualities matter to an individual's willingness to hear and accept feedback. The most effective feedback comes from a trustworthy source (Ilgen et al., 1979), who presents the feedback from a perspective of caring and concern (Fong et al., 2018). Recipients are most likely to accept feedback that they believe was delivered with good intentions to help, and no intention to harm; this belief comes from a previous strong relationship between the giver and receiver (Eva et al., 2012).

Unfortunately, the American Management Association found that a significant cause of frustration during performance reviews is that managers aren't trained on how to deliver feedback or coach employees on how to modify their performance based on that feedback (Harms & Roebuck, 2010).

Employees are sensitive to the accuracy of feedback, and, as noted previously, cognitive biases sometimes interfere with a manager's accuracy. Aguinis and colleagues (2012) describe some of the biases that affect managers' assessments. For example, managers are impacted by the saliency and recency of behaviors when delivering feedback. They can sometimes react to the recency or significance of behavior that is easiest for them to see, and then over-generalize its occurrence. Once they have provided negative feedback about the behavior, they are more likely to notice it recurring, and are more likely to remember the behavior in future (Aguinis et al., 2012). Recipients are skeptical of negative feedback; for instance, employees discount feedback if the supervisor did not actually observe the behavior (Wagoner & Waldron, 1999). Further,

managers fail to predict that their employees may not see the situation as they do, and may be unpleasantly surprised by an employee's reactivity (Cannon & Witherspoon, 2005).

Manager's feelings about the employee impact their approach to feedback. The less they like the employee, the less feedback they provide (London, 1995) and the more they are likely to blame the employee for the problem (Aguinis et al., 2012). Managers are also reluctant to give negative feedback to employees they like, or on whom they are dependent. After they give negative feedback they report liking the employee less (Larson, 1984). If managers feel the employee's poor performance reflects badly on them, they may take punitive action towards the employee (Cannon & Witherspoon, 2005). These data show the many ways that negative feedback can adversely impact relationships, and relationships impact the exchange of feedback.

Managers are reluctant to give negative feedback because they think the recipient may reject the feedback, become defensive, or project negative feelings back on the supervisor (Steelman & Rutkowski, 2004). They have good reason to hesitate: negative feedback is a reliable cause of interpersonal conflict (Rudawsky et al., 1999). Providing negative feedback is stressful and unpleasant, so many managers simply avoid it altogether. Alternatively, they delay providing feedback when they initially see a behavior, waiting until they can no longer avoid discussing it or the problem has gotten too bad to ignore, resulting in even more negative feedback (Wagoner & Waldron, 1999). This is problematic for employees because they aren't getting the information that they need to adjust their performance (Wagoner & Waldron, 1999).

In addition to avoiding feedback, supervisors try to soften the blow of negative feedback by being indirect, providing vague descriptions of the problematic behavior, downplaying the seriousness of the problem, and failing to provide examples (Wagoner & Waldron, 1999). This can leave employees poorly informed about their situation, or unclear about next steps (Aguinis

et al., 2012). In an emotionally charged situation, employees may fail to ask the follow-up questions they need to understand and act on what they have heard (Chen, Lam, & Zhong, 2007). To benefit from negative feedback, the individual needs to feel that the information extends their current understanding; they have to engage in cognitive processing to decide this (Audia & Locke, 2003). Negative feedback complicates that process: the employee, feeling threatened by the bad news, is inclined to dismiss the vague information or attribute it to external causes, instead of engaging in a conversation with their manager to understand the information better (Audia & Locke, 2003).

The way a supervisor delivers feedback impacts its acceptance and perceived utility: a helpful, constructive attitude on the part of the supervisor is correlated with positive responses by employees, including satisfaction and motivation to improve job performance (Steelman & Rutkowski, 2002). Steelman and Rutkowski (2002) reviewed survey results from over 400 employees, which asked them to rate their experiences of being reviewed; these researchers found supervisor credibility and feedback delivery had a larger impact on feedback acceptance and subsequent motivation than did the positive or negative valence of the feedback. Other researchers found that making aspects of the delivery situation more comfortable, for example delivering the feedback in private, made the process more palatable for the recipient (Leung et al., 1998). Survey results from 300 United Parcel Service employees led Wagoner and Waldron (1999) to conclude that when supervisors communicated care for their employees, it buffered the impact of bad news.

Using a strengths-based approach to feedback delivery, balancing positive and negative feedback, and actively engaging the employee in a conversation about what's going well, increases employee satisfaction with the process and reduces defensiveness (Aguinis et al.,

2012). Managers who help employees see how to compensate for weaknesses using their strengths, or restructure job responsibilities to reduce focus on weaker skills, also lead to increased well-being and engagement, as well as increased job satisfaction and motivation (Aguinis et al., 2012). On the other hand, if the manager aims the criticism at stable behaviors or core parts of the recipient's personality, the feedback can leave the receiver feeling discouraged about the possibility of change (Cannon & Witherspoon, 2005).

What Personal Characteristics Impact Reception of Critical Feedback?

“Love your enemies, for they tell you your faults.” -- Benjamin Franklin

A variety of personal characteristics of the recipient mediate their reactions to negative feedback.

After receiving critical feedback, test participants with traits like conscientiousness and perfectionism experienced physiological reactions that impacted their performance on subsequent tasks. For example, people who were high in conscientiousness experienced increased tension after receiving feedback; tension interfered with their subsequent performance (Cianci, Klein, & Seijts, 2010). Besser and colleagues (2004) studied the interaction of perfectionism and critical feedback. After receiving critical feedback on a test of reaction time and accuracy, subjects with perfectionist traits responded to critical feedback with negative affect and signs of physiological distress. These researchers suggested perfectionists responded to negative feedback with unhelpful, automatic thoughts about their performance.

Other traits had varying impact on reactions to negative feedback. People with a strong internal locus of control were more likely to change their behavior after receiving negative feedback (Ilgen et al., 1979). Research subjects with high to moderate social anxiety perceived any feedback as more negative than those who were less anxious (Ilgen et al., 1979). Low self-efficacy may impact a feedback recipient's decision to pursue goals or not after receiving feedback (Audia & Locke, 2003).

Self-esteem influences how individuals perceive and respond to negative feedback (Ilies et al., 2007). Failure and critical feedback has a greater impact on subsequent motivation and performance on people with low self-esteem, who respond with more negative affect (Kernis,

Brockner, & Frankel, 1989). Low self-esteem exacerbates the effects of negative feedback, which may be perceived as a threat to one's self-image (Brown, Kulik, & Lim, 2016).

Kernis and colleagues (1989) suggest that people with low self-esteem may experience greater reactions to negative feedback because of their tendency to over-generalize negative outcomes to other situations. Over-generalization and self-esteem are inversely correlated, and over-generalization has been linked to depression (Kernis et al., 1989).

Research on self-compassion suggests that it may play an important role in reactions to negative events (Leary, Tate, Adams, Batts Allen, & Hancock, 2007). In one study, 117 subjects who completed the Self-Compassion Scale were asked to answer questions about negative events in the preceding days, including rating how bad the event was, describing the event, and indicating the degree to which they felt responsible for the event. Regardless of how bad the events were rated, participants who scored higher on self-compassion experienced less negative feelings as a result of the event, and rated themselves more highly on their ability to handle the event.

Other research also shows that self-compassion is correlated with lower negative emotions, less self-blame, less rumination, and greater ability to keep the situation in perspective (Leary et al., 2007). Researchers have some evidence that high self-compassion acts as a buffer against negative events, even when someone has low self-esteem; high self-compassion is associated with better coping skills and Growth Mindset. In addition, there is some speculation that some high self-esteem is fragile: people with high self-esteem, but low self-compassion, may experience that self-esteem inauthentically, and may be more defensive in the face of negative feedback that threatens their self-image (Leary et al., 2007).

How Does Emotion Play a Role in Reception of Critical Feedback?

“Negative feedback has ‘unreliable effects’ because it creates a complex set of feelings and thoughts, sometimes feeling motivational, sometimes feeling threatening, and challenging their self-worth.” (Zingoni & Byron, 2017, p. 50)

Negative feedback can lead to a variety of complex emotions, some of which interfere with cognitive processing of feedback. Further, those negative emotions may be long lasting and have implications for subsequent performance.

While negative feedback is sometimes perceived as motivational, it can also feel threatening (Ilies et al., 2007). Negative feedback often produces negative feelings like anger, distress, and depression (Rudawsky et al., 1999); defensiveness, dissatisfaction, and denial (Steelman & Rutkowski, 2002); disappointment or frustration (Motro & Ellis, 2017); hostility, irritability, anxiety, and despair (Lam et al., 2002); or shame, guilt, embarrassment, and fear (Belschak & Den Hartog, 2009). Finally, negative feedback was related to job-related depression, job anxiety, job turnover, and lower job satisfaction (Sparr & Sonnentag, 2008).

Giving and receiving feedback can be very emotional for both the giver and receiver. Cannon and Witherspoon (2005) report that recipients have been known to become angry or cry, storm out of an office, lash out verbally, or physically attack their managers. Critical feedback can be viewed as an attack on one's ego or identity, and can produce a fight or flight response (Cannon & Witherspoon, 2005).

To benefit from negative feedback, people need to be able to appreciate that the feedback contains new information. The situation is complicated by supervisors attempting to soften the bad news by communicating ambiguous messages; this makes it harder for the recipient to

understand what the supervisor is attempting to communicate. To learn more, the recipient must choose to engage with the supervisor. Negative emotions interfere with that process. Negative feedback can trigger affective reactions that can distort the process of appraising information, or simply make the recipient withdraw from the conversation (Audia & Locke, 2003).

Negative feedback can result in feelings of tension or anxiety (Ciani, Klein, & Seijt, 2010). High levels of tension lead to off-task thoughts (for example, self-doubt, worry, fear of punishment) that interfere with performance on tasks requiring concentration, information processing, and learning. Tension makes it difficult for people to direct cognitive resources toward their goals (Cianci, et al., 2010).

A recipient's response to feedback impacts a supervisor's subsequent evaluation of the employee (Motro & Ellis, 2017). Anger is a particularly problematic response to feedback. Anger is associated with blaming others, instead of oneself, for unfavorable events, or blaming the feedback provider, which may create an unwillingness by the receiver to change behavior (Niemann, Wisse, Rus, Van Yperen, & Sassenberg, 2014). Again, individual characteristics are important: individuals who are high in neuroticism, or emotional instability, are especially likely to become angry in stressful situations, like receiving negative performance information (Niemann et al., 2014).

Domagalski & Steelman (2007) have reported that employees who get angry at work are more likely to be interpersonally aggressive and display problematic work behaviors (like stealing). Anger at work is often handled through emotional restraint. Anger suppression is a form of emotional labor, in which an individual modulates the expression of one's emotions for professional reasons. While usually applied to interactions with customers, some researchers feel the term applies equally well to describing the work of regulating emotional interactions

between staff members (Domagalski & Steelman, 2007). Emotional regulation comes with costs to the individual exercising that regulation, including negative health consequences (Domagalski & Steelman, 2007). This suggests that the emotions evoked by negative feedback can negatively impact health directly (through experience of greater tension) and indirectly (through suppression of emotion).

Gender plays a role in assessment of emotional display. For example, men are faulted for crying after a performance review, while women are criticized for getting angry (Motro & Ellis, 2017). Women who display anger at work are viewed as less effective (Domagalski & Steelman, 2007).

In one study, the largest category of events that triggered anger at work was being falsely accused of poor performance or being treated unjustly: employees reacted by withdrawing, quitting, or taking revenge (Fitness, 2000). Unfair feedback puts employees in a difficult situation: they may feel stuck between not wanting to seem defensive, while also justifiably wanting to defend themselves from feedback they think is inappropriate (Cannon & Witherspoon, 2005).

Consistent with Mikulincer's results (1989), Sparr and Sonnentag (2008) found that frequency of negative feedback from a supervisor could create feelings of helplessness. Availability of guidance to help resolve performance issues, and encouragement to seek feedback, can counteract this. These authors suggest the opposite of helplessness is personal control; data shows that feelings of personal control predict well-being. Personal control over access to important information at work can prevent employees from feeling this source of stress and its negative consequences for well-being. Personal control over job-related information was

a negative predictor of job-related depression, job anxiety, turnover, and is positively related to job satisfaction; employees who go looking for feedback feel better.

An intriguing counter argument to this finding is that sometimes not responding to repeated negative feedback is not helplessness; instead it may be an appropriately adaptive behavior. For example, review of a situation can lead the feedback recipient to conclude that no effort will change the situation, and in that case, ceasing instrumental action may be the right choice (Brockner et al., 1987).

How is Motivation Impacted by Critical Feedback?

"Feedback is the breakfast of champions." – Ken Blanchard

Critical feedback both mediates and impacts motivation. Receiving feedback has a paradoxical effect on motivation (Ilgen et al., 1979). When feedback provides information that boosts performance, it can increase feelings of competence, which increases motivation. However, the act of receiving feedback implies some level of control over the recipient, which can be experienced as decreased autonomy, which can adversely impact motivation (Ilgen et al., 1979). This feeling of lack of autonomy is stronger when the information is redundant, that is, when your manager nags repeatedly about the same issues, you feel controlled, not supported (Ilgen et al., 1979).

Motivation from feedback depends on the extent to which it conveys a sense of competence and control over the task, and includes information about extrinsic rewards that will follow from accepting the feedback (Ilgen et al., 1979). Feedback, motivation, and goal-setting are interconnected. Feedback on achieving specific goals is more actionable, and difficult goals lead to higher performance (Audia & Locke, 2003). Again, a paradox arises: when the individual has the autonomy to set their own goals, they have greater intrinsic motivation to reach those goals, but individuals' self-set goals are typically lower than those imposed by others, so their ultimate performance may suffer (Ilgen et al., 1979).

Negative feedback from managers can threaten motivation because of the impact it has on feelings of the fundamental psychological needs of competence and autonomy (Wagoner & Wagoner, 1999). Employees' need for autonomy can be threatened because negative feedback imposes the supervisor's requirements (e.g., how and when a task needs to be done) on their

performance, and calls into question their competence. Employees perception of their competence is dependent on how others assess them; negative feedback impacts that perception directly (Wagoner & Wagoner, 1999).

Self-efficacy also has a role here: self-efficacy is a person's belief that they have the capability to handle a task, and that their efforts will be successful (Maddux, 2009). When an individual feels that they are likely to be successful, they are more motivated to take action. Failure and negative feedback provide evidence that suggest the opposite; this can undermine feelings of efficacy, which lowers motivation (Brockner et al., 1987).

How Does Feedback-Seeking Behavior Play a Role in Reception of Critical Feedback?

"Many employees find themselves in a feedback vacuum." (Ashford, Blatt, & Vandewalle, 2003, p. 774).

As noted above, employees are interested in feedback to improve their performance and to help them achieve their goals (Audia & Lock, 2003). Getting feedback is more difficult because of the kind of work and the style of working many people engage in today (Ashford et al., 2003). Knowledge work is difficult to observe directly, making it harder for managers to evaluate. The growth of organizations distributed across geographies and time zones results in fewer opportunities to see employees' actions directly, or to connect in ways that encourage exchange of less formal feedback. The emergence of a multicultural workforce complicates feedback delivery, as even well-intentioned managers wrestle with questions about communicating cultural norms and work expectations (Ashford et al., 2003).

Employees have the option of seeking that feedback on their own. Researchers have identified three reasons why employees look for feedback: instrumental, to achieve their goals and regulate behavior; ego-based, to defend or bolster their ego; or image-based, to protect or enhance impressions of themselves. Employees' beliefs about these motives influence their feedback-seeking behaviors (Ashford et al., 2003). For example, employees seeking to bolster their image often look for positive feedback, while growth-minded employees seek information to adjust their performance (Ashford et al., 2003).

Feedback-seeking is associated with higher performance ratings, higher job satisfaction, greater creativity, and lower turnover (Crommelinck & Anseel, 2013). New employees who seek feedback are better able to integrate into their new environment (Crommelinck & Anseel, 2013).

Having the information that you need about your performance promotes a sense of personal control, which is associated with greater well-being, greater job satisfaction, reduced work anxiety, and turnover. (Sparr & Sonnentag, 2008). Personal control contributes to well-being by helping the employee feel that they have the information they need to pursue their goals, which supports self-determination; further, when employees believe they have control over their work environment, they are more likely to manipulate aspects of the work environment to be more beneficial for their well-being (Sparr & Sonnentag, 2008).

Managers represent a special case of employees seeking feedback (Ashford & Tsui, 1991). Managers face specific challenges when trying to increase their effectiveness: managerial work is complex and ambiguous. Techniques that work for individual contributors, like job descriptions and standard operating procedures, don't provide sufficient control for helping managers decide how to spend their time. Self-regulation is insufficient, because they need to understand how to effectively support their employees in their work. As noted above, negative feedback is particularly helpful in managing performance (Audia & Locke, 2003); managers are less likely to receive this feedback from their subordinates (who often are uniquely situated to provide managers with this feedback), so managers need to actively seek it themselves (Ashford & Tsui, 1991). Ashford and Tsui (1991) showed that managers who sought negative feedback increased their understanding of how others evaluated their work and were rated more effective by their subordinates, while managers who sought positive feedback were rated less effective. Researchers speculate that seeking negative feedback seems like a more authentic search for information, while seeking positive feedback feels to the people asked like an ego-boosting search expedition (Ashford & Tsui, 1991).

Again, personal characteristics play a role in feedback-seeking. Highly self-confident people were more likely to seek feedback, both positive and negative, while people with low self-esteem were less likely to seek feedback, or only sought positive feedback, possibly to bolster their self-esteem (Ashford et al., 2003). People who expect to hear bad news are more reluctant to seek feedback, unfortunately sacrificing the opportunity to get the information they need to help improve their performance (Ashford et al., 2003). Goal orientation also influences feedback-seeking behavior: people with a learning goal orientation are more likely to seek feedback to help improve, while people with a performance goal orientation are less likely to seek feedback, which they find threatening (Zingoni & Byron, 2017).

Research shows that seeking feedback has mixed results on how an employee is perceived. Managers who provide negative feedback to employees are more likely to rate those employees less positively in future (Ashford et al., 2003), suggesting that employees may need to be cautious when seeking feedback. Other studies have shown that negative feedback-seeking is associated with subsequent higher ratings of effectiveness for the seekers (Ashford et al., 2003). Researchers advise that the benefits of getting accurate information to improve performance probably outweigh any damage to image, and in many cases seeking negative feedback will improve one's image (Ashford et al., 2003).

Organizations can foster environments that encourage feedback-seeking and make employees feel safe asking for guidance (Edmonson, 1999). Feedback environments that block feedback-seeking are associated with higher levels of employee anxiety and turnover (Ashford et al., 2003). However, even when providing feedback that is actively sought by the recipient, peers and supervisors continue to be reluctant to provide details and honest assessment, fearing repercussions, or concerned that they are violating some cultural standard (Ashford et al., 2003).

As noted previously, Sparr and Sonnentag (2008) found that frequent negative feedback, or feedback provided without guidance as to how to improve, was related to feelings of helplessness. Availability of feedback, and encouragement to seek feedback, can counteract this. The authors suggest the opposite of helplessness is personal control; data shows that feelings of personal control predict well-being. Personal control over access to relevant information at work prevents employees from feeling this source of stress and its negative consequences for well-being (Sparr & Sonnentag, 2008).

What Theories May Suggest How to Turn Critical Feedback into Positive Fodder?

There are many theories that provide insight into the process of receiving feedback. These theories provide models for how the information impacts the receiver, and what characteristics of the receiver and the situation influence responses to that information. Understanding these theories begins to suggest which positive interventions may allow a feedback recipient to derive greater benefit from the information they are receiving.

Feedback Intervention Theory

After reviewing over 600 studies on feedback interventions, Kluger and DiNisi (1996) found highly variable results; while some interventions had a positive effect on behavior and performance, others had no effect, and, as noted previously, in one-third of studies, the interventions had a deleterious effect on performance. Kluger and DiNisi (1996) offer a model to explain these conflicting results: Feedback Intervention Theory.

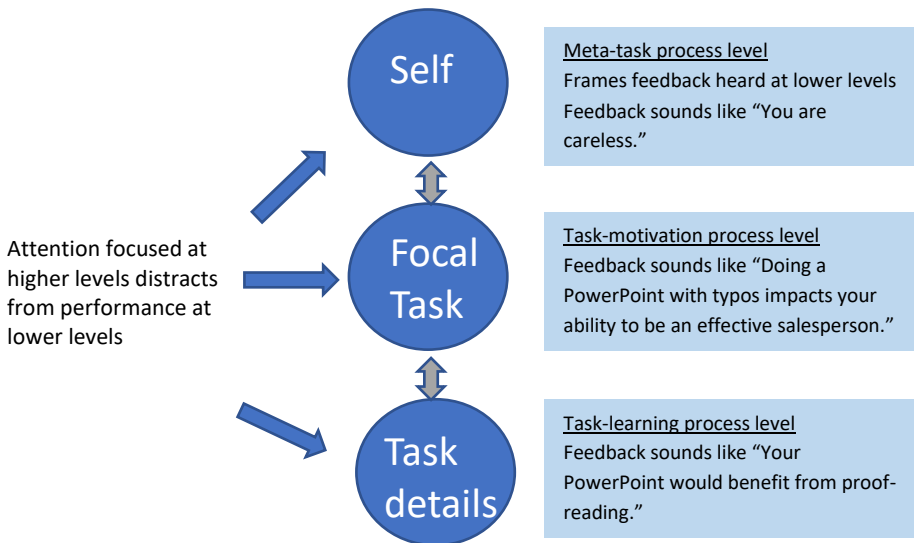
Kluger and DiNisi (1996) dismissed both Control Theory and Goal-Setting Theory as inadequate to explain the results of intervention studies. Both theories assert that behavior is goal directed, and these theories claim that individuals modify their behavior based on feedback which indicates how well their behavior is supporting their goal pursuit. Each theory has a different explanation for the behavior that follows evidence of falling short of goals. In Goal-Setting Theory, the individual focuses on meeting a standard; if feedback shows they have fallen short, people either work to hit the goal, change the goal, reject the feedback, or abandon commitment to the goal. Control Theory focuses on eliminating the difference between performance and goal. Control Theory offers four options in response to negative feedback: change behavior, change the standard, reject the feedback, or escape the situation (and feedback)

in some way. However, Kluger and DiNisi (1996) maintain that neither of these theories completely accounts for the observed data. For example, neither theory predicts the effects of a feedback intervention on task motivation (which will influence the strategy the person adopts to resolve the discrepancy), neither explains why positive feedback is sometimes demotivating, and neither explains why pleasant feelings sometimes enhance performance, while unpleasant feelings may be beneficial in other situations.

As an alternative, they offer a complex model of three hierarchical feedback loops to help predict the impact of feedback interventions on behavior.

Here's a simplified conception of their model:

Figure 1: Feedback Intervention Theory



Modified from Kluger and DiNisi, 1996

Here's a basic explanation of the model:

1. Behavior is regulated by comparing feedback to goals, and identifying the gaps that result.
2. Three hierarchical feedback loops regulate individual performance. The loops are related, but not absolutely connected (so feedback at the lowest level doesn't necessarily impact self-image).
3. Higher levels of feedback loops regulate lower levels. The highest level, meta-task processes, has a framing effect that influences how the individual interprets information from a lower loop.
4. Attention moves across these levels; attention at the highest level (feedback about self) can impair attention and performance at lower levels (the work needed to actually complete the task).

Kluger and DiNisi (1996) summarize the model as follows: feedback interventions affect learning by directing attention. When feedback indicates a failure to meet task standards or goals, the recipient generates hypotheses about how to address the gap. If the feedback doesn't include information to help the recipient decide how to address the gap (or the best way to meet the standard), performance can decrease (because the recipient wastes time trying inefficient solutions). However, if improvement strategies are suggested, these may inhibit experimentation, which can have a long-term adverse effect on performance. Further, if the feedback causes the recipient to focus on themselves, and away from the task details, performance can also be adversely affected.

Kluger and DiNisi's (1996) research on this theory leads them to the following conclusions: feedback interventions that direction attention to meta-task processes, or make the

person focus on their self-concept, diminish the effects of those interventions on performance, while feedback interventions that direct attention to task-motivation or task-learning processes have beneficial impacts on performance. For example, personal praise or criticism both have adverse effects on performance, as these are aimed at the meta-task level (e.g., either "You are great!" or "You are terrible" direct attention to self and away from task performance). They found that more frequent feedback at the task-detail level increased performance, and interventions that supplied the correct solutions were also helpful (Kluger & DiNisi, 1996).

Other findings from the literature fit well with Feedback Intervention Theory.

Leung, Su, and Morris (1998) found that when employees focused on the meta-level meaning of the feedback (e.g., trying to infer their supervisor's intent) the outcomes were less positive, either because they were confused by the message (and so forced to spend time deciphering it) or distracted by inferred commentary that negatively impacted their self-concepts.

People with fixed mindsets, or working with performance goals, respond worse to negative feedback (Zingoni & Byron, 2017). A fixed mindset causes attention to be focused at the self-level and away from the details of the task (Zingoni & Byron, 2017).

Causal language (explaining the why behind feedback) is more readily accepted (Loftus & Tanlu, 2017). Presumably, explaining how suggestions to improve performance will be beneficial to achieving goals builds a connection for the receiver between the task-detail level and the focal task level. This might sound like: "It's important to improve the quality of your PowerPoint presentations by getting rid of the typos because professional-looking presentations will make you a more credible sales person."

When faced with evidence of failure, personality traits influence how a person chooses to respond to that information, by increasing effort, discounting the feedback, or withdrawing from the task. Kluger and DiNisi (1996) suggest that a tendency to blame one's self for failure interferes with task performance, again relating this to a focus at the self or meta-task level. This is consistent with findings that people with perfectionist tendencies will perform worse after receiving negative feedback because of the ruminative thoughts that comment about self (Besser et al., 2004).

What does this theory suggest about how to derive the most benefit from critical feedback? Any intervention that can keep the individual focused on the focal task or task learning level and away from ruminating on threats to self is likely to be more beneficial to both performance and affect.

Responses to Negative Feedback Model

While Kluger and DiNisi (1996) attempted to present a general theory for how feedback is processed, Ilgen and Davis (2000) focus explicitly on responses to negative feedback. A simplified description of their model is as follows:

- People receive negative feedback. They attach some affective interpretation to the feedback and choose a behavioral response.
- Their behavioral response is either to work to improve performance (by working harder or changing how they work) or to withdraw from the task. Either choice has implications for their subsequent performance (e.g., working harder may increase performance, and avoiding the task may impair later performance). Their behavioral choices will receive subsequent feedback and they will experience the consequences of those choices.
- The model suggests there are three factors that impact how a person interprets negative feedback and chooses their response: "self-efficacy, goal-orientation, and self-regulatory focus" (Ilgen & Davis, 2000, p. 553).

The authors claim that an individual's self-efficacy and their habitual performance attribution style (e.g., "it's always my fault" versus "it's never my fault") both affect how they process negative feedback (Ilgen & Davis, 2000). For negative feedback to cause people to work harder, they must believe their effort will impact their performance. That is, they must have a belief in their self-efficacy with respect to this performance challenge. But this also means they must be willing to take some responsibility for the performance gap, which can be emotionally unpleasant. Some will be willing to take that responsibility, so increased effort will make sense.

Others will shift blame to uncontrollable causes, which reduces the likelihood that they will exert additional effort.

Attributing performance problems to ability may motivate efforts to improve, but it's a double-edged sword. Feedback Intervention Theory suggests this focus on self, or meta-task contributions to the performance problem, in turn causes attention to shift away from task performance, and this attentional shift can have an adverse impact on performance (Kluger & DiNisi, 1996). Complicating the situation further, if these attributions negatively impact a recipient's self-concept, future performances may be negatively affected, because of a decrease in feelings of self-efficacy (Elgin & Davis, 2000). Elgin and Davis (2000) predict that people with lower self-efficacy are more at risk from the effects of negative feedback, which is consistent with findings by Baron (1988).

Elgin and Davis (2000) also explain how an individual's goal orientation will impact responses to negative feedback. They describe different effects of negative feedback depending on goal orientations: learning goal versus performance goal orientation. With a performance goal orientation, an individual's primary concern is achievement with respect to goal completion. With a learning goal orientation, an individual is focused on developing skills and mastering tasks, and the end goal is a target that reflects distance to mastery. Individuals with a learning goal orientation regard negative feedback as helpful information that could be used to assess development of skill, while those with performance goals interpret negative feedback as a judgment on competence. This interpretation is further impacted by an individual's self-efficacy: negative feedback is more affectively negative for an individual with performance goals and lower self-efficacy.

Elgin and Davis (2000) note that goal-setting has an impact on performance. Specifically, moderately difficult and specific goals will lead to higher performance; goals help clarify tasks and motivate persistence toward improved performance. Self-regulation also plays a part: people with greater self-regulation are better able to choose appropriate strategies for actions after comparing their performance to goals (Elgin & Davis, 2000).

What does this theory suggest about deriving benefit from negative feedback? The authors offer several recommendations (Elgin & Davis, 2000). They argue that the most effective negative feedback is presented in a way that encourages recipients to accept responsibility for their performance, without lowering their self-concept. The authors advocate for the importance of learning goals and a Growth Mindset. In addition, feedback that assists recipients in choosing effective future strategies and helping them see the ineffectiveness of old strategies is especially important (Elgin & Davis, 2000).

Self-Determination Theory

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) provides some insights into why interventions have varying effects on motivation. Deci and Ryan (2000) posit that motivation depends on satisfaction of the basic human needs to feel competent (good at what they do), autonomous (choice in what they do), and related to others. Numerous studies support the theory that these needs are preconditions for both well-being and positive motivation (Sheldon & Krieger, 2007).

SDT distinguishes between the “why” and the “what” of motivation, and finds that these have independent and additive effects (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The “why” of motivation focuses on whether motivation is autonomous or controlled. SDT claims that motivation exists on a spectrum ranging from amotivation (no motivation) to extrinsic motivation (externally controlled behavior) to more autonomously driven behaviors. Autonomous behaviors range from identified, or self-directed behaviors, which are in service of an external goal (like exercise), to intrinsic motivations, which are completely internalized (like listening to music) (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In addition, the “what,” or content, of the motivation matters. People may pursue extrinsic values (like money or position) or intrinsic values (like community or personal growth) (Sheldon & Krieger, 2007).

Both the what and why have an impact on subjective well-being: more intrinsic goals lead to greater motivation, better objective outcomes (like grades), and greater subjective well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2008). When environments support autonomy, individuals’ basic psychological needs are met, and they develop the resources to pursue more intrinsic goals (Sheldon & Krieger, 2008). An individual’s perception of the autonomy of a goal impacts their willingness to take on goals and their ability to reach goals (Brown & Ryan, 2015). For example, people who are more autonomously motivated receive higher performance evaluations, are more

persistent, choose more challenging activities, and report more positive emotions (Guay, Ratelle, & Chanal, 2008).

Behaviors that feel more internally regulated are experienced as more interesting, and a better fit with an individual's values and preferences. Intrinsically motivated behaviors are easier to maintain, and people show higher compliance with new behaviors that feel internally regulated. Intrinsic motivation is fostered by social conditions that promote feelings of autonomy, competence and relatedness. Intrinsic motivation can be developed by helping the individual understand why a behavior is important to them (Brown & Ryan, 2015).

Negative feedback can threaten all aspects of self-determination. Feedback that suggests performance has fallen short can be interpreted as commentary on competence (Wagoner & Waldron, 1999). When a manager provides feedback about performance, and specifies alternative performance parameters ("do it this way"), the individual may experience that as restricting their autonomy (Belschak & Den Hartog, 2009). Finally, the negative emotions the sometimes result from the exchange of critical feedback can be detrimental to relationships (Rudawsky et al., 1999).

Self-Determination Theory also suggests how to use these building blocks to derive more benefit from critical feedback. For example, by seeking feedback, instead of only waiting to receive it, the individual takes personal control over the exchange of feedback, which supports their own autonomy; the information individuals receive can be helpful to increasing their performance, boosting feelings of competence. Feedback delivered in the context of an existing strong relationship is likely to be more credible, and may be delivered in a more caring manner that's easier to hear and accept; by investing in building strong connections to managers and co-workers, the individual increases the possibility that they will be part of a supportive relationship.

In addition, research shows that understanding more about the why behind performance suggestions leads to more uptake of feedback (Loftus & Tanlu, 2017); internal motivation is driven in part by the why of goals.

Cognitive Interference Hypothesis

Mikulincer (1989) proposed the Cognitive Interference Hypothesis to help explain why anxious people perform more poorly after failure, or negative feedback, than their less anxious counterparts. This hypothesis claims anxiety-related cognitions undermine performance. Anxiety is a general state of emotional arousal that interferes with attention to task-relevant actions. Anxiety causes differential performance effects: highly anxious individuals divide their attention between off-task cognitions (worry, self-doubt) while the less anxious person is able to focus more fully on the task. Performance deficits result from attentional resources that are diverted from task to off-task cognition.

Cognitive Interference Hypothesis is consistent with Feedback Intervention Theory (Kluger & DiNisi, 1996) that contends that attention to self, for whatever reason, directs attention away from the task, and therefore interferes with performance. This hypothesis is also reminiscent of William James' (1892/1984) assertion that consciousness directs attention. James advocated for marshalling attentional resources with effort and practice, and warned against, for example, "wrestling" with bad feelings, because this rumination distracted the mind from more useful endeavors.

Subsequent research has shown some support for this theory. However, not all off-task thoughts were associated with lower performance. Performance declines were only associated with task-escape thoughts; that is, unsolvable problems increase motivation to avoid a task, leading to cognitive detachment from the situation. That detachment impaired performance (Mikulincer, 1989).

Cognitive Interference Hypothesis suggests that reducing rumination on off-task thoughts and decreasing anxiety should be good for performance. Negative feedback recipients should benefit from interventions that help them keep focused on their tasks and reduce rumination.

Face Threat Theory

Because of the power differential, an interaction where a manager is criticizing the performance of an employee has the potential to be an emotionally face-threatening event that could embarrass the employee or damage their self-concept (Wagoner & Waldron, 1999). Face threatening acts are often perceived by the recipients as threats to their competence or autonomy (Wagoner & Waldron, 1999). Research on face threats aligns with theories about self-determination. One approach managers take to reduce face threats is to choose less negative language, and focus on being tactful (Kingsley Westerman & Smith, 2015). Use of tactful language reduces autonomy and competence threats, by being less directive or less critical about the performance gap, but may also reduce the clarity of the information communicated (Kingsley Westerman & Smith, 2015).

Employees respond to face threats through conversation or silence (Kingsley Westerman & Smith, 2015). Researchers suggest that employees' use of conversation, or voice, can be an "active and constructive" way of helping to resolve problems (Kingsley Westerman & Smith, 2015, p. 462). Employees can seek feedback or stay fearfully silent; fear may also cause them to respond defensively to feedback. When they stay quiet, they are choosing not to understand the feedback and are more likely to misconstrue or reject it. If they feel threatened, they may react defensively, or with anger. Employees are more likely to engage in conversation where they feel psychological safety; in contrast, face-threatening messages reduce feelings of psychological safety (Kingsley Westerman & Smith, 2015).

What can Face Threat Theory tell us about how to increase the benefit of negative feedback? Face Threat Theory suggests that managers' attempts to reduce embarrassment, and promote autonomy and competence may sometimes result in less useful communication.

Employees may need to take the initiative to understand the message they are receiving to fully benefit from it. Further, employees who recognize that they need to process their emotions when they receive face-threatening information may be better able to manage their defensive reactions. Finally, employees who feel safe to ask clarifying questions will be more likely to benefit from the information exchanged (Belschak & Den Hartog, 2009).

Hope Theory

Magyer-Moe and Lopez (2015) argue that hope plays a role in all beneficial change by supporting goal achievement. They report that people with higher levels of hope do better in school, athletics, health, problem solving, and psychological adjustment.

Hope Theory describes a process of a person seeing and defining goals, developing strategies to reach those goals, and developing beliefs and skills to sustain the motivation needed to use those strategies. Hope is different from optimism; it's not a generalized expectation of future beneficence, rather it is an active process of drawing on resources to bring a positive future state. Magyer-Moe and Lopez (2015) claim that relationships with others who manifest high hope help determine whether a person can sustain the motivation to reach their goals. Supportive others can help the individual identify clear goals, define pathways to reach those goals, and provide needed emotional support to help someone maintain the energy to pursue those goals. These researchers also advocate for using challenges as cues to implement previously defined strategies to overcome blocks along the path to goal achievement.

How can Hope Theory itself create a pathway to flourishing from negative feedback? Critical feedback that contains specific suggestions to address performance gaps leads to more effective outcomes (Goodman et al., 2004). This aligns with Hope Theory's emphasis on the need to identify pathways to reach goals. Further, Hope Theory advocates planning ahead for potential roadblocks, by using expected challenges to cue effective strategies: one specific application of this idea might be to anticipate defensive reactions in a performance review and script an alternative, more productive response. Finally, Hope Theory advocates for drawing on supportive relationships to maintain hope and execute pathway strategies; people hoping to

benefit from negative feedback might be advised to lean on others when they anticipate tough feedback or when they need to process difficult information.

Goal-Setting Theory and Self-Efficacy Theory

Goal-setting and self-efficacy have related impacts on performance. Goals can establish the context for feedback (Kluger & DiNisi, 1996), while self-efficacy influences goal pursuit and reactions to feedback.

Locke (1996) summarizes 30 years of goal-setting research to explain what make goals effective. Locke (1996) notes that hard, specific goals lead to the greatest levels of achievement, and that personal commitment is essential when goals are hard. He notes that people typically do not set goals as high for themselves as others would set for them, which is detrimental, as aiming for higher goals leads to greater achievement. Also, motivation can flag in the pursuit of hard goals.

Support from a coach or a manager can be beneficial in goal pursuit. Managers or coaches can act as role models, bolster motivation through expressions of confidence, provide training or new strategies to increase skills, and, especially, can provide feedback that's essential in helping guide performance towards achieving goals (Locke, 1996).

Self-efficacy also plays a role in Goal Theory. Self-efficacy is a person's belief that their capabilities and actions will produce desired effects (Maddux, 2009). Maddux (2009) argues that self-efficacy is key to achieving goals because the individual must believe in their ability to accomplish something in order to accomplish it, or even to be willing to attempt it. Self-efficacy beliefs impact the difficulty of goals an individual is willing to take on, the effort they will extend to reach those goals, and their ability to overcome problems along the way. Self-efficacy can be built through activities like allowing the individual to see themselves being successful, watching successful behavior modeled by others, or being given verbal reinforcement (Maddux,

2009). People with higher self-efficacy are more likely to persevere and find solutions when blocked (Maddux, 2009).

Research about reactions to critical feedback provide evidence that individuals with low self-efficacy react more strongly to negative feedback (Ilgen et al., 1979), and may be less likely to continue to pursue goals after receiving negative feedback (Audia & Locke, 2003). In contrast, people who are high on self-efficacy also tend to be high on measures of resilience (Reivich & Shatté, 2002), which may allow them to recover more quickly from upsetting, critical feedback.

What do Goal-Setting Theory and Self-Efficacy Theory suggest about deriving benefit from negative feedback? Feedback is more effective in the context of goals that indicate parameters for desired performance. Self-efficacy will influence acceptable goals or commitment to goals. These theories suggest that an individual will benefit from carefully crafted goals, support that builds their self-efficacy, and supportive relationships; those factors are likely to create the most fertile conditions for critical feedback to be beneficial.

Affective Events Theory

Not all responses to critical feedback are negative. Christensen-Salem and colleagues (2018) offer the perspective that negative feedback at work can be interpreted in light of Affective Events Theory (AET). This theory proposes that individuals react to events based not only on whether events are positive or negative, but also how they relate to an individual's goals.

When an event occurs, the individual makes an initial appraisal of the event, which then produces an emotional reaction (Christensen-Salem, et al., 2018). In this model, feedback is interpreted as supportive (or not) for personal goals and values; that interpretation impacts acceptance of the feedback. Events that are perceived as interfering with goal attainment are judged as harmful, and cause negative affect. People experience an event as positive when the event supports their goals, or contains information that could be used as a beneficial resource.

Events deemed positive have an activating influence on cognition, enabling cognitive flexibility, increasing assimilation of new information, and motivating creative work. While Christensen-Salem and colleagues (2018) did not make this connection, their description is resonant with Broaden-and-Build's Theory of positive events stimulating similar capabilities (Fredrickson, 1998). Christensen-Salem and colleagues (2018) presented data that when developmental (or critical) feedback from supervisors was accepted, it led to positive affect, which beneficially impacted creative behavior.

This theory suggests that, although critical feedback can be hard to hear, when it is viewed as beneficial by the recipient, it can produce positive affect, which broadens and builds creative thought (Christensen-Salem et al., 2018).

Broaden-and-Build Theory

In Broaden-and-Build theory, Fredrickson (1989) argues for the power of positive emotions. The theory describes the effect of positive emotions: when an individual experiences positive emotions, their awareness literally widens, making them aware of new options, increasing their creativity, and giving them confidence to explore and experience the world. As they experiment in the world, they develop new skills and discover more resources that support further growth. Further, as the individual experiences positive emotions associated with new experiences, they are motivated to repeat the experiences, building their competency further.

Fredrickson (2016) also describes the benefits "micro-moments" of positive resonance that occur between people when they mimic each other's positive emotions. For example, a shared smile can elicit a physical response that creates positive feelings and emotional connection in both parties. Fredrickson (2016) claims these small moments of resonance support development of high-quality connections between people, which in turn create feelings of mutual care which are beneficial to the relationship.

In the workplace, positive emotions are associated with better performance, greater creativity, increased motivation, and lower turnover (Tenney, Poole, & Diener, 2016). Data further lend support for the beneficial impact which positive emotions have on health: positive emotions are associated with healthy blood pressure levels, stronger immune response, and better health behaviors (Fredrickson, 2009).

In general, positive feedback leads to more positive emotions (Belschak & Den Hartog, 2009). When recipients were left with negative feelings after receiving critical feedback, they sometimes performed worse on subsequent tasks (Kluger & DiNisi, 1996). In contrast, feedback

received in the context of supportive, caring relationships tended to be better received (Fong et al., 2018).

Broaden-and-Build theory provides motivation for moving beyond the negative feelings that critical feedback can evoke. For their subsequent growth, creativity, and development, feedback recipients would benefit from working through their negative feelings to try to regain their positivity. One path forward is through relationships that provide caring and connection: high-quality connections may help build those relationships.

Summary of What We Know About Feedback and What We Should Do About It

Data suggest that people benefit from external perspectives on performance for a variety of reasons to help them understand how their performance falls short of goals:

- People don't view their own performance clearly, often over-estimating their effectiveness; additionally, they often incorrectly attribute aspects of poor performance to factors outside their control.
- Having a third party provide feedback helps the individual get clearer information on how they are performing relative to goals.
- Information from a manager or other coach can help provide pathways and alternative strategies for achieving goals that are more effective; but understanding and accepting the need for these alternatives first may require understanding where current performance falls short.

Here is a summary of key factors that influence whether negative feedback is beneficial and encouraging, or feels unproductive and demoralizing. What's notable is that there are many things the individual can do to make themselves more receptive and better able to hear, accept, and act on feedback they receive; in addition, they have some options for influencing aspects of the environment to create better conditions for receiving and hearing feedback.

Table 1: Summary of key research about negative feedback

| <p>These things make negative feedback harder to hear, accept, and act on, and increase negative feelings</p> <p><i>*Items marked with asterisks are malleable by the receiver of the feedback</i></p> | <p>These things make negative feedback easier to hear, accept and act on, and buffer the recipient from negative feelings</p> <p>And may be <i>within</i> the recipient's influence</p> | <p>These things make negative feedback easier to hear, accept and act on, and buffer the recipient from negative feelings</p> <p>And may be <i>outside</i> of the recipient's control</p> |
|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback that is critical of the person (as opposed to focused on the skills of the task) • Inaccurate feedback * Defensiveness or anger * Conscientiousness * Tension / anxiety * Perfectionism * Social anxiety * Low self-efficacy * Low self-esteem * Low self-compassion * Perception of face / ego threat * Over-generalization (by the recipient of the feedback) * Neuroticism / emotional instability * Lack of psychological safety / aversive feedback-seeking environment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trusted source / healthy and supportive prior relationship • Feedback delivered privately • Specifics about behavior, with suggestions about better alternatives, presented directly and clearly • Learning goals and Growth Mindset • Feedback that supports autonomy, employee choice and exploratory learning • Timeliness • Appropriately frequent • Causal language or explanation of why • Asking clarifying questions to confirm understanding • Focus on character strengths / skill strengths • Feedback that supports autonomy and feelings of competence (thereby supporting motivation) • Feedback-seeking / personal control • High-quality connections | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback provided with the intention to be beneficial and not harm, presented with caring and concern • Accurate feedback, ideally based on direct observation of behavior, or at least from a credible source • Constructive feedback • Skillfulness of feedback delivery |

Theories about feedback provide insights into general strategies an individual may take to create conditions where they are more likely to hear, accept, and act on feedback.

Table 2: Theories related to feedback

| Theory | Implications for establishing conditions to support hearing, accepting, and acting on feedback |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Feedback Intervention Theory | Keep focus on focal task or task learning level and away from self; prevent rumination on self or threats to self |
| Negative Feedback Model | <p>Create conditions for recipient to accept responsibility without lowering self-esteem</p> <p>Learning goals and Growth Mindset are important</p> <p>Assist recipients in identifying better future strategies</p> |
| Self-Determination Theory | <p>Maintain autonomy by seeking feedback</p> <p>Boost competence by seeking feedback</p> <p>Relationships support exchange of feedback: feedback is more credible and accepted coming from a caring source</p> |
| Cognitive Interference Hypothesis | Reduce off task rumination; stay focused on task |
| Face Threat | <p>Feedback-seeking, to counteract managers withholding information</p> <p>Employees should develop skill in processing emotional and face-threatening information so they can benefit from the information</p> <p>Employees who feel safe are likely to ask more clarifying questions that will get them the information they need to understand the feedback</p> |
| Hope Theory | <p>Specific suggestions to address performance gaps lead to better outcomes (e.g., help employees identify pathways)</p> <p>Plan for roadblocks, and develop strategies for dealing with those</p> <p>Draw on supportive relationships to maintain hope/motivation and support for executing strategies/pathways; also, to lean on for support when getting negative feedback</p> |
| Affective Events Theory | If the individual can perceive feedback as beneficial it can produce positive affect, which can broaden-and-build creative thought |
| Broaden-and-Build | <p>Positive affect supports growth, creativity</p> <p>Positive relationships can help build positive affect</p> |

Empirical Interlude

What emotions, exactly, do people feel when they get critical feedback? Research into reactions to critical feedback typically report only a few emotions for each study, for example, anger, distress, and depression (Rudawsky et al., 1999); defensiveness, dissatisfaction, and denial (Steelman & Rutkowski, 2002); disappointment, frustration (Motro & Ellis, 2017); hostility, irritability, anxiety and despair (Lam et al., 2002); shame, guilt, embarrassment, and fear (Belschak & Den Hartog, 2009). Frequency of these emotions is not reported, nor is it clear if these emotions are reported directly by the study participants, or selected by participants from a list suggested by the researchers.

Emotional granularity describes the fine-grained variations that different people feel in response to a situation, and a person's ability to make nuanced distinctions between similar emotions (Smidt & Suvak, 2015). Individuals vary in their skill at making these distinctions; research shows that individuals with greater emotional granularity are better able to regulate their emotions, presumably because they have more choices of emotions available to them to select from in any situation (Barrett, 2016).

The next part of this capstone proposes a series of interventions that an individual can use to plan for, engage with, and process critical feedback. According to models of resilience (Reivich & Salzberg, 2018), thoughts influence consequences, such as emotional reactions. Before proposing interventions, it seemed sensible to get more data on the range of emotions people might experience in response to critical feedback, in order to determine if particular interventions were more or less appropriate.

Findings

In May of 2018, I conducted an on-line survey of 101 friends and professional contacts to explore the range of emotions to critical feedback. I asked them to think about a specific instance in a professional situation where they received negative or corrective feedback, and then asked,

- From whom did they receive the feedback?
- In 1-2 words, what emotions did they experience because of the feedback?
- What about the situation made them feel that way?

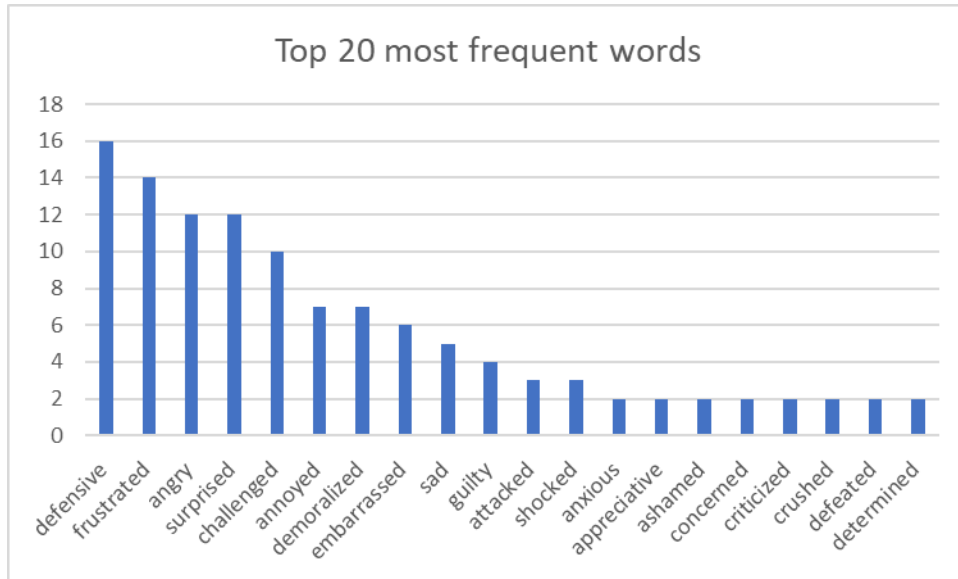
From whom did they receive feedback. Approximately 70% of the instances reported involved feedback from a manager / supervisor / superior; the remaining instances described feedback from co-workers, customers or other people.

Table 3: Feedback givers

| | |
|--------------------------------|------------|
| Co-worker directly to you | 16 |
| Group to you | 9 |
| Group to team you are on | 5 |
| Superior | 3 |
| Manager in planned 1-1 | 22 |
| Manager unplanned | 22 |
| Manager, annual review | 13 |
| Mixed (manager and co-workers) | 9 |
| Customer/other | 2 |
| Total | 101 |

What emotions did they experience? Participants reported 182 words describing their emotional reactions; 88 were unique. 87% of the words had a negative valence, demonstrating that most participants in this study associated critical feedback with negative emotions.

Figure 3: Frequently reported emotions



Categorized emotions. I grouped the individual emotions words in categories (for which I supplied the names).

Table 5: Negative terms used to describe feedback experience (bold items discussed below)

| Category | # of words in this category | These were the actual terms used by participants | Example comment |
|------------------|-----------------------------|--|---|
| surprised | 25 | astonished, attacked, blind-sided, startled, shocked, surprised, taken aback, taken off-guard, thrown off track, unexpected | "I hadn't perceived that I was doing anything wrong." |
| sad | 19 | dejected, demoralized. disappointed, discouraged, dismayed, hurt, sad, upset | "Mocking and disrespectful tone? Lack of confidence in my work/abilities projected by those providing feedback." |
| defensive | 16 | defensive | "I thought my solution was best and didn't like being questioned." |
| frustrated | 14 | frustrated | "I was frustrated that he didn't correct me in the moment instead of telling me later that I had said something incorrect." |

| | | | |
|---------------------|------------|---|--|
| angry | 12 | angry | "This team co-worker complained that their work was not included in the final project even though they were days late with their portion, past the deadline." |
| disrespected | 12 | belittled, dehumanized, diminished, not respected, not seen, not valued, silenced, unappreciated, undervalued, unfairly treated, unheard | "Boss often insults or speaks from a pedestal with condescension." |
| anxious/fearful | 12 | afraid, anxious, concerned, fearful, insecure, nervous, scared, sick, stressed, unsettled | "I felt like all the good things I had done were being ignored. I felt self-conscious." |
| challenged | 10 | challenged | "It was something that I knew I needed to work on, but challenging to face." |
| annoyed | 9 | aggravated, annoyed, irritated | "The manager himself was the cause and failed to recognize his role in it." |
| helpless | 9 | crushed, defeated, deflated, dispirited, felt like quitting, overwhelmed, small | "I felt like they were discovering my true incompetence." |
| shamed | 7 | ashamed, blamed, guilty | "I felt I was being used as a scapegoat for a particular situation." |
| embarrassed | 6 | embarrassed | "I was new to the organization at the time and the others giving feedback had been at the company a long time. I felt ganged up on and it felt like it was a purposeful attempt to embarrass or bombard me to throw me off." |
| criticized | 4 | criticized, insulted, judged | "My manager provided me only negative feedback while not including or balancing it out with the positive work done." |
| resigned | 2 | not surprised, resigned | -- |
| confused | 1 | confused | -- |
| Grand Total | 158 | | |

Positive terms used to describe feedback experience: For comparison, here are some of the positive terms reported, and a few sample comments.

Table 6: Positive words used describe feedback experience

| Actual terms | Total | Example Comments |
|--------------|-------|---|
| constructive | 1 | |
| positive | 1 | |
| inspired | 1 | "Feedback was practical, action oriented and forward oriented." |
| grateful | 1 | "Feedback was critical but not given harshly, and I agreed with everything that was said." |
| focused | 1 | |
| capable | 1 | |
| eager | 1 | |
| good | 1 | |
| empowered | 1 | |
| hopeful | 1 | "I love getting feedback from my boss. I know that she believes in me. And I believe in myself, so I see feedback as a means of helping me reach my goals." |
| professional | 1 | "Receiving critical feedback signaled that my boss understood I take my work seriously." |
| intrigued | 1 | |
| appreciative | 2 | "It was given in a constructive manner." |
| receptive | 2 | |
| motivated | 2 | |
| determined | 2 | |
| Total | 20 | |

What Does This Data Suggest About Interventions?

Three categories (**bolded**, in the negative list above) that are missing from the published research are "surprised" (illustrated by words like surprised, astonished, shocked), "disrespected" (illustrated by words like dehumanized, silenced, unappreciated), and "helpless" (illustrated by words like, crushed, defeated, deflated).

Knowing these feelings are common suggests that interventions that can help with these emotions may be useful. For example:

- A typical "surprised" comment was "I didn't perceive that I was doing anything wrong." Participants with this experience may benefit from advice about feedback-seeking, so that they do not wait to get feedback; as research from Wagoner and Waldron (1999) has shown, it's quite common for managers to avoid communicating bad news, and this could lead to a surprised reaction in an employee.
- Participants who felt disrespected (for example, "Boss often insults or speaks from a pedestal with condescension") may benefit from advice about how to broach these feelings with their manager, or explore the topic of psychological safety, for additional insights into how to manage a situation that may, after this experience, feel less welcoming or safe.
- Finally, someone suffering feelings of helplessness (for example, "I felt like they were discovering my true incompetence") may benefit from some self-compassion practice.

Finding the Silver Lining: Feedback Flourishing Theory

Research from a variety of domains is clear: constructive feedback provides important information to which we might be otherwise blind that can help us to improve our performance.

From a positive psychology perspective, why do we want to improve performance?

There are several answers.

In a professional environment, demonstrating high performance is more likely to lead to valuable personal outcomes, like higher salary and recognition. While money doesn't buy happiness (Kahneman & Deaton, 2010), unemployment definitely leads to lower well-being ("Unemployment, reemployment," 2017). Engaging in activities that help make you more employable can be presumed to provide long term well-being benefits.

Self-Determination Theory suggests that well-being rests on the pillars of competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Brown & Ryan, 2015). Improving performance is directly related to competence: as one's skills increase, one's feelings of competence grow. Further, skilled performers are often in a position to work more independently, supporting their feelings of autonomy. Skilled employees and their leaders have stronger, more mutually supportive relationships when the employee is satisfying the professional requirements of their leader; this suggests a connection between performance and relatedness (Moss, Sanchez, Brumbaugh, & Borkowski, 2009).

Finally, theories from positive psychology, like PERMA (Seligman, 2012), offer models for how people can flourish, and provide support for deriving benefits from negative feedback. PERMA is a model used to define and measure the construct of well-being. Because "happiness" is hard to define, and therefore measure, well-being is the measurable construct that has emerged to represent happiness, or the general idea of human flourishing. PERMA defines five elements

as essential to well-being, including positive emotion, engagement, meaning, positive relationships, and accomplishment. The theory argues that each component is important to human flourishing, and that each can be increased with positive intervention techniques (Seligman, 2012). It is reasonable to speculate that an effective performer often feels more positive emotions, is more likely to feel engaged at work, benefits from positive relationships in their professional context, finds meaning in what they are doing, and achieves high levels of performance. Findings about critical feedback suggest these same elements either support effective feedback exchange or are a result of receiving corrective feedback.

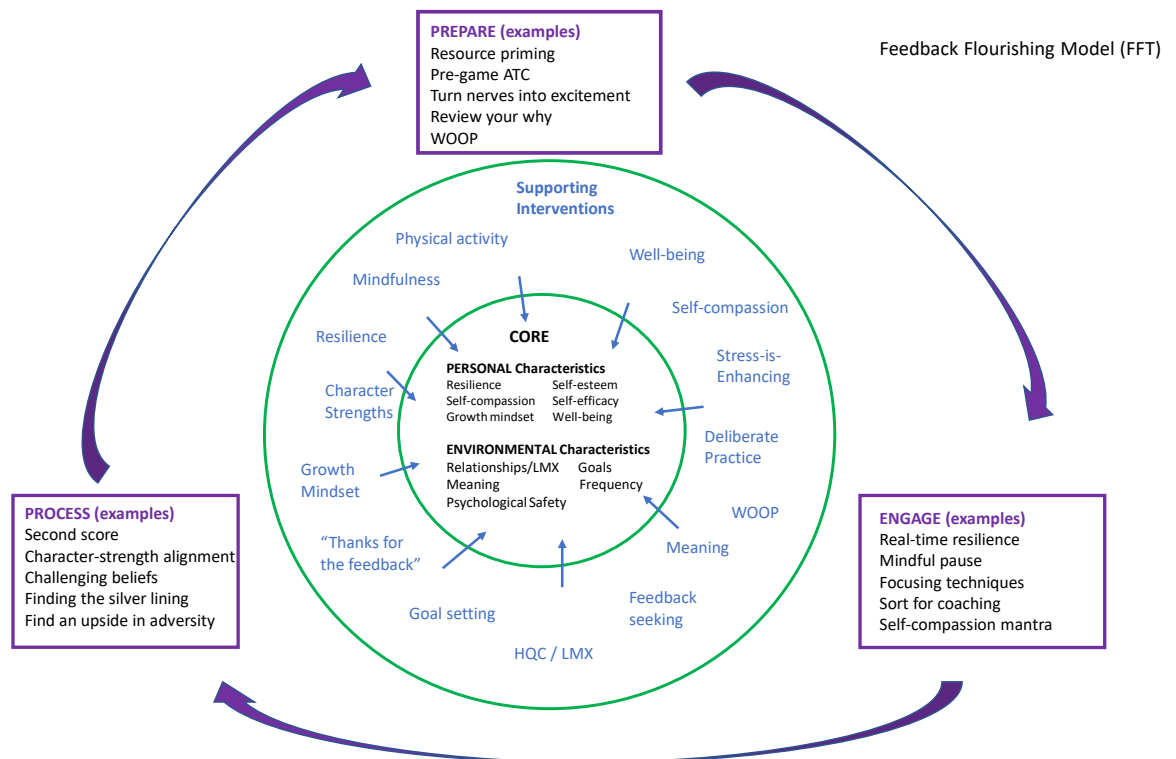
Having established that feedback is beneficial, but can be difficult to accept, even when it is delivered well, how can positive psychology help people be more receptive and act on feedback? As noted in Table 1 above, while many factors can make feedback difficult to receive, an individual may have the opportunity to change aspects of the situation or themselves to make it easier to receive and act on feedback.

The following model offers a theory on how positive psychology can help.

Feedback Flourishing Model

As summarized above, many factors contribute to making feedback easier or harder to hear, accept and act on. While a few of the factors lie outside the control of the feedback recipient (e.g., the giver's skill in delivering feedback) many more of the factors are either directly within the control of the feedback receiver, or lie within their scope of influence. Some of these factors are personal characteristics of the individual, some are aspects of the environment, and some are specific to each feedback conversation. By applying positive psychology interventions, the feedback recipient has the opportunity to change their receptivity, influence the environment, and prepare, engage and process the feedback conversation more effectively. This model shows how these factors are related:

Figure 4: Feedback Flourishing Model



Here is a description of this model, starting from the inner ring:

There are core personal and environmental characteristics that can influence how well feedback conversations go; a sample of these characteristics are represented in the inner ring of the model. Core personal characteristics are skills, behaviors, traits, and strengths of the feedback recipient which they can change with deliberate practice. These include characteristics like self-esteem, self-efficacy, optimism, resilience, self-compassion, and Growth Mindset. Core environmental characteristics are aspects of the organizational environment that can make feedback delivery or receipt more likely or more effective, and which lie within the feedback recipient's ability to influence, though are not completely within their control. These include things like quality of relationships, meaning of work, psychological safety, and goals.

The next ring in the model lists some of the relevant supporting interventions that could be used to directly or indirectly influence core personal and environmental characteristics. These interventions come from positive psychology and other domains, like character strengths, mindfulness, and stress-is-enhancing mindset. In some cases, personal characteristic and interventions share the same name (e.g., self-compassion and resilience are both traits that make that make it easier for the individual to receive feedback, and are names of sets of interventions).

The outermost ring of the model represents specific feedback conversations, represented in the "Prepare," "Engage," or "Process" boxes. The model assumes that it is possible to prepare for feedback conversations. There are steps the recipient can take before feedback conversations, whether the feedback is planned or spontaneous, to make them more beneficial; when these conversations are planned or expected, there are additional steps the recipient can take to prepare. During the conversation, there are techniques that can help the feedback recipient stay engaged. After the conversation, the recipient can use positive interventions to help process their

emotions and choose their next steps. The same positive interventions that are used to influence core personal or environmental conditions can be applied to prepare for, engage in, and process feedback after the conversation.

The rest of this capstone describes the positive interventions that could be used to address the core and situational aspects of receiving feedback, including background, how or why an intervention may be beneficial, and suggestions about when to apply certain interventions. It also provides guidance for selecting appropriate interventions.

While this model is theoretical, it draws some support from the world of performance psychology. Performance psychology focuses on providing skills to help an individual improve their performance when high performance is vital (Anderson, 2009); arguably, performing well in a feedback conversation, where it is imperative to listen, be open, and maintain helpful emotions, represents a similar performance-critical situation. Anderson (2009) describes the five most commonly used performance psychology skills, including relaxation, self-talk, imagery, goal-setting, and concentration, which are augmented by skill development appropriate to the performance domain. These five skills are represented in the model above, along with skills more specific to this performance situation.

This is a theoretical model; the recommendations for applying interventions to core or situational challenges are grounded in research, however more research is needed to validate the model and recommendations. Or, perhaps feedback is needed? As I prepared the model and my list of recommendations, it was clear that the model and recommendations would both benefit from input from other practitioners. I look forward to hearing from others. Would you make the same recommendations? Would you argue for additional interventions in certain categories? Are you skeptical about whether some recommended interventions would be beneficial? I plan

to apply the techniques in the capstone to my feedback-seeking behaviors to continue to improve the model and recommendations.

Feedback Interventions

How the Intervention Information Is Structured?

There are four parts to this section of the capstone:

1. **Topic descriptions.** Topics include, for example, “Well-being,” “Resilience,” and “Self-Compassion.” After a background summary of the topic, theory, or research, I’ve structured the interventions for each topic as follows:
 - ***Environmental [Topic] Interventions.*** Research suggests that some aspects of the environment create conditions that make feedback easier or more difficult to hear, accept and act on. In some cases, the individual may have the ability to influence aspects of the environment or how they relate to the environment. Here are two different examples:
 1. Feedback from trusted others is easier to hear and believe. An individual could attempt to contribute to making an environment that fosters trusting relationships with methods from research on high-quality connections. In this case, the individual is attempting to influence the environment to their benefit.
 2. Meaning can influence interpretation and receptivity to feedback. While an individual may not be able to change the mission of an organization, understanding how that mission relates to their own work can provide meaning that impacts their receipt of feedback. In this case, the individual could leverage interventions around meaning to change their relationship to the environment.
 - ***Personal [Topic] Interventions.*** For example, “Personal Well-being Interventions” are described. These are interventions that an individual can use to influence core

- traits or behaviors of themselves. Based on research about negative feedback, these interventions are intended to help the individual change aspects of their beliefs, behaviors, or mindsets to help make them more receptive to negative feedback.
- ***Prepare [Topic] Interventions.*** These interventions are intended to help the individual prepare for receiving feedback in general, or to prepare for a specific feedback conversation. In some cases, the interventions should be done as preparation (e.g. before the conversation), even though they will actually be used during the conversation. For the sake of brevity, I have included a description in the area where I think it should primarily be associated, but then I recommend the same topic in the Intervention map (see Appendix B, item 1). For example, Real Time Resilience is intended for use during an adversity, like a feedback conversation, but needs to be practiced before, so I included the description under "Prepare."
 - ***Engage [Topic] Interventions.*** The interventions are intended to be used during a feedback conversation, to help keep the individual focused and engaged in the conversation.
 - ***Process [Topic] Interventions.*** These interventions are intended to be used after the feedback conversation to help analyze, integrate, and act on the feedback.

Interventions are described within each topic area. In cases where the intervention required detailed instructions, worksheets or different formatting to be clear, I have pointed to material in appendices. Not all topics provide interventions for all areas; where no intervention seemed relevant, I included a heading section with text "not applicable." For example, no interventions are offered for Mindfulness to influence the environment. As noted above, readers

might appropriately take issue with my sorting, recommendations, and "not applicable" designations; I look forward to hearing ideas to improve these recommendations.

2. Intervention Map. This is a table of all the interventions, by topic area. Topic area is defined either as a theoretical model (e.g., character strengths) or associated with one primary resource (e.g., material in the "Thanks for the feedback" topic area was mostly inspired by that book). See Appendix B, item 1, for the Intervention Map.

3. Intervention Diagnostic Tool. This is a table of interventions sorted by feedback challenge. This table suggests specific interventions based on feedback-receiver related challenges. See Appendix B, item 2, for the Intervention Diagnostic Tool.

4. History of positive psychology. To provide context for these recommendations, a history of positive psychology is included in Appendix A.

Positive Interventions and Person-Activity Fit

The rest of this capstone describes a series of positive interventions that a feedback recipient can use to build their skills, develop personal traits, or influence the environment to set the conditions for feedback receipt being a more positive experience. Positive interventions are any intervention intended to increase positive affect, decrease negative affect, or increase subjective well-being in a non-clinical population which can be performed without causing harm. Which interventions a person chooses to adopt are a function of their situation (what they are trying to change) and what kinds of interventions are best for the individual.

Sin and Lyubomirsky (2009) found that positive interventions significantly impact well-being; people who exerted more effort to practice interventions, and practice interventions over time, saw the greatest improvements in well-being. They found evidence that habitual applications of positive interventions produce the greatest benefit for the individual. Further, personal preference influenced the amount of time and effort a person will invest in a positive intervention, and that investment correlates with the effectiveness of the intervention. Sin and Lyubomirsky (2009) speculate that higher levels of motivation and commitment beneficially relate to longer and more effortful practice. The authors recommend choosing positive interventions related to intrinsic goals; pursuing intrinsic goals generates positive emotions, which reinforces pursuing them (Bao & Lyubomirsky, 2014).

Identifying a variety of interventions can help sustain long-term adoption of positive interventions. The downside of repeated practice of an intervention, as Bao and Lyubomirsky (2014) note, is that people hedonically adapt to positive interventions. The initial bursts of well-being from practicing new behaviors decline as the experience produces more predictable results. The authors suggest techniques including using variety, novelty, differing focus, intrinsic

motivation, and socialization to help stave off hedonic adaptation. For example, trying multiple interventions, finding new ways to do them, and cycling through different interventions produce the biggest boosts in happiness (Bao & Lyubomirsky, 2014).

Well-Being

Well-Being Background

As noted above, subjective well-being (SWB) is a measure of human flourishing or happiness. SWB is how people subjectively evaluate their lives, and can also be used to provide information about job satisfaction or positive affect at work (Tenney et al., 2016). In a meta-analysis of findings, Tenney and colleagues (2016) conclude that workers who are high in SWB experience better health, greater self-regulation, stronger motivation, increased creativity, and stronger positive relationships. Other research has demonstrated that overall levels of well-being contribute to better health and longevity, greater productivity, higher levels of resilience, and increased levels of self-esteem (Diener et al., 2017; Diener, 2017). Research on negative feedback shows that factors like self-esteem (Ilies et al., 2007), emotional regulation (Ilgen et al., 1979), and strong relationships (Ilgen et al., 1979) play a role in how well a recipient is able to hear, accept and act on feedback.

How Does Well-Being Impact Receipt of Feedback?

Outcomes of positive well-being create some of the conditions that make negative feedback easier to hear; in effect, strong well-being lays a solid foundation for being receptive to feedback. Positive psychology at its heart focuses on improving well-being (Seligman, 2012), and, arguably all positive psychology interventions could be considered useful toward that end. This capstone attempts to carve out a set of interventions to address a subset of the question of well-being: improving well-being with respect to receiving negative feedback. With that context, all the interventions that follow are in service of building this core personal trait. I will call out

only a few that are unique to improving well-being in this section; the rest of the interventions could easily be included under this topic.

Environmental Well-Being Interventions

Not applicable.

Personal Well-Being Interventions

Improving overall SWB has been shown to build many of the same characteristics that are beneficial to helping someone receive negative feedback. As noted above, effectively all the interventions in this capstone are aimed at increasing well-being, by making the receipt of feedback beneficial and making the recipient feel more positive about the experience. There are a few interventions unique to this topic, as well as a few others that are worth commenting on further. Although there are only a few interventions suggested in this section, some of them allow the individual to establish a baseline, and create foundational habits, so I have included it first in the list of topics.

1. Physical activity. Overall, maintaining a practice of more physical activity contributes positively to factors that benefit well-being. See the Physical Activity section for more information.

2. Mindfulness. Mindfulness practice is called out in many of the interventions that follow, as well as being a separate category. Mindfulness is a foundational method for building well-being. See the Mindfulness section for more information.

3. PANAS. Before undertaking any program of improvement, it can be helpful to establish a baseline. By measuring your current level of well-being, you can have an objective measure of whether the interventions that you try are making a difference. The Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS) has been shown to provide valid, reliable data on the taker's positive and negative affect, or mood (Watson, Clark, Tellegen, 1988). The PANAS instructions can specify a timeframe (e.g., right now, or over the last week) that help define their scope in a way that allows the test taker to get a picture at a point in time. One way to use the PANAS would be to take it with a scope of "today," then proceed with interventions intended to increase positive affect, and periodically re-take the PANAS to see if the interventions were having an impact. (See Appendix C, item 3, for more information.)

4. PERMA. PERMA is a model used to define and measure the construct of well-being (Seligman, 2012). PERMA defines five elements as essential to well-being including positive emotion, engagement, meaning, positive relationships, and accomplishment. The theory claims that each component is important to human flourishing, and that each can be increased with positive intervention techniques. Research has demonstrated support for this theory and various techniques have emerged to maximize elements of PERMA (Seligman, 2012). To understand which elements may benefit from attention, the Authentic Happiness website offers a PERMA questionnaire that can give you insight into your current level of satisfaction with each element of the model. The advantage of this survey tool is that the results could be used diagnostically, that is, if your R score is low, then you should look at intervention ideas to boost that in order to increase your PERMA score, which should, in turn, increase your well-being ratings. (See Appendix C, item 4, for a link to this survey.)

5. Three good things. A frequently recommended, and empirically validated way to boost your well-being is simply to reflect daily on three good things that happened that day (Peterson, 2006). In one study, people who participated showed increases in happiness up to six months after the original study, and 60% of the original participants continued the practice at the six-month point, suggesting that it is a relatively easy happiness boost that can become habitual. (See Appendix C, item 5, for instructions and variations.)

6. Positive portfolio. Fredrickson (2009) recommends building a portfolio that elicits positive emotions. She suggests focusing the portfolio around a specific emotion (e.g., joy, pride, inspiration) and finding pictures, letters, music, or other artifacts that elicit positive emotions, and then pulling this resource out when you need a boost. For example, you could prepare a portfolio that reminded yourself about your proudest work achievements, and review this immediately before a feedback conversation. (See Appendix C, item 6, for more information.)

Prepare Well-Being Interventions

Not applicable.

Engage Well-Being Interventions

Not applicable.

Process Well-Being Interventions

Not applicable.

Character Strengths

Character Strengths Background

Character strengths are positive traits that are core to an individual's identity (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The idea of focusing on strengths (as opposed to weaknesses) is fundamental to positive psychology. The Character Strengths and Virtues Classification was developed in the early days of positive psychology's emergence as a discipline, with the intent of providing the theoretical framework for studying the impact of these beneficial traits (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Character strengths are core aspects of personality that are recognized across cultures, that are valued for themselves (as opposed to being valued for some benefit that is derived from their exercise) and are traits which contribute to human fulfillment (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The classification identifies 24 strengths; example strengths include "Fairness, equity, and justice," "Love of learning," and "Perspective wisdom." Individuals identify their character strengths by taking the VIA Character Strengths survey (see Appendix D, item 1). Survey results include a rank ordered list of traits, starting with the top three to seven "signature" strengths, which are exhibited most strongly.

Over 2000 studies have referenced the character strengths classification, and many have shown support for the benefits of building awareness and working actively to develop one's strengths (Niemi, 2017). For example, studies show that people using their signature strengths resulted in increased happiness and decreased depression (Gander, Proyer, Ruch, and Wyss, 2012); ranked higher on measures of well-being (Wood, Linley, Matlby, Kashdan, & Hurling, 2011); and showed stronger results on measures of relationship satisfaction (Lavy, Littman-Ovadia, & Bareli, 2016). People feel energized, motivated, and positive when they are using their signature strengths (Niemi, 2017). There's a sense of authenticity when using signature

strengths, and the idea of attempting to live without them can feel alienating. Niemiec (2017) describes character strengths as a force that drives actions and motivation across a variety of domains.

Use of strengths in the workplace was associated with generally positive work experiences and perceptions of work as a calling (Harzer & Ruch, 2012). Efforts to increase use of signature strengths as well as lower strengths both positively impacted engagement, job satisfaction, and performance in self-reports (Littman-Ovadia, Lavy, & Boiman-Meshita, 2017), as well as more Combining goal-setting with strength usage increased feelings of engagement and hope, while increased use of strengths was linked to increased levels of self-efficacy, proactive behavior, and positive affect (Niemiec, 2017).

Researchers believe that all character strengths are represented in each person to varying degrees (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). One distinction is between "big" and "little" character strengths. While "big" strengths are those that you exercise more frequently or which feel most natural, use of "little" character strengths often occurs in daily life and may occur without much awareness; for example, remembering to brush your teeth daily is an example of self-regulation, which people may feel they lack as a main strength (Niemiec, 2017).

Character strengths are all equally valuable, though there is evidence that some character strengths result in different outcomes; for example, zest and hope are linked to happiness, while perseverance is associated with academic achievement (Niemiec, 2017). Researchers identify more benefits from efforts to recognize and leverage top strengths before attempting to develop strengths that appear lower for an individual. Using top strengths feels natural, authentic and motivating; activities that focus on top strengths tend to be self-reinforcing. Researchers

recommended focusing on the top three to seven strengths, at least initially, to derive the most benefit (Niemiec, 2017). The interventions that follow primarily leverage "top" strengths.

How Could Signature Strengths Impact Receipt of Feedback?

Research shows that individuals who consciously use their character strengths are more engaged with work, experience more meaning in life, feel more positive emotions, have improved relationships, and are more likely to accomplish goals, that is, they flourish according to PERMA parameters (Niemiec, 2017). Working on signature strengths satisfies needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness; people are intrinsically motivated to use them. Because of this intrinsic motivation, leveraging character strengths feels easy and natural; this intrinsic motivation supports goal achievement, which promotes happiness, which further reinforces the behavior. It's easy to keep thinking up new ways to use them, so one is less likely to hedonically adapt to interventions that are based around signature strengths (Niemiec, 2017). Finally, working with signature strengths can build self-esteem (Niemiec, 2017), and work that is aligned with signature strengths can often bring fulfillment and meaning (Harzer & Ruch, 2012).

Character strengths are malleable and can be developed with practice. This has implications for receiving critical feedback. Some feedback about task performance relates to habitual performance of work: for example, an employee may receive corrective feedback because they are habitually late to work. On reviewing their character strengths, they may see that they rank relatively low on the strength of self-regulation. Research showing that different character strengths can be developed can provide assurance that interventions aimed at boosting strengths will be helpful.

Environmental Character Strengths Interventions

Not applicable.

Personal Character Strengths Interventions

The following interventions help build internal recognition of character strengths, and support practice using the strengths, which in turn encourages further use.

1. Take the VIA survey. The VIA Survey of Character Strengths is a self-assessment that provides an individual information about your personal strengths. While many self-assessments focus on gaps or negative traits, the VIA helps brings awareness of core, positive characteristics (Niemic, 2017). (See Appendix D, item 1, for more information.) After you take the test, you will have clearer insights into your strengths, and can begin leveraging those strengths through a variety of interventions to boost mood, increase motivation, and support well-being (Niemic, 2017).

2. Aware-Explore-Apply model. Developing a deeper identification with your top strengths makes them more available to you. Read the descriptions of your signature strengths (see Appendix D, item 2) to learn more about what they mean, how they are manifest, and how they might be used. Then, consider these questions:

- **Aware.** What's your reaction to your VIA strengths? Does anything surprise you? Do your highest strengths resonate as your signature strengths? Do these top strengths feel core to you?

- **Explore.** Look for examples in your life when you were successful: what strengths were you using? How did your signature strengths come into play? How do you express your signature strengths daily?
- **Apply.** Which strengths do you want to use more? How can you apply your strengths in new ways? Think about a current problem or goal: how can you use your strengths to help you achieve that (Niemiec, 2017)? For example, think about a goal you have with respect to receiving negative feedback: how might your strengths help you with that?

3. Strength subtraction. Before you can develop your strengths, you need to recognize how you already exhibit them. To help recognize a strength in yourself, review your VIA Survey results and choose one of your top strengths. Then ask yourself: "Imagine for the next week that you had to live without that strength. What would that feel like? Are you willing to do that?" Discuss how that feels with a partner, or spend a few minutes writing about the feelings that result from that mental exercise (Niemiec, 2017).

4. Strength spotting. Learn to recognize strengths in yourself and in others.

- **In yourself.** Create a schedule to monitor your behavior at periodic times of day to see which strengths you use during your activities (see example worksheet in Appendix D, item 3). Which strengths do you use frequently? Which did you not notice before you did this?
- **In others.** Label strengths you observe in others; you can do this with real, or fictional people. Provide evidence for that strength (e.g., describe a brief example).

If it's a real person, can you find an opportunity to appreciate that strength by conveying to the person that you value that strength in them (Niemiec, 2017)?

5. Use signature strengths in new ways. Using your signature strengths in new ways has been shown to increase well-being (Niemiec, 2017). Select one of your top strengths, and use that strength in a new or different way each day for a week. Reflect on the experience: how did it feel? Where, when, and how did you use the strength? How did it impact the situation?

6. Character Strengths 360. This is a more involved activity. Use the Character Strengths 360 to collect feedback from friends and family about your strengths (see Appendix D, item 4).

While traditional 360-degree feedback forms focus on areas for improvement, the VIA offers the opportunity to use a similar instrument to collect feedback from others about one's strengths. Soliciting feedback from others can provide new insights into what others view as your core strengths and what you communicate to others about your strengths (Niemiec, 2017).

Niemiec (2017) recommends providing the Character Strengths 360 survey to 10 or more people who know you across a variety of domains (home, professional, spiritual, community, etc.) Once you get their answers back, you can compare this information to your own results. Look at signature strengths that recur to find strong strengths that you demonstrate reliably to yourself and others. Look for possible blind spots: are there strengths that others call out that you were unaware of? Or are there strengths that you feel in yourself that others aren't seeing? This new information may suggest sources of strength that you can draw on in future, or

opportunities to make your strengths work more for you by being more conscious of using them with others (Niemic, 2017).

Prepare Character Strength Interventions

Once you have started to recognize and connect with key strengths, you can then draw on these strengths as you face challenging situations, like feedback conversations. Researchers have shown that reminding yourself of your character strengths can be helpful prior to engaging in a potentially stressful conversation (Niemic, 2017). Reminding yourself of your strengths can boost your feelings of self-efficacy, which has been shown to increase receptivity to feedback (Ilgen & Davis, 2000) and reminds you of personal resources that are readily available for you to draw on during any situation.

The following interventions can be useful when preparing for feedback conversations.

1. Apply your signature strengths in new ways. Select one of your top strengths, and consider an upcoming feedback conversation. Think about your concerns and your goals for that conversation. How can that strength help you deal with your concerns in that feedback conversation? For example, if one of your signature strengths is creativity, spend some time thinking about or writing about how you might apply your ability to creatively problem solve to prepare for this conversation (Niemic, 2017).

2. Acting "As If." Select a strength that you think could be helpful for an upcoming feedback conversation; you can choose a signature strength, or one of your lower strengths if you think that would be beneficial. Think about the situation in which you want to manifest that

strength more strongly. Imagine behaving in a way that is consistent with the strength. One approach to prepare is to read something, like a poem that demonstrates the strength. Commit to acting as if you feel that strength in the situation, even if it's less familiar. Afterward, reflect on your experience. Were you able to demonstrate that strength? Was it helpful to you (Niemic, 2017)?

3. Resource priming. To prepare yourself for an upcoming stressful interaction, identify the event, for example, an annual performance review with your manager. Next, review your signature strengths. With that in mind, try any of the following:

- Consider how you have used these strengths in the past and remind yourself that they are an important part of you.
- Draw connections between your signature strengths and the stressful situation. What is it about the situation that will require your strengths? Can looking at the situation from the lens of your strength provide insights into your potential reactions or the behaviors or needs of the other party?
- Brainstorm ways that you may be able to use your strengths in that situation.
- Create a list of concerns or needs that you have with respect to the upcoming situation: how can your signature strengths help you address those concerns?
- Are there other character strengths that you think would be helpful in this situation? Could you draw on anyone in your social or professional network to provide that perspective (Niemic, 2017)?

4. Create a strengths habit. Choose a character strength you would like to draw on during a difficult conversation (Niemiec, 2017). Choose a brief cue, then script a routine for demonstrating the strength, and then give yourself a reward for that. For example, if trying to cue yourself to use the character strength of self-regulation, you might say: "When I feel myself getting angry in this conversation, then I will take a deep breath." (See the WOOP section later in this capstone for more guidance on this approach).

5. Personal Model of Resilience. Padesky and Mooney (2012) describe a methodology by which a therapist and client can work together to develop a strategy for developing personal resilience. While their method includes coaching from a therapist, the method may be adaptable for an individual to use by themselves. (See Appendix D, item 5, for a more complete description of this method.)

This method assumes that each person has some areas in which they already demonstrate strengths, specifically areas related to passionate interests, committed values, or small "can't miss" daily activities. Consistent with Niemiec's idea of strength spotting (2017), these authors suggest that people are often unaware of their strengths, and need to explicitly look for them. The first step is to think about an area of successful activity, where you were able to successfully overcome obstacles, and identify the strengths that you used. Next, turn the strengths into general strategies, and think about how you might apply them to a problem area. The authors recommend adopting a learning goal attitude: the goal should be to focus on growing strengths, not on completely eradicating the problem. With those strategies identified, conduct small experiments and reflect on the outcomes, then modify your strategies moving forward.

Engage Character Strength Interventions

Not applicable.

Process Character Strength Interventions

Considering your character strengths after difficult situations can provide you with insights into how to process events so that you can derive benefit from these interactions. Here are strength-based exercises to use after a feedback conversation.

1. Positive reappraisal with strengths. Consider a recent difficult interaction, like a feedback conversation. Write about what happened (when, where, with who). What character strengths did you show during this interaction? How did they help you? What character strengths are you showing now? What insights did you gain as a result? What will you do as a result of these insights?

2. Character-strength alignment. In light of the feedback conversation, consider how you might modify your work to use your top 3-5 strengths more as part of your job.

- List the five tasks you do most frequently at work, then review your top five strengths.
- Write down one way you can use any one of your top strengths with each of the five work tasks.
- Give yourself a timeframe and review progress (e.g., check in after one week to see if you have made progress).
- When you are ready, repeat this process for a different top strength, until you have tried this with all your signature strengths (Niemic, 2017).

3. Strength-based problem solving. In light of the feedback conversation, consider a problem or challenge that you face at work. Perhaps the feedback conversation asked you to change a behavior or improve your performance on a specific project. Look at your top five strengths and brainstorm ways that you could use each strength to help you address that challenge.

Resilience and Optimistic Explanatory Style

Resilience and Optimistic Explanatory Style Background

How an individual explains bad events to themselves influences how they react to those bad events (Seligman & Schulman, 1986). An individual with a pessimistic explanatory style tends to attribute bad things to their own actions, and sees the problem as pervasive and permanent ("it's my fault, this always happens, I'm a failure at everything.") In contrast, an individual with an optimistic explanatory style attributes causality externally, and regards bad events as temporary and specific ("it's not my fault, it only happened once, it was only in this one area.")

People with a pessimistic explanatory style are predisposed to giving up when faced with adversity (Seligman & Schulman, 1986). For example, pessimistic insurance sales people, who were often faced with rejection as part of the sales process, were more likely to quit than their optimistic counterparts (Seligman & Schulman, 1986). Elite, but pessimistic athletes, manipulated into believing their times were slower than they'd expected, raced more slowly in subsequent events than their optimistic counterparts under the same conditions (Seligman, 2006). Optimistic explanatory style provides a variety of positive outcomes, like overall better emotional well-being and mental health (Seligman, 2006), improved physical health (Brummett, Helms, Dahlstrom, & Siegler, 2006), increased success (Seligman & Schulman, 1986), and improved quality of relationships (Seligman, 2006).

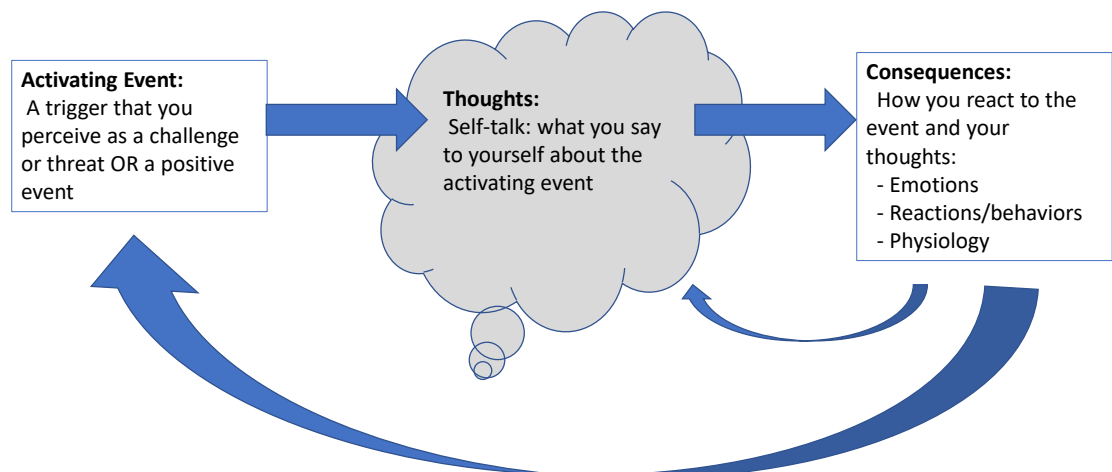
It is possible to learn to be more optimistic. The tools for doing this emerged from Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, a therapeutic approach pioneered by Aaron Beck. Beck speculated that depression was a disorder of conscious thought, in which a client was locked into patterns of negative, or extremely pessimistic thinking (Seligman, 2006). Based on that theory

of depression, he developed a treatment approach which involved disputing habitual negative thoughts to change patterns of thinking; this approach has proved helpful both for relieving depression, and facilitating a more optimistic explanatory style in clients (Seligman, 2006).

The same approach was modified by researchers at the University of Pennsylvania to develop programs that could be used in non-clinical settings. The focus is on building resilience; Reivich and Salzberg (2018) define resilience as the ability to bounce back from adversity, and grow and thrive in the face of challenges. Used in schools, colleges, corporations, and the military, the program has been shown to reliably increase resilience skills, including optimistic explanatory style (Reivich & Salzberg, 2018). Central to this approach is a model of reactions to adversity called ATC, which stands for Adversity – Thoughts - Consequences (Reivich & Salzberg, 2018):

Figure 5: Adversity – Thoughts – Consequences

Resilience is helpful when you have been triggered (ATC model)



Based on Ellis and Beck (Reivich and Salzberg, 2018)

An Activating Event occurs whenever a situation arises that is perceived as a challenge, threat, or even a significant positive event. This triggers Thoughts that result in self-talk, or internal explanations about the causality and significance of the event. Those thoughts trigger Consequences in the form of emotions, behaviors, reactions, and physiological changes. Resilience interventions attempt to change habitual negative self-talk, which can lead to negative emotions, or unhelpful behaviors or reactions; interventions can help the individual develop patterns of more positive or realistic self-talk that can lead to more adaptive reactions to the situation (Reivich & Salzberg, 2018). In addition, energy in the model flows in both directions: if an individual anticipates an adverse activating event, they can consider what they would like their reaction to be, and then practice and plan self-talk to use during the event to help facilitate that reaction (Park, 2018).

How Do Resilience and Optimistic Explanatory Style Impact Receipt of Feedback?

Southwick and Charney (2018) define resilience as the ability to adapt well in the face of adversity, trauma, threat, or stress. Critical feedback can be perceived as threatening to the recipient of the feedback (Kluger & DiNisi, 1996). People who are resilient are better able to respond to threatening situations (Reivich & Salzberg, 2018). Interventions that promote resilience are likely to make an individual more adaptively responsive, and less reactive to adversities, like critical feedback (Reivich & Shatte, 2002). Building a more optimistic explanatory style and greater personal resilience are likely to be helpful components in being able to derive benefit from negative feedback.

Environmental Resilience Interventions

Not applicable.

Personal Resilience Interventions

If critical feedback is perceived as an adversity, then building resilience is an important personal characteristic that enables an individual to respond effectively to that adversity.

Resilient people demonstrate high levels of emotional regulation and impulse control, optimism, and self-efficacy, which can be helpful in responding adaptively in the face of critical feedback (Reivich & Shatte, 2002). To build resilience skills, it helps to understand your current level of resilience, and what abilities you may need to bolster. The following interventions are aimed, in part, at providing you with a clearer idea of your current level of resilience, and an understanding of the kinds of triggers to which you may be sensitive.

1. Take the Resilience Quotient test. This test identifies your current skills and opportunities for growth (Reivich & Shatte, 2002). It provides scores to understand your current level of emotion regulation, impulse regulation, optimism, habitual explanatory style, empathy, and feelings of self-efficacy. In addition, based on your scores, this tool suggests appropriate interventions. (See Appendix E, item 1, for link to test and scoring.)

2. Learning your ABC's. This skill is intended to help identify situations in which you are least resilient (Reivich & Shatte, 2002). In the more recent version of this model the term "thoughts" has been substituted for "beliefs" (Reivich & Salzberg, 2018); the older version of this model, on which this skill was based used "Adversity – Beliefs – Consequences" as the basis

for the acronym. The intent of this skill is to look for patterns: Are there specific adversities that are more triggering? Do you interpret those events in unhelpful ways? or Do you have typical unhelpful ways of reacting to events?

There are 3 steps in using this skill: (See Appendix E, item 2, for a worksheet to help capture this information.)

- **Adversity:** Identify past adversities when you were unhappy with your reaction. Look for patterns, like: do these reactions relate to specific situations or specific people? Are there certain themes that recur? Do you feel "stuck" with certain emotions?
- **Beliefs:** Monitor your "ticker-tape" thoughts on a typical day and develop an awareness of your underlying beliefs about causality and implications. Once you have identified your beliefs, look at your explanatory style, specifically, do you have an optimistic (not me, not permanent, local) or pessimistic (me, always, everything) explanatory style? Next, look at your beliefs for their implications about what's going to happen next. Do you tend to overestimate or underestimate the implications of the event (e.g., do you catastrophize or minimize?)
- **Consequences:** Look at situations where you are confused by your reactions, or your reactions were counterproductive. Review what happened. What was the adversity? What, when, and where did it happen? Describe the event as objectively as possible. Consider the consequences in terms of emotions and behavior: What did you feel? What did you do? Identify the intensity of the emotion. Are there patterns? Do your beliefs have themes or follow patterns? Do you have more why/causal beliefs or what's-next/implication beliefs? Notice if you experience an "aha" moment when you

look at your description: when you review what you believed about the event does your reaction make sense?

3. Avoiding Thinking Traps. Cognitive bias plays a role in reactions to negative feedback (Cannon & Witherspoon, 2005). Behavioral economists have described two styles of thought that are involved in decision making: System 1 and System 2. System 1 thinking is automatic, intuitive and fast; it's the answer that someone blurts out. Kahneman (2003) notes that System 1 can be powerful and accurate; experts who rely on their System 1 intuitions often provide more accurate answers. A downside of System 1 thinking is that it is habitual, or based on rules of thumb; once ingrained, it's difficult to unlearn these rules and modify these habitual responses (Kahneman, 2003). System 2 thinking is slower and effortful; it's the kind of thinking involved in answering complex questions (Kahneman, 2003). System 2 involves more careful reasoning. However, it is more flexible than System 1, and can be consciously modified. System 2 is involved in making judgments, and being reflective, including reflecting on System 1 answers (Kahneman, 2003).

Our System 1 conclusions dominate our reactions to adversity: we tend to notice, remember, and value information that supports our initial or habitual beliefs (Reivich & Salzborg, 2018) and we don't notice or remember disconfirming evidence, or we devalue evidence that goes against our initial conclusions. This is consistent with research that shows that employees tend not to remember the details of negative feedback, which often disconfirms their beliefs about their performance (Lam et al., 2002). Reivich and Shatte (2002) call these habitual patterns "thinking traps." Thinking traps are frequently triggered by aspects of the situation like stress, lack of sleep, perception of threat, or ambiguity. Critical feedback exhibits

many of these criteria, since the recipient often feels stressed or perceives threat (Kluger & DiNisi, 1996), and feedback givers sometimes provide ambiguous information to soft-pedal the bad news (Wagoner & Waldron, 1999). Thinking traps are overly rigid patterns of thinking that cause us to miss crucial information (Reivich & Salzberg, 2018). In a feedback discussion, these triggered, reactive thinking patterns may cause systematic misinterpretation of what's being communicated (Lam et al., 2002).

By reviewing your reactions to adversities in "Learning Your ABCs" you can identify habitual explanatory patterns that may be evidence of your typical thinking traps. Once aware that you fall into these traps, you can employ other resilience skills to help avoid these traps in future. Reivich and Salzberg (2018) propose the following general approach to dealing with a thinking trap:

1. *Notice that you have fallen into a pattern.* Get off of automatic pilot, and be aware of the patterns that trigger you.
2. *Stop your reactivity.* Is there a mental cue you can use to interrupt the pattern? (See the WOOP section for some suggestions).
3. *Be accurate and thorough in the conversation.* Ask questions to broaden your awareness, and collect information you might otherwise miss. (See the "Thanks for the Feedback" section for some suggestions about how to engage and ask questions.)
4. *Practice.* Developing your skill at interrupting your reactions to thinking traps takes practice. Pay attention to your efforts and celebrate when you see improvements. (See suggestions under the Deliberate Practice section for more ideas on this).

See Appendix E, item 3, for a list of common Thinking Traps and suggestions for specific questions to help interrupt reactivity and seek missing information.

4. Detecting Iceberg Beliefs. Many of us hold fundamental beliefs about how the world "should" work or how we should be in it, and these beliefs influence our thinking, often below the level of consciousness. Reivich and Shatte (2002) call these "Iceberg Beliefs." Icebergs can be adaptive when they direct behavior to align with deeply held values. However, they can also minimize our effectiveness, causing disproportionate reactions or unhelpful behaviors, which often take us by surprise. Iceberg Beliefs can become too rigid, causing repeated unhelpful emotional patterns. In addition, it's possible to hold two contradictory Iceberg Beliefs, which can explain why it is difficult to make decisions on specific issues. Identifying and addressing Iceberg Beliefs can help you prevent recurring dysfunctional patterns.

Reivich and Shatte (2002) offer two clues that there is an Iceberg Belief at the base of reactions: we describe a situation using the word "should," or our reactions are disproportionate to the adversity we encountered.

There are three general categories of Iceberg Beliefs (Reivich & Shatte, 2002):

- **Achievement.** Achievement-oriented people have an underlying belief that success is the most important thing in life. A variation on this is the perfectionism that is common for achievement-oriented people; as noted above, perfectionists tend to have a hard time accepting feedback (Besser et al., 2004).
- **Acceptance.** Acceptance-oriented people jump to conclusions and try to mind read. In ambiguous situations, they assume there has been damage to their relationship.
- **Control.** Control-oriented people have underlying beliefs around the importance of being in charge and in control of events. People with strong control beliefs have a

heightened sensitivity to experiences in which they are not in charge, or not able to change the course of outcomes, and may attribute lack of control to personal failure.

Self-Determination Theory proposes that psychological well-being depends on feelings of competence, relatedness, and autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 2008). These three categories of Iceberg Beliefs align with those SDT categories: competence and achievement, acceptance and relatedness, control and autonomy. From this perspective, threats to these core beliefs strike deeply at the core of someone's well-being.

Reivich and Shatte (2002) suggest that apparent disconnects between emotions and behaviors in challenging situations are potential signs of underlying Iceberg Beliefs: when your thoughts cannot explain the intensity of your emotions and behaviors, the emotions seem out of proportion to the adversity, the behaviors seem inappropriate, or you are puzzled by your reactions. For example, if you experienced a situation where anger would have been an appropriate consequence (e.g., someone stole your parking spot, which is typically experienced as a violation of rights which results in anger, and you felt guilt instead), there's a chance that there is an underlying Iceberg Belief at play. (See Appendix E, item 4, for a list of typical belief-consequence pairings.)

Steps to Detecting Icebergs. (See Appendix E, item 4, for a worksheet.) For a specific adversity, after you have mapped out the ABCs (see above), check the B-C connection. Focus on three things: Are your C's out of proportion to your B's? Is the strength of your reaction not explained adequately by the thoughts you had about the adversity? Does the quality of your C seem mismatched to the category of your B? For example, do you feel embarrassed, when a more typical consequence would be guilt? Are you struggling to make a simple decision?

If you answered yes to these questions, then look at the situations to see if you can identify the Iceberg Belief. Ask these questions about the situation: What does this mean to me? What is the most upsetting part of this for me? What is the worst part of that for me? What does that say about me? What's so bad about that? When you have an "aha" reaction to a response to one of the above questions, you have likely identified an Iceberg Belief that underlies your reaction. For example, "Of course I panicked when my kids were late, I thought they were dead." Once you have identified an Iceberg Belief, you can apply Avoiding Thinking Trap techniques to the situation to develop more appropriate responses.

Prepare Resilience Interventions

As noted above, energy in the ATC model flows in both directions. One way to look at the model is deterministic: e.g., these reactions were caused by these thoughts and adversity. However, the model also predicts that one can identify adaptive reactions to a situation, and then identify thoughts that will support that reaction in the face of the adversity.

1. "Pre-game" ATC. Parks (2018) recommends a strategy of using the ATC model to help regulate emotions and arousal. By considering what response you'd like to have (e.g., "I'd like to be alert, but not frantic") you can develop an inner dialog to support those feelings (e.g., "When I start feeling nervous, I'll remind myself that this is my body's way of getting me ready to perform well.") This also provides an opportunity to combine interventions: for example, see later sections for applying concepts about Stress-is-Enhancing mindset and structuring your inner dialog using WOOP. (See Appendix E, item 5, for more information on Pre-game ATC.)

2. Real-Time Resilience. Real-Time Resilience is intended for use in the midst of adversity, but Reivich and Shatté (2002) recommend that it be practiced before you need it. However, it's also beneficial to practice with Challenging Beliefs and Putting it in Perspective (see later sections), as those techniques provide the foundation for this one. The basic approach is to quickly attack every counterproductive thought with a more accurate response. Based on Cognitive Behavior Therapy, repeating this technique over time will help change your habitual thinking patterns (including thinking traps, pessimistic explanatory style) to more adaptive, realistic, optimistic, and helpful responses. Because your thoughts drive your behavior, reactions, and emotions, being able to intervene and interrupt negative thoughts and ruminations is vital to gaining control of your reactions in the moment of adversity. (See Appendix E, item 6, for more details.)

3. Shuffle those thoughts! Frederickson (2009) offers a variation to practice Real-Time Resilience. Capture typical negative thoughts, or negative thoughts that you anticipate having before a stressful event, like a feedback conversation. Use index cards, writing one thought per card. Shuffle the cards, and practice Real-Time Resilience. As new negative thoughts come up, add them to your deck. (See Appendix E, item 6, for more details.)

Engage Resilience Interventions

Sometimes adversities trigger intrusive thoughts that undermine the ability to react adaptively in a situation. For example, during a feedback conversation, an individual may be overcome with self-judgmental thoughts like "oh no, I'm a failure, I can't believe I made that mistake, I've lost all credibility."

Intrusive thoughts can undermine resilience in three ways: they are often negative and catastrophic, driving negative affect; they lead to rumination on bad feelings, which worsens mood; they take up cognitive resources that could be better used for solving problems (Reivich & Shatté, 2002). This is consistent with data that supports both Feedback Intervention Theory (Kluger & DiNisi, 1996) and Cognitive Interference Hypothesis (Mikulincer, 1989) that suggest that off-task and ruminative thoughts interfere with performance on a task.

The following techniques can help focus attention back onto the feedback conversation, so that the individual can pay attention and engage to ask clarifying questions, understand messages, and get a clearer idea of next actions or implications.

1. Focusing techniques. Focusing techniques can be helpful in interrupting rumination and stopping intrusive thoughts. Good focusing techniques often take the form of pleasant, mental games that are challenging enough to divert your attention from your non-resilient thoughts, but not so difficult that you find them frustrating (Reivich & Shatté, 2002). (See Appendix E, item 7, for a list of focusing techniques.)

2. Working with ambiguous feedback. Feedback discussions are often difficult because the information presented is ambiguous, and the ambiguity itself can be frustrating. Managers sometimes try to soften the message they are providing to help employees save face, but the result is that the information they are presenting is ambiguous (Wagoner & Waldron, 1999). Reivich suggests the following steps when given ambiguous feedback (Reivich & Salzberg, 2018):

- Ask the other person if you can take a minute to clarify what you are currently experiencing.
- Recap the conversation. "You gave me feedback about the following situation. I asked for clarification. You will get more details and get back to me."
- Describe your current state. "I'm feeling some frustration (or "I'm feeling some emotion"). What you told me is ambiguous. I just need to share with you that it is the ambiguity that is bothering me, not getting feedback."
- Explain that you just needed a minute to transition: "I just needed to let you know where I am. Ok. I'm ready to move on to the next topic."

3. Is the feedback giver triggered? Providing negative feedback to another person can be difficult, and many managers try to avoid it (Steelman & Rutkowski, 2004). They may be stuck in their own A-T-C patterns while you, as the receiver, are stuck in yours. Learn to recognize body language and conversational styles that suggest the other person is triggered. Do they seem upset, angry, or stressed? Are they getting defensive? If so, that could be a sign that they are reacting to some beliefs about how they should be handling the conversation or how you should be reacting. This is a good indication that you may need to slow the conversation with more questions, ask for factual clarification, or even suggest a break so that you can both regain perspective.

Process Resilience Interventions

If a feedback conversation has felt like an adversity, the individual may experience their feelings and reactions as another adversity. Processing those feelings and reactions after the event is crucial to learning to deal with these kinds of conversations more productively in future.

These resilience interventions are aimed at helping you work through your reactions, assumptions, and interpretations about what happened; challenging your worst-case fears and interpretations is the key technique for moving to a more optimistic explanatory style (Reivich & Shatté, 2002).

1. Challenging Beliefs. This is a skill that you can use to get a more realistic perspective after a difficult feedback conversation (Reivich & Shatté (2002). For people whose thoughts during adversities focus more on the "WHY" of an event, this skill can help them get out of unhelpful thinking patterns. Recurring thinking patterns about causes limit your options for dealing with the situation, because you continue to return to the same solutions that have not been previously effective. (See Appendix E, item 8, for a worksheet.) The basic process is: identify an adversity, your beliefs, and your initial thoughts about the causes. For each cause, provide evidence for or against that belief. Next generate some alternative causes, and choose the one you think is most realistic. Then, decide what you will do based on that cause.

Reivich and Shatté (2002) advise paying attention to things like: what do the causes tell you about your explanatory style. Is it more optimistic (not me - not always - not everything) or more pessimistic (me - always - everything)? Also pay attention to whether your beliefs apply in one domain ("I'm often late to meetings at work") but not another ("I'm careful about getting the kids out of the house on time at home").

2. Putting it in Perspective. This skill can help you get a clearer picture of the implications of what's being said in a feedback conversation (See Appendix E, item 9, for more information.) When your thoughts lead you to incorrect beliefs about what will happen in the future, or the likelihood of certain outcomes, this skill can clarify and calm your concerns. This is particularly helpful if you are prone to catastrophizing or minimizing.

Many triggered thoughts are projections about the future. While the final belief may be catastrophic, the chain of evidence that leads there are often mostly logical steps. Because the pattern of reasoning feels logical, it's easier to get sucked into the conclusion seeming plausible (Reivich & Shatté, 2002).

The basic steps are as follows: for an adversity, like a specific feedback conversation, write down each thought as it occurred to you, then evaluate if it's an absolutely true fact or a supposition. Estimate the likelihood of each belief. Next, generate a low probability best-case alternative. Doing this forces you out of your worst-case scenario thinking, and brainstorming about silly alternatives is funny, increasing your positive affect. Your best-case story should make you laugh. Finally, identify the most likely implications of the adversity. This should leave you with a smaller number of more plausible outcomes to address. Because they are more plausible, more will be within your capability to address.

Again, it's worth reflecting on this exercise when you are done to see if you can detect any recurring patterns of thinking traps or Iceberg Beliefs that you may want to be aware of in future (Reivich & Shatté, 2002).

Developing a Growth Mindset

Growth Mindset Background

Many of the findings on reactions to negative feedback point to the importance of a Growth Mindset to help a feedback recipient hear, accept, and act on feedback (Elgin & Davis, 2000). Growth Mindset describes how individuals perceive goals, and their underlying beliefs about learning and intelligence.

Goal orientation can be seen both as a trait of the individual (Dweck & Leggett, 1988) or of the situation, specific to the types of goals which are set (Cianci et al., 2010). Dweck and Leggett (1988) describe how individuals vary in their self-theories: their model describes people as either entity theorists or incremental theorists. Entity theorists believe human attributes cannot be changed: entity theorists are less likely to seek out negative feedback, they react more emotionally to negative feedback, and are more likely to attribute performance deficits to lack of ability (Cianci et al., 2010). Entity theorists view negative feedback as threatening to their self-image; this threat is presumed to consume cognitive resources, which makes entity theorists less able to remember and act on the feedback. Entity theorists respond poorly to failure because their concern with restoring positive feelings of self-worth overrides their concerns with using the feedback to achieve their goals (Cianci et al., 2010).

Incremental theorists believe that human attributes can be changed through effort: they are more likely to seek negative feedback, and are more likely to attribute their performance deficits to their own lack of effort (Cianci et al., 2010). Incremental theorists are motivated by goals that help them expand their skills; negative feedback is perceived by them as valuable because it provides information to develop. Because incremental theorists find critical information valuable (and not threatening), they have less emotional reaction to it, and are able

to remember and act on it (Cianci et al., 2010). Dweck calls this perspective on human capability a Growth Mindset (Dweck, 2006).

How Does Growth Mindset Impact Receipt of Feedback?

With learning goals, and a belief in ability to change, negative feedback becomes helpful data, instead of being perceived as a threat (Cannon & Witherspoon, 2005). People who approach feedback conversations with a Growth Mindset are better able to hear and act on the information that they hear (Elgin & Davis, 2000). Dweck (2006) argues that an individual can develop a Growth Mindset; interventions that can lead to a Growth Mindset are likely to make an individual better able to derive benefit from the messages in negative feedback.

Environmental Growth Mindset Interventions

Not applicable.

Personal Growth Mindset Interventions

Despite the frequency with which developing a Growth Mindset is recommended, advice about how to do this is much less specific than would be helpful. Dweck (2006) offers some general approaches, but unlike Self-Compassion or Stress-is-Enhancing Mindset, there are few detailed instructions for how to proceed. Most of the advice suggests consciously thinking about activities as learning experiences, or reflecting later on those experiences. Where more detailed instructions exist, they tend to be aimed at parents or teachers to help them develop Growth Mindset in children, for example, "6 tips to help students develop Growth Mindset in a classroom" (2017).

The following interventions have been gathered from a variety of sources.

1. Commit to a Growth Mindset. Dweck (2006) recommends committing to a Growth Mindset to help that approach become a natural pattern.

2. Learn about Growth Mindset. Dweck (2006) suggests that you remind yourself that research shows that adopting a Growth Mindset allows you to learn from a variety of experiences. For example, students exposed to a short video about how the brain changes with learning scored better on a subsequent test. (See resources in Appendix F, item 1.)

3. 25 ways to develop a Growth Mindset. See this list in Appendix F, item 2.

4. Develop grit. Duckworth (2016) defines grit as passion and perseverance towards a goal. Grit and Growth Mindset are closely related concepts: gritty individuals demonstrate Growth Mindset. Cultivating grit may help stimulate a Growth Mindset. (See Appendix F, item 3, for a summary of steps to develop grit.)

5. Lower the stakes/up the frequency. A college instructor shared the following strategy he used to help students in his speech class develop a Growth Mindset (H. Kumar, personal communication, 6/4/18). He suggested these steps: Choose a skill that you want to develop. Find low-risk ways of practicing the skill. Practice the skill frequently, and normalize failure; if possible, make the practice game-like or fun. For example, in his speech class, many of his students feared public speaking. He would frequently start the class with pop-quiz like

questions that forced the students to start to speak in public, "Give me a two-minute speech about what you did this weekend." By keeping the atmosphere light, and the risks low, students could begin to explore their skill. To translate this to a feedback situation, you could explicitly seek feedback on things that you care less about to practice asking for and receiving feedback, for example, getting feedback on a simple email, or one slide of a PowerPoint presentation. As your comfort increases, notice that you are developing a learning mindset with respect to this task.

Prepare Growth Mindset Interventions

Although Dweck does not suggest any specific interventions for preparing for feedback conversations with a Growth Mindset, one can extrapolate based on her descriptions of how people with Growth Mindset approach challenges (Dweck, 2006).

1. Anticipate learning. Before engaging in the feedback conversation, consciously consider what you may learn from the conversation.

2. Commit to curiosity. Before the conversation, consciously commit to bringing an attitude of learning and curiosity into the room. Remind yourself of this just before the conversation.

Engage Growth Mindset Interventions

Not applicable.

Process Growth Mindset Interventions

Dweck (2006) suggests that reflecting on experiences can be an excellent opportunity to notice that you learned from them, which can reinforce the benefits of a Growth Mindset.

1. Reflect on a recent event. Consider a past event that you think measured you in some way (e.g., a performance rating). Focus on that thing. Feel all the emotions that go with thinking about it. Now put yourself in a Growth Mindset perspective. Look honestly at your role in it, but understand that it doesn't define your intelligence or personality. Then ask: "What did I (or can I) learn from that experience? How can I use it as a basis for growth? (Dweck, 2006, p. 56)

“Thanks for the Feedback”

"Thanks for the Feedback" Background

"Thanks for the Feedback" is a practical guide intended to help people derive positive benefits from difficult feedback (Stone & Heen, 2015). Stone and Heen (2015) offer a model to assess how a feedback conversation has gone off track. Using this model as a diagnostic tool can suggest which interventions could prevent this problem from recurring, or suggest strategies for a feedback receiver to re-engage with the feedback giver to attempt to salvage value from the feedback. They describe three factors that interfere with smooth communication of feedback: mismatched expectations; vague or generalized language; or other factors, like content of feedback, relationships, or characteristics of the feedback receiver.

Mismatched expectations about the nature of the feedback being exchanged leads to disappointment or confusion. Stone and Heen (2015) argue that the feedback giver and recipient may have different expectations about the purpose of a feedback conversation. They suggest there are three primary objectives that become misaligned.

1. Appreciation: "Thanks for your efforts"
2. Coaching: "Here's a better way for you to do this next time."
3. Evaluation: "Here's where you stand based on your performance."

If the receiver is expecting or hoping for one kind of feedback ("I'm expecting him to tell me how much he appreciates the extra work I did") and instead gets another kind ("I can't believe after I worked all weekend he had the nerve to complain about a few typos") the conversation is likely to go off track (Stone & Heen, 2015).

Vague language or generalized labels leads to misunderstanding. Feedback givers often talk in labels that are confusing or can be misinterpreted. For example, "your presentation

needs to be more strategic" is only helpful if both the feedback giver and receiver both understand what the word "strategic" encompasses in this context (Stone & Henn, 2015).

Content of feedback, relationship issues, or characteristics of the feedback receiver leads to triggered emotional responses. Stone and Heen (2015) identify three primary types of emotional triggers that contribute to unproductive feedback conversations,

1. **Truth triggers:** The recipient rejects the feedback as inaccurate. The recipient focuses on what's wrong with the feedback; their instinct is to reject all the feedback if any piece of it is wrong, even if some of it is correct. Their reactions sound like: "That's wrong" or "That's not me" (Stone & Heen, 2015, p. 25).
2. **Relationship triggers:** Acceptance of feedback is influenced by who is providing it, and the relationship of the giver and the receiver. These triggers often result in feelings of hurt, suspicion, or anger. The recipient's focus is on the relationship, and they may reject any ownership for contributions to the problem. Further, they may try to shift the conversation to what's wrong with the relationship, or how the giver contributed to the problem. Reactions sound like: "I can't hear this feedback from you." "After all I've done for you?" "Who are you to say that?" "You're the problem, not me" (Stone & Heen, 2015, p. 25).
3. **Identity triggers:** The feedback threatens the recipient's self-image; the feedback is perceived as a threat. The recipient's focus is on what this means to them (either what it means about how they feel about themselves, or a distorted interpretation of the future implications). Stone and Heen (2015) suggest that a fixed mindset may contribute to these reactions. Reactions sound like: "I screw everything up," "I'm doomed," "I'm a failure" (Stone & Heen, 2015, p. 25).

How Do Insights from "Thanks for the Feedback" Impact Receipt of Feedback?

Stone and Heen's (2015) three factors align with research into acceptance of negative feedback. Research shows that feedback is best accepted in the context of a supportive relationship (Ilgen et al., 1979); one can speculate that mismatched communication may occur when relationships are less well established. Feedback givers and feedback receivers have different data and different perspectives on things like causation (Larson, 1984), overly general language, like labels, can add to the confusion. Finally, when a recipient is emotionally triggered by the conversation, they may be focused on off-task thoughts, which will likely reduce the effectiveness of the conversation, consistent with Cognitive Interference Theory (Mikulincer, 1989).

Environmental "Thanks for the Feedback" Interventions

Not applicable.

Personal "Thanks for the Feedback" Interventions

Not applicable.

Prepare "Thanks for the Feedback" Interventions

Stone and Heen (2015) recommend preparing for feedback conversations, keeping in mind habitual reactions to negative feedback. They note that reactions to feedback often occur because the information that is communicated in the conversation can threaten self-identity stories. They offer the following interventions to prepare for a feedback conversation. (See Appendix G for a tip sheet for navigating conversations.)

1. Reminders about reality. They suggest that accepting some realities may make it easier to hear and accept feedback, for example:

- You will make mistakes. It's worth reminding yourself that perfection is an unreasonable standard. A corollary to this is to accept that the feedback provider will also make mistakes in delivery, but that should not invalidate everything they say.
- You have complex intentions. Your reactions to what you hear will be influenced by your feelings on a number of dimensions.
- You have contributed to the problem. Accepting that you have contributed to the problem opens the possibility that you can also be part of solving it (Stone & Heen, 2015).

2. Prepare for the worst outcome. Consider what you may hear, and script an adaptive response for yourself. If the worst happens, you have a plan for dealing with it. If the worst doesn't happen (more likely), whatever does happen may seem less dire (Stone & Heen, 2015).

4. **Adopt a Growth Mindset.** Stone and Heen (2015) remind that accepting feedback is impacted by the lens of your identity story. They recommend shifting from simplistic self-stories, and consciously adopting a Growth Mindset.

Engage "Thanks for the Feedback" Interventions

Most of Stone and Heen's (2015) recommendations fall into "engage" interventions. Specifically, they offer insights about how to deal with expectation mismatches, how to

understand unclear statements, provide suggestions on how to handle relationship triggers, and offer other general suggestions about questions to ask to keep a productive conversation going.

Mismatched expectations about the nature of the feedback being exchanged leads to disappointment or confusion. As noted above, conversations can go awry when feedback givers and receivers have different ideas about the goals of the situation. Stone and Heen (2015) note that feedback conversations can focus on appreciation, coaching, or evaluation. They say that all three are important and necessary, but when a recipient gets what they don't expect or need, difficulties can arise. The first step is understanding the difference:

- **Appreciation.** The purpose of appreciation is to motivate and encourage. It conveys to the recipient the message that "you matter." For appreciation to feel valuable it needs to be specific, come in a form and from a source that the receiver values and can hear from, and it must be authentic. Lack of appreciation can be demotivating and damaging to a relationship.
- **Coaching.** The focus of coaching is to help the recipient increase their skills, knowledge, and growth. Good coaching can increase positive feelings in the relationship between the giver and the receiver. However, a recipient who is seeking coaching, but gets either appreciation or evaluation can be particularly prone to triggered reactions.
- **Evaluation.** The focus of evaluation is to provide feedback about where the recipient stands relative to goals, others, or some objective standard. Evaluation is helpful to align expectations and guide subsequent choices, but it may not provide enough information about how to modify performance to meet the standard; usually coaching is needed for that.

Stone and Heen's (2015) perspective aligns with research that specific feedback in the context of a supportive relationships is most likely to be effective (Steelman & Rutkowski, 2004).

Stone and Heen (2015) note that in feedback conversations, recipients often hear evaluation feedback most clearly, and that it can drown out the other two types. In addition, even if the main objective of coaching is to provide information about how to improve, it inevitably contains evaluative information as well. If the evaluation is not provided skillfully, and focuses on the person, not just the performance, the conversation can go off-track. This observation is consistent with Feedback Intervention Theory that warns that feedback directed at the self-level will distract from performance at the task level (Kluger & DiNisi, 1996).

Stone and Heen (2015) recommend the following interventions to correct for mismatched expectations:

1. Clarify intent. To deal with mismatched expectations, the recipient may need to clarify the purpose of the conversation. Consistent with advice about feedback-seeking, the recipient should take the initiative to ask for the form of feedback they need if that's not what the giver is intending to provide (Ashford et al., 2003). For example, they suggest pausing the conversation to ask questions like (Stone & Heen, 2015, p. 38):

- "I appreciate that you are coaching me on how to improve in this area. It would help if you could give me a quick evaluation. How am I doing overall?"
- "You are saying this is coaching, but I'm also hearing some evaluation in what you are saying. Am I right that you are also telling me that I am falling behind?"

2. Sort for coaching. Stone and Heen (2015) also recommend that you "sort for coaching," or make a conscious effort to put on a Growth Mindset and find coaching information in evaluative comments.

3. Separate assessment, consequences, and judgment. Stone and Heen (2015) recommend a receiver should try to separate the assessment, consequences, and judgment contained in feedback. Assessment provides ranking, consequences describe outcomes that result from the assessment, and judgment is the narrative that givers and receivers tell about the assessment and its consequences. Separating and clarifying those aspects of feedback gives the receiver a clearer picture of which items require response, which will help them realistically think through their options. This might sound like:

- "When you say that I am falling behind, can you give me some sense of where I am objectively?" (assessment)
- "Based on that rating, what will that mean for my salary this year?" (consequences)
- "How should I think about my position at the company based on that?" (judgment)

Clarifying unclear language is essential to make sure that both parties are clear on the content of the discussion. Feedback givers often resort to vague labels, like, "You aren't being strategic enough." Labels result when the giver combines data, and their interpretation of that data, and may also include their emotional reaction to the data they observed ("I get frustrated when you are careless.") Stone and Heen (2015) attribute this to the different perspectives about the situation (the giver and receiver literally see different parts of the situation) or different interpretations based on the giver's values, past experiences, assumptions,

and implicit rules about how the world should be. This leap from data to interpretation is often unconscious, and the feedback giver can't explicitly share their interpretations as such because they are unaware of it. Stone and Heen (2015) are attributing difficulties in feedback conversations to similar cognitive biases called out by other researchers (Cannon & Witherspoon, 2005).

Stone and Heen (2015, p. 61) also offer the view that an individual comes in to a feedback conversation with their own interpretations of events. These pre-existing ideas cloud their ability to hear the feedback, and make it harder to hear, or as they put: "You aren't trying to get the giver's ideas into your empty head, you're trying to get the giver's ideas into your full head."

They offer the following suggestions for clarifying content:

1. First, understand. Stone and Heen (2015) recommend that you enter a feedback conversation with the intent of working first to understand, while still holding your own perspective on the situation. They suggest shifting from immediately refuting each point with "that's wrong" to "tell me more and let's figure out why we see this differently."

2. Label spot. Labels used by feedback givers may mean different things to the giver and receiver. The receiver may misinterpret their meaning, and react to that misinterpretation. Stone and Heen (2015) recommend that you actively label spot: notice when a term has been used that has a lot of meaning packed into it, or is open to interpretation, consciously note it as a label. If you get reactive to something said, that may be an indication that a label was used that needs clarification.

3. Where's it coming from / where's it going to. Stone and Heen (2015) suggest that feedback often contains both retrospective data and forward-looking implications. To understand feedback, explore both where it's coming from (both data and interpretation) and where it's going to (advice, consequences, expectations).

- **Where's the data coming from?** Ask for clarification and details about the label: "When you say 'careless' can you give me an example of what you observed?" Or, ask for more details, "Can you tell me more?" or "I'd like to understand more about what you saw."
- **Where's the data going to?** Ask for coaching, "What's your advice?" "What would you do next?" "Can you show me or give me an example?"
- **Clarify the expectations in evaluative conversations:** Ask, "What were the criteria you used to make this evaluation? What did you consider to be most important? Are there additional concerns or factors I should know about? Can you clarify your expectation and help me understand what makes that factor important to you?"
- **Look forward:** Ask, "What are the consequences?" "How will this affect me in the coming year?" "What should I be thinking about or work on?" "When can we reassess?"

4. Work together. Commit to trying to work together with the feedback giver to get a more complete picture. This commitment maximizes the chances you will both learn something, which can be especially helpful when you think the giver is wrong about some aspects of their feedback. Ideally, the receiver should try to figure out what's legitimate about the feedback, and

also if the receiver and giver have common concerns. Once the giver and receiver both agree about what's accurate or true, they can begin to explore joint solutions.

Characteristics of the relationship may lead to triggered responses in the receiver.

Feedback receivers can be triggered by who is giving the feedback (Stone & Heen, 2015).

Consistent with research by Steelman & Rutkowski (2002), receivers may reject feedback from people they don't like or don't trust. In the midst of emotions triggered by relationship issues, it's important to still try to get to the root of the feedback being communicated.

Conversations with relationship triggers follow this pattern:

- Receiver gets feedback
- Receiver gets triggered
- Receiver changes the topic to how they feel
- Conversation continues with receiver and giver talking about two different topics.

1. Relationship issues. Sometimes the environment creates patterns of issues in the relationship, and working to understand if any of these are contributing to the situation is worthwhile (Stone & Heen, 2015). For example,

- **You + Me intersections.** Individual preferences, tendencies, and traits can create friction between people. To resolve these disagreements, try to step outside of your perspective and observe the system as the other does; instead of focusing on what the other is doing wrong, notice what you are each doing in reaction to each other. Ask, "What is each of us contributing?"

- **Role clashes.** "Accidental adversaries" can be created because of the roles people play in an organization. In these cases, people may attribute the problem to the personality and intentions of the other, but it may be the structure of the roles they inhabit that create the conflict. A related problem is role confusion (not sure whose job it is) or role clarity (intentional role tensions that can be important for an organization, can be difficult interpersonally, for example, a compliance officer and a sales person). To resolve these disagreements, ask, "How are our roles contributing to how we see each other and to the feedback we give each other?"
- **Big picture.** Processes, policies, physical environment, or other players may create or reinforce a problem. Looking at systems can reduce interpersonal judgments about individuals. The solution to conflict may lie outside of the relationship. See if there are ways that the system can support the relationship and resolve the issue, instead of trying to circumvent the system. Ask, "What part of this is systemic, and could we make that work for us instead of against us?"
- **Feedback from strangers.** It's tempting to reject feedback from strangers or people we find difficult, because we think they can't sensibly comment or we don't trust their judgment. But, this may represent a lost opportunity to get a fresh perspective on behavior or performance. This may also be an opportunity to uncover relationship issues that underlie feedback: ask, "Is this about helping me grow and improve, or is this the giver's way of raising an important relationship issue that has been upsetting them?"

2. Clarify your contribution. While you may not have complete responsibility for the problem, pushing yourself to be honest about what you might be contributing will be beneficial to resolving the issue in the long run. You are more likely to be able to resolve the problem if you are open to accepting that you may have contributed to it (Stone & Heen, 2015).

3. Don't switchtrack. Relationship triggers can create "switchtrack" conversations, where a second topic, about the relationship, is introduced. The result is two people talking about two different things. Stone and Heen (2015) recommend spotting the two topics and making sure both are discussed:

- **Be aware of the two topics:** Think to yourself, "hmmm... I asked about doing the dishes, and he's complaining that I don't appreciate him. That's two different topics."
- **Signpost the issue in the conversation:** "I think we have two topics to discuss. Both are important. Let's take them one at a time, in this order, ok?"

Additional ideas to stay engaged in the conversation. Emotional triggers can make it hard to stay engaged in a conversation, and research suggests that it's important to work through those emotions to try to understand the message that is being communicated. Stone and Heen (2015) offer some additional questions to draw on when feeling triggered or confused by the message.

4. Check in and name your reactions. During the conversation, they advocate checking in and naming your own reactions. For example, notice:

- What do I feel? Name the feeling, notice how it feels physically in your body.

- What's the story I'm telling myself (and what is the threat I see in the story)?
- What's the actual feedback that I'm hearing?

5. Check for distortions. How are you distorting the information you are hearing?

Consider the various ways that you might distort what you are hearing, and try to separate facts from beliefs:

- What is this feedback about and what isn't it about?
- Distinguish between consequences that WILL happen and that MIGHT happen.

6. Switch perspective. Use these techniques to help you get perspective during the conversation (Stone & Heen, 2015):

- Try to imagine yourself as the observer. What would you think about this feedback if it were directed at someone else?
- Think about whether this conversation will matter in 10 years.

7. Name one thing. Stone and Heen (2015) suggest these questions to get additional specific information from a giver:

- "At the end of the day, what is the most important thing I should be working on?"
- "What's one thing you see me doing that gets in my own way?"
- "What's one thing I could change that would make a difference for you?"

Process "Thanks for the Feedback" Interventions

To fully benefit from feedback that is offered, the recipient needs to understand it. As noted previously, feedback givers are often reluctant to deliver negative feedback, and that reluctance translates into unclear language (Wagoner & Waldron, 1999). In addition, the giver and receiver often have different data on a situation, as they interpret the details from different perspectives; this is complicated by cognitive biases that interfere with an individual's ability to see the situation clearly (Cannon & Witherspoon, 2005). But, this lack of clarity because of cognitive bias is exactly why getting feedback is so valuable.

Feedback recipients too often focus on what's wrong with the feedback without asking what's right about it (Stone & Heen, 2015). There are many ways in which feedback can be incorrect. Feedback may be literally incorrect, correct in the past but not now, incorrect in context, or can contain incorrect conclusions based on different perspectives on the data. Further, it is possible that only parts of it are wrong. The challenge to the recipient is to stay engaged with the conversation to find out if there's anything correct or actionable (Stone & Heen, 2015).

After receiving feedback, you need to make choices about what you will do about it. Stone and Heen (2015) offer the following ideas:

1. Notice blind spots. You may receive feedback on things that relate to your blind spots. Noticing patterns in feedback can help you gain more awareness about what you convey to others, where your instincts are wrong, or where your intent is being misconstrued. Some common blind spots include:

- **Leaky faces or voices.** Biologically, you can't tell what you convey in your face, tone of voice, and body language. Feedback from others can provide you with valuable information you can't see yourself.
- **Incorrect Theory of Mind:** In addition, you may make incorrect guesses about what others are thinking. Feedback can give you insight into whether your attempts at inferring the intent of others is accurate. Perhaps you are not good at reading body language or your emotional intelligence is not as strong as you thought.
- **How do your emotions impact a situation?** You may discount what your emotions bring to a situation, while others count them as more significant than you know. For example, you may not realize you are coming across as angry.
- **Attribution errors:** You may attribute failure to the situation, while others attribute it to your character, lack of skill, or lack of effort.
- **Impact-intent gap:** You judge yourself by your intentions, while others judge you by your impact on them. It helps to separate intentions from impact when feedback is discussed: "I've been trying to do X, but it sounds like my impact has been Y. Let's discuss that."

2. Reject feedback. It's possible after fully understanding the feedback, that you still disagree with it. Stone and Heen (2015) suggest that it's appropriate to be transparent and honest about your reactions, and tell the feedback giver that you don't plan to follow their suggestions. They recommend being firm and appreciative of the feedback. They recommend politely naming your reactions to keep yourself in the conversation and keep the lines of communication

open. "Wow that's hard to hear" or "Wow, that's not how I see myself." And then, "Please, tell me more."

3. Get feedback on your reactions. If you aren't sure your reactions were appropriate, asking others for feedback can be a good tool to help you calibrate. Stone and Heen (2015) recommend the following:

- Ask others to be "honest mirrors" to help you see yourself in the moment. For example, you could ask your manager for feedback about your reactions, or if you receive feedback in a public setting, ask others about your reactions.
- Ask a trusted co-worker, "How am I getting in my own way?" Get advice about how you might be contributing to the situation.

4. Look for messages in your reactions. There may be information for you in the situations or types of feedback to which you react. Stone and Heen (2015) suggest the following:

- Use your reaction as a blind-spot alert. If you are getting emotional, look at why you are being reactive.
- Look for consistency in feedback. Are you and the giver talking about the same behavior but interpreting it differently (I think I'm shy/ people describe me as aloof). Have you heard this before? When and where?

5. Second score. If you are committed to working to improving your reactions to feedback, you can give yourself a "second score," or, rate yourself on how you handled the first

score that's implicit in the feedback that you receive. How did you react to your evaluation and what did you do because of what you heard? For example, "I'd give myself a B- for how I reacted in that conversation." Stone and Heen (2015) recommend setting up a second score scorecard in your head, and monitoring for improvement on your second score over time. If you are unsatisfied with your score, think about what you can do now to make the situation better, or follow-up with the feedback giver to make sure they know that you did hear them, and plan to act.

A related idea is to be explicit about this method with the feedback giver, perhaps after you have calmed down. Explain that you would like to reduce your reactivity or be more open to feedback, and explain what score you gave yourself. Do they agree?

Self-Compassion

Self-Compassion Background

Self-compassion involves nonjudgmental feelings of kindness and caring toward oneself, especially in the face of perceived inadequacies or failures (Neff, 2003). Self-compassion may be a key component in moderating one's reactions to negative feedback. Neff (2003) describes three components of self-compassion:

- **Self-kindness.** Being kind to oneself after failure instead of being self-critical. People who demonstrate self-compassion look at their actions non-judgmentally and are self-supportive. Self-talk that demonstrates self-kindness might sound like, "Missing that deadline isn't that big a deal. Yes, I should have started earlier, but it's the first deadline I missed."
- **Common humanity.** Viewing one's difficulties or failures as connecting to the larger human experience, instead of experiencing these difficulties as isolating. People who are more self-compassionate recognize that all people are flawed, and draw connections to other people when they have experienced a failure. Self-talk that reflects a sense of common humanity might sound like, "Yes, I missed that deadline, but in the grand scheme of things no one was harmed, and other people have lived through missed deadlines."
- **Mindfulness.** Keeping painful thoughts in "balanced awareness rather than over-identifying with them" (Neff, 2003, p. 85). People who practice self-compassion are honest with themselves about feeling difficult emotions, instead of trying to push them away. Self-talk reflecting mindfulness might sound like, "I'm feeling bad about

missing that deadline. I want to take responsibility for that, and I'm not going to be overwhelmed by it."

Research suggests that self-compassion is a more effective buffer against negative events than self-esteem (Leary et al., 2007). Self-compassionate people tend to have high self-esteem; researchers speculate this is because they are likely to react kindly, rather than critically, towards their own actions, which promotes positive feelings (Leary et al., 2007). People who are low in self-esteem, but high in self-compassion react less negatively to negative events; in contrast people who are high in self-esteem, but low in self-compassion, may still react defensively to negative feedback. High self-compassion is also associated with better coping skills and Growth Mindset. Self-compassionate people seemed to have more perspective on their problems and are less likely to feel isolated by them. They also experience less anxiety when thinking about their problems (Neff, 2011).

How Does Self-Compassion Impact Receipt of Feedback?

Researchers speculate three reasons for why self-compassion may buffer the impact of negative events, like critical feedback (Leary et al., 2007).

1. There is some evidence that people who are high in self-compassion view events more accurately; their less biased view of events may contribute to them more accurately interpreting the implications of an event, which means less catastrophic thinking (Leary et al., 2007). Less catastrophizing would reduce their overall reactivity to negative events.

2. People high in self-compassion are less emotionally reactive, and their self-esteem is more stable (Leary et al., 2007). Less reactivity is likely to enable them to stay engaged in conversations about performance.
3. People high in self-compassion can keep negative events in perspective (Leary et al., 2007). Being able to frame negative feedback in a more positive light may raise positive affect, and lead to broadening-and-building of reactions to respond to critical feedback.

Self-compassion seems to provide a buffer against self-doubting rumination. Especially intriguing is the idea that people with higher self-compassion are better able to accept their contribution to a problem (which means they may be more willing to accept feedback), while leaving them in an emotional state that makes them more capable of coping and taking next steps. As Neff (2011) describes, self-compassion provides the benefits of self-esteem by protecting against harsh self-criticism, without the drawbacks of needing to see oneself as better than others.

It is possible to increase self-compassion (Neff, 2011). The challenge is that many of the self-compassion exercises are unlikely to be received well in most workplaces (e.g., hugging practice, writing an unconditionally loving letter) or would be best taught by a skillful meditation teacher. What follows are some of the self-compassion exercises recommended by Neff (2011) in her book and on her website that are likely to be accepted in a workplace.

Environmental Self-Compassion Interventions

Not applicable.

Personal Self-Compassion Interventions

All three elements of self-compassion (self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness) can be applied to increase an individual's overall level of self-compassion. While self-compassion from a situational perspective (prepare, engage, process) is also helpful, increasing your overall level of self-compassion may be one of the most important aspects of changing your relationship to negative feedback. In the context of feedback conversations, you will be better able to hear, accept, and respond if you can focus on the feedback and not get distracted by off-task thoughts, like rumination or self-recrimination (Mikulincer, 1989). In addition, a known problem in feedback conversations is that an individual's biased view of their performance makes them incorrectly reject feedback (Cannon & Witherspoon, 2005). People with higher levels of self-compassion are less likely to ruminate, and more able to accurately assess situations. The following interventions can help bolster these abilities.

Interventions to Increase Self-Kindness

Neff (2011) says the first step toward greater self-compassion is understanding how you currently talk to yourself, with the aim of stopping harsh self-judgment and self-talk. She calls this self-kindness (Neff, 2011). This also relates to viewing yourself more accurately, which is another fundamental element of self-compassion. Noticing your habitual inner dialog provides insights which can help you understand your skewed perceptions of yourself. She argues that over-valuing the personal qualities we like about ourselves, while attempting to ignore personal qualities we don't like, result equally in distorting our perceptions of reality. Being overly kind or overly harsh to ourselves both create disadvantages to us having a true grasp on what's happening in the world.

The following exercises give an opportunity to notice and reflect on habitual patterns of self-talk, and evaluate our current level of self-compassion.

- 1. Self-compassion survey.** Use this tool to evaluate how self-compassionate you are now. (See Appendix H, item 1, for a link to this survey.)

- 2. Self-compassion workbook.** The Australian Department of Mental Health has an excellent mental health web site that includes a workbook to build self-compassion. (See Appendix H, item 2, for a link to this resource.)

- 3. How would you treat a friend?** (Neff, 2011) Use this exercise to contrast how you speak to yourself compared to how you speak to others.
 - Think about a time when a close friend felt bad about herself and was struggling in some way. Write down what you said to that friend, paying attention to the tone and words you use.
 - Now, think about time when you felt bad about yourself, or were struggling with some negative emotion. Write down what you typically say to yourself, and note the tone and words that you use.
 - Is there a difference between how you talk to others and how you talk to yourself? If so, ask yourself why? What factors come into play that lead you to treat yourself and others so differently?
 - Write down how you think things might be different if you responded to yourself in the same way you usually respond to a close friend.

3. Seeing yourself as you are. Neff (2011) argues that seeing ourselves inaccurately creates separation from other people. Accepting both the good and bad aspects of ourselves gives us a clearer perspective our ourselves, and helps us connect better to others. This exercise is intended to help you inventory personal traits that you value or would rather ignore, as a step toward embracing all those traits. List the following:

- Five culturally valued traits for which you are above average
- Five culturally valued traits for which you are average
- Five culturally valued traits for which you are below average
- After writing these lists, ask if you can accept all these facets of yourself. What would it take to be more accepting and compassionate?

4. Non-violent communication. This is a method for retraining your self-talk with the aim of expressing more empathy for yourself (Neff, 2011, p. 51). At points of stress, or when you are about to launch into self-criticism, pause and ask yourself these questions:

- What am I noticing?
- What am I feeling?
- What do I need right now?
- Do I have a request of myself or someone else right now?

5. Changing critical self-talk. Neff (2011) recommends that the following exercise be done over the course of several weeks. The intent is to change how you talk to yourself, by observing your current inner dialog and practicing altering it. Although Neff doesn't make this

connection, this self-talk exercise is like many of the exercises aimed at building resilience (Reivich & Shatté, 2002); the intent here is to notice and assertively dispute incorrect self-talk, and then substitute more accurate responses. This exercise can be done in writing, aloud, or done silently (Neff, 2011, p. 53).

- Notice when you are being self-critical. Try to notice exactly what you say. Exactly what words do you say? Do you repeat the same phrases to yourself? What is your tone of voice? Does your voice remind you of anyone in your past who was critical of you?
- Make an active effort to soften your self-critical voice, but try to do this compassionately, not judgmentally (e.g., don't say "you are such a bitch" to your inner critic). Say something like, "thank you for trying to point out ways I could improve, and could you please stop being so critical, it's causing me pain."
- Reframe the observations made by your inner critic in a kind, friendly, positive way. If you are having trouble thinking what words to say, imagine what a compassionate friend would say in this situation. Consider what qualities you would like to encourage in yourself.

6. Moving past regret. Regrets about past decisions can weigh us down and interfere with our ability to offer ourselves kindness. Journaling about past regret with a loving-kindness approach can help release some of those stuck feelings. (See Appendix H, item 3, for this exercise.)

Interventions to Increase Common Humanity

The second element of self-compassion is recognizing the common human experience, which Neff (2011) calls common humanity. The word compassion means to "suffer with," which emphasizes the commonality of human struggle. Neff (2011) claims that compassion comes in part from recognition that all people are imperfect; self-compassion is an acknowledgment that you, like everyone else, have faults. Connecting your feelings about falling short to the common experience of everyone else making mistakes will help you feel less isolated. Here is where self-compassion and Self-Determination Theory align. According to Self-Determination Theory, relatedness is a basic psychological need (Ryan & Deci, 2008). Recognizing the commonality of suffering, and allowing your faults to connect you to other people instead of isolating you, helps you fulfill that basic psychological need.

1. Letting go of our self-definitions by identifying our interconnectedness. This exercise is intended to reframe our traits as situational, creating an opportunity to connect to others who might react the same way in the same situation (Neff, 2011, p.75). Think about a trait for which you judge yourself (e.g., "I'm shy" or "I'm lazy"). Ask yourself the following questions:

- How often do you display this trait? Most of the time, sometimes, only occasionally?
Who are you when you don't display this trait? Are you still you?
- Are there particular circumstances that seem to elicit the trait, and other times when the trait doesn't manifest? Does this trait really define you if it only appears sometimes?

- What are the causes and conditions that led you to having this trait in the first place? If these forces were "outside" of you, is it accurate to think of this trait as reflecting the inner you?
- Did you choose to have this trait, do you have much choice about whether you have this trait? If not, why judge yourself for it?
- Can you reframe your self-description so that you are not defining yourself in terms of the trait? Can you try restating it as "sometimes, in certain circumstances I feel shy?" How does it feel to identify less strongly with that trait?

Interventions to Increase Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the third element of self-compassion (Neff, 2011). The intent of practicing mindfulness is to facilitate clear perspective and nonjudgmental acceptance of whatever is happening in the present moment. Neff (2011) suggests that seeing reality clearly provides the opportunity to respond to circumstances more effectively, and notes that there is evidence that people who are more self-compassionate can more accurately interpret what is happening around them.

The following exercises are a mix of meditation and writing exercises intended to cultivate mindfulness.

1. Noting practice. Neff (2011) recommends a noting practice to help you become more conscious of what you are experiencing. In a noting practice meditation, you simply pay attention to the thoughts that are passing through your head. (See Appendix H, item 4, for a link to a guided meditation for doing a noting practice.)

2. Self-compassion journal. Neff (2011) suggests keeping a self-compassion journal for one week to help you become aware of your emotions. The intent of this exercise is to practice self-compassion in a way that also helps change the way that you think. Each day, review the day's events, and write down anything that you felt bad about, anything you judged yourself for, or any difficult experiences that caused you pain (e.g., a co-worker corrected your grammar in a meeting and you responded with sarcasm). For each event, use mindfulness, a sense of common humanity, and self-kindness to process the event in a self-compassionate way. For example:

- **Mindfulness.** Bring to awareness the painful emotions that arose due to your self-judgment or difficult circumstances. Write about the emotions that you felt. As you write, try to be accepting and nonjudgmental about your experience.
- **Common humanity.** Write down the ways in which your experience was connected to the larger human experience. This might include acknowledging that being human means being imperfect, and that lots of people have had these sorts of painful experiences. You may also want to reflect on the causes and conditions underlying the painful event, which can help give you more perspective on your assessment of what happened.
- **Self-kindness.** Write yourself some kind, understanding words of comfort about the situation, adopting a gentle, reassuring tone.

3. Self-compassion meditation. Developing a meditation practice is an important component to building self-compassion (Neff, 2011). (See Appendix H, item 5, for a list of self-compassion meditation resources.)

Prepare Self-Compassion Interventions

Neff (2011) suggests that self-criticism works to change or motivate behavior through fear; because it feels so unpleasant to criticize ourselves, we are motivated to perform to avoid harsh self-judgment. However, Neff (2011) notes that anxiety can undermine performance, distracting people from their task. This is consistent with Cognitive Interference Hypothesis that argues that anxiety drives attention to off-task thoughts and causes performance to degrade (Mikulincer, 1989). Neff (2011) recommends the use of self-compassion as a motivator instead of fear. Self-compassion increases feelings of confidence and security. Neff (2011) mentions that self-compassion stimulates production of oxytocin; this is consistent with the tend-and-befriend aspect of the Stress-is-Enhancing theory (see Stress-is-Enhancing section below) which shows that helpful hormones like oxytocin are stimulated when the individual is in a heightened state of arousal as part of caretaking activities (McGonigal, 2016). Perhaps self-compassion works along the same physiological pathways as tend-and-befriend arousal, suggesting that when being self-compassionate we are tending-and-befriending ourselves.

Neff (2011) suggests the following exercises motivate performance through self-compassion. In the context of feedback, these could be practiced before a planned feedback conversation to help prepare you in ways that may make the conversation more productive.

1. Identify what you really want. While based on Neff (2011, p. 166), this exercise has been modified to be more specific to feedback conversations. Prior to a feedback conversation, consider the following:

- Think about ways that you use self-criticism as a motivator. Is there any personal trait that you criticize yourself for because you think being hard on yourself will help

you change? For example, do you criticize yourself for having a knee-jerk reaction to rejecting feedback? If so, first try to notice the emotional pain that self-criticism of that behavior causes, and give yourself compassion for the experience of that self-judgment.

- Can you think of a kinder, more caring way to motivate yourself to make a change if needed? What language would a wise and nurturing friend or coach use to gently point out how your behavior is unproductive? What would they encourage you to do instead? What is the most supportive message you can think of that's in line with your underlying wish?
- Once you are in the feedback conversation, every time you catch yourself being judgmental about your unwanted behavior, first notice the pain of your self-judgment and offer yourself some compassion. Then try to reframe your self-talk so that it is more encouraging and supportive.
- After the conversation, reflect. Did the compassionate approach to yourself help you modify your behavior?

Engage Self-Compassion Interventions

Neff (2011) recommends practicing self-compassion during a difficult situation, as a way to stay engaged. Directing self-compassion towards oneself during difficulties can produce positive emotion and boost coping skills. She offers the following idea as a practice to use during a challenging situation, like receiving negative feedback:

1. Self-Compassion mantra. A mantra is just a set of memorized phrases that you repeat silently whenever you want to give yourself a reminder to feel something, like compassion. Although derived from Buddhism, mantras don't need to be religious, though you may embrace the spiritual tone of some of these suggested phrases if you find that beneficial. Neff (2011) offers suggestions from her own experience, but suggests that the individual develop any four phrases that seem comfortable and memorable. Once you have memorized them, you can repeat them silently when during a difficult experience as a way to remind yourself to be more self-compassionate. Her mantra:

1. This is a moment of suffering.
2. Suffering is part of life.
3. May I be kind to myself in this moment.
4. May I give myself the compassion I need.

She offers these alternatives, and again, recommends that you develop similar phrases that feel natural and appropriate to you.

1. I'm having a really hard time right now. Or, It's painful for me to feel this now.
2. Everyone feels this way sometimes. Or, This is part of being human.
3. May I hold my pain with tenderness. Or, May I be gentle and understanding with myself.
4. I am worthy of receiving self-compassion. Or, I will try to be as compassionate as possible.

Process Self-Compassion Interventions

Neff (2011) recommends self-compassion as a tool to help process difficult emotions. She notes that one of the most consistent research findings is that people who are more self-compassionate are less anxious and depressed. Depression is often related to ruminating over negative thoughts. People who are more self-compassionate are less likely to ruminate. She notes that rumination is often related to feelings of fear, shame, and inadequacy; self-compassion works to counter these insecurities, which can help break ruminative patterns.

Neff (2011) explains that the goal of self-compassion with respect to negative emotions is not to push them away. She cites evidence that it is impossible to consciously suppress unwanted emotions; attempting to do this actually strengthens them. People with higher levels of self-compassion are less likely to suppress unwanted thoughts; instead they are more likely to experience and accept difficult feelings. She suggests that self-compassion provides a feeling of safety that allows the individual to bring these feelings up, because they can trust that they will hold the feelings in compassionate awareness. She also suggests that by holding negative feelings with compassion, new positive emotions are generated and experienced along with the painful ones.

Here are several self-compassion interventions that can be helpful in processing emotions:

1. Dealing with difficult emotions meditation. Neff (2011) offers a guided meditation to process difficult emotions. This meditation focuses on recognizing and then working through the emotion, using loving-kindness meditation. Loving-kindness is a traditional Buddhist meditation in which phrases that evoke benevolent feeling are directed towards yourself and then

to others (Neff, 2011). Neff (2011) explains that loving-kindness meditation works by having you set an intention to experience more well-being for yourself and others; the intention begins to change your thoughts, and may lead to changed behaviors that are congruent with these thoughts. You could consider doing this meditation after a difficult feedback conversation to regain perspective on your emotions. (See Appendix H, item 6, for link to a recorded version of this meditation.)

2. Compassion after a difficult conversation. This is a variation on what Neff (2011) suggests as an exercise for parents. After a difficult event, like a feedback conversation that didn't go well, think about the mistakes that you made during the event.

- Is there anything you wish you had or hadn't done or said? Try to be as honest with yourself as possible, and know that it's okay to be human and imperfect. Try to be as kind and understanding toward yourself as you would be to a good friend in a similar situation. What would a good friend say to you about your behavior?
- What emotions are you experiencing right now? Can you offer yourself some compassion for your emotional pain? What do you need right now to ease your stress?
- Can you think about how common your experience is? Acknowledge that being human means being imperfect. What were some of the conditions that contributed to the conversation not going as well as you might have liked?
- If you are feeling negative emotions toward the other person in the conversation, it may help to ponder your interconnectedness and their common humanity. When considering their actions or words, can you identify any precipitating factors for

- them? What emotions may they have been feeling that triggered their behaviors? Do you know of any stresses that may be affecting them or their responses? Once you have a better sense of what the conditions may have lead this person to act the way they did, check to see if you can let go of any of your negative feelings toward them. Could you think about forgiving this person? Note... if this person's actions were abusive, forgiving them doesn't mean that you should not protect yourself from them, but dropping your anger reduces the impact of that negative emotion on yourself.
- Once you have processed the event, think about whether there is anything you can do to help repair the situation. What concrete actions can you take?

3. Transforming negativity. The next time you are feeling negative emotions, try to generate some positive emotions to go along with them. Neff (2011) suggest reciting the following phrases when you are feeling negative emotions. The intent is to validate and accept your negative feelings, while also focusing on a desire to be happier:

- It's hard to feel (fill in the blank) right now.
- Feeling (blank) is part of the human experience.
- What can I do to make myself happier in this moment? (Neff, 2011, p.249)

4. Finding the silver lining (modified, from Neff, 2011). Putting current difficulties in perspective can give you a more accurate perception about what's happening. Also, taking the opportunity to see if there is anything positive, in terms of learning from the situation, can help bring a positive light to negative experiences.

- Think of one or two of the biggest challenges you've faced in your life so far. Is there anything good that came out of those experiences? Did you grow as a person, learn something important, find more meaning in your life? If you could, would you go back in time and change what happened, if it meant that you wouldn't be the person you are now because of it?
- Think about a challenge that you're facing right now, for example, dealing with the emotions from a negative feedback conversation or working through the consequences of a negative feedback conversation. Is there any way to see your problem in a different light? Is there anything positive that may come out of your present circumstances? Any learning opportunities, career possibilities, new relationships, a reorganization of your priorities?
- If you are having trouble seeing anything positive about your current situation, it's probably a sign that you need more self-compassion. Try looking at the problem from a kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness approach. Offer yourself words of support. How does this situation connect you with other people? Take a few deep breaths and accept that this situation is happening, even if you don't like it.
- Now look at it again. Is there an opportunity to learn from this experience?

Stress-is-Enhancing Mindset

Stress-is-Enhancing Background

While stress was formerly considered an experience to absolutely avoid, recent research has led to a more nuanced understanding of what happens to the body under stress, which leads to the conclusion that it's healthier to adopt a "stress-is-enhancing" mindset (McGonigal, 2016).

There are different kinds of stress responses (not just fight or flight); there is no one uniform physical stress response that is triggered by all stressful situations (McGonigal, 2016). While the physical sensations of stress are similar in all cases, what happens in the body is very different. Specific cardiovascular changes, ratios of hormones released, and other aspects of a stress response vary, and each response can create different psychological responses.

Understanding these different responses can change how you think about stress, which in turn can change the way your body responds to stressful situations. Here's a summary of the three different stress responses:

1. **Threat response.** This response occurs when the body perceives a physically threatening danger. This is the closest response to what is known as fight or flight. In this response, your body prepares for the need for quick action, or the possibility of physical harm by increasing heart rate, and deepening breathing, while also heightening your senses. Unlike the next two responses, the body does not produce hormones that counteract the experience of stress or that support learning from the experience (McGonigal, 2016).
2. **Challenge response.** This response occurs when there is a stressful, but less threatening situation. Your heart rate still rises, your adrenaline spikes, your muscles and brain get more activated, but you feel focused, not fearful. You release a different

ratio of stress hormones, including higher levels of DHEA, which helps your heart recover from stress, and helps your brain encode the experience into memory so that you can learn from it. This state increases your physical and mental resources, provides increased confidence and concentration, and supports peak performance. You feel energized, and have more resources available to devote to the task, so you can perform better (McGonigal, 2016).

3. **Tend-and-befriend response.** This response occurs when others need help or appear threatened. Stress can motivate you to connect with others, driven by the hormone oxytocin, a hormone associated with building social bonds. The tend-and-befriend response dampens your fear response, suppressing the instinct to freeze or flee, motivates care-giving, enhances empathy and intuition, and strengthens social relationships (McGonigal, 2016).

While the physical changes that result from a threat response can have long-term negative health consequences, the changes from challenge or tend-and-befriend include protective changes that allow the body to heal, and also to learn from the experience. Your mindset about stress influences which form of stress you experience. A mindset is a belief about the world that influences how you think, feel, and act. Mindsets are self-reinforcing. Your mindset affects how you act, and your interpretation of the resulting experience; because you have often chosen actions that will reinforce that belief, the belief is strengthened and becomes your habitual mental approach. However, mindsets can be changed (McGonigal, 2016).

Multiple studies have shown that mindsets can be influenced by single brief interventions, and that the resulting mindset change can improve your health, happiness, and success for years into the future. One of the most widely cited mindset intervention studies

illustrates this phenomenon. This study was an attempt to influence academic and health-related outcomes for minority college freshmen (Walton & Cohen, 2011). Participants were given information in which senior students at the school described their initial feelings of alienation, loneliness, and feelings of not fitting in, which resolved over the course of their college careers; the intent was to convey to the participants that feelings about belonging are challenging, though temporary. Participants were asked to write an essay about how their own experiences reflected a similar pattern; they were then given the opportunity to read this essay on a video that would be shown to future students. Student who participated in this condition showed higher GPAs three years later, even though many of them had no memory of participating in the study.

Another mindset-change study examined the impact of how people thought about stress on their physiology and performance. Subjects were asked to participate in a mock interview. In the experimental condition, subjects watched a brief video that explained that stress could be viewed as helpful. These subjects performed better on the interviews, felt better about how they had done, and their bodies released hormones consistent with a challenge response instead of a threat response. Other studies of stress responses have shown similar results (McGonigal, 2016).

Researchers suggest there is an important distinction between people who have a "stress-is-enhancing" mindset versus "stress-as-debilitating" (Crum, Salovey, & Achor, 2013); people who perceive that stress has enhancing benefits respond differently, and beneficially, to challenging situations. People who view stress as helpful are more likely to cope with stress proactively, by engaging in behaviors like accepting the reality of a stressful event, developing plans for dealing with the source of stress, or taking steps to overcome, remove or change the source of stress. They feel better after the event, and are more likely to try to make the best of the situation by viewing it more positively or as an opportunity to grow. Further, they perform

better on objective measures after stressful events, compared to people who reacted to the event as a threat. This effect does not appear to be a placebo. Stress-is-enhancing training often includes a specific explanation that the goal is to get participants to adopt a stress-is-enhancing mindset, and the intervention is still effective; if the result were a placebo effect, the result should be impacted by this instruction (McGonigal, 2016).

There are other findings that support the idea that stress is beneficial. Studies show that people who have experienced more stressful events are less likely to experience depression and anxiety later in life (McGonigal, 2016); this is consistent with findings that people exposed to stressful situations early in life may be more resilient later (Reivich & Shatté, 2002). People who report more stressful events also identify their lives as more meaningful; because meaning is an aspect of PERMA, stressful events, properly viewed and processed, may actually contribute to well-being (Seligman, 2012).

How Does "Stress-is-Enhancing Mindset" Impact Receipt of Feedback?

If you view negative feedback conversations as stressful events, then adopting a stress-is-enhancing mindset is likely to be beneficial. People who respond more adaptively to stress think and talk about it differently (McGonigal, 2016). They are less likely to turn hostile or self-defensive in the face of stressful events, and are more likely to take care of themselves, physically, emotionally, and spiritually after the event. They respond as if stress is an expected part of life, and view stressful events as an opportunity to grow. People with a stress-is-enhancing mindset were more likely to acknowledge their stress, and less likely to review every challenge as a catastrophe. Further, people who held these attitudes were more likely to act and to connect with others during stress; Self-Determination Theory counts relatedness as a basic

psychological need (Deci & Ryan, 2008). When an individual can view stress positively, or harness its energy to build social bonds, it has the potential to be life enhancing.

Environmental Stress-is-Enhancing Interventions

McGonigal describes how the way stress is discussed and described in an environment influences the mindsets of people in the environment. There may be some opportunities for an individual to influence their environment to help support healthier messages about stress. If others can be persuaded to adopt the same mindset, the way a set of co-workers might talk about stress could be transformed, which would likely be beneficial to all of them. Here are several interventions that might influence how people in a shared environment, like a workplace, talk about stress.

1. Stress-is-Enhancing video. A set of co-workers could watch the TED video that explains these concepts and then discuss them together. They could then commit to trying to adopt and support each other in using stress-is-enhancing language, e.g., not "I'm so stressed about this presentation," but, "I can feel I'm really excited to do my best at this presentation." (See Appendix I, item 1, for a link and suggestions.)

2. Upside of Stress bookgroup (McGonigal, 2016). In workplaces where employees hold book discussions, they could read and discuss the *Upside of Stress*. They could brainstorm ways to support each other in applying the ideas in their workplace.

Personal Stress-is-Enhancing Interventions

McGonigal (2016) recommends working consciously to adopt a stress-is-enhancing mindset. She offers several intervention suggestions.

1. Adopt a stress-is-enhancing mindset. McGonigal (2016) offers the following basic process for adopting a stress-is-enhancing mindset:

- Acknowledge the stress. Notice it. How and where do you feel it in your body?
- Welcome the stress by recognizing that it is a response to something you care about. Can you identify the positive motivation behind the stress? What is at stake, and why does it matter to you?
- Consciously harness the energy that stress give you, instead of wasting energy trying to reduce the stress. What can you do right now that reflects your goals and values and helps you reach the goal that is motivating the stress?

2. Learn about the stress response. Review information about the stress response so that you have a better idea of what your body is doing (McGonigal, 2016). (See Appendix I, item 1, for resources.)

3. Rethink your stress response. McGonigal (2016) offers a brief mindset intervention to help you change the way you think about stress. Think of a recent stressful event, for example, your last performance review. How did your body feel during that event? Review information about the stress response. (See Appendix I, item 2.) Could you think about your body's reactions as helpful? Spend a few minutes writing about how your body felt, and any

insights that you have after reminding yourself about the stress response. (See complete description of this exercise in Appendix I, item 3.)

4. Positive stress mindset checklist. Brafford (2017) summarizes the process of adopting a stress-is-enhancing mindset in a convenient checklist. Reviewing this checklist can help remind you about the benefits of modifying your perceptions of stress. (See Appendix I, item 4, for checklist.)

Prepare Stress-is-Enhancing Interventions

McGonigal (2016) suggests that interventions can affect your habitual reactions to stress. By applying stress-is-enhancing interventions prior to entering a stressful feedback conversation, you might be able to perceive the interaction as a challenge rather than a threat, which is likely to feel better, and allow you to respond more appropriately in the interaction. McGonigal (2016) described one study in which subjects were instructed that when they felt anxious or stressed to think about how their stress response could be helping them. Those study participants responded with a challenge response, showing fewer signs of anxiety, performing better, and rebounding from the stress better, such that their performance on their next task was not adversely impacted by the stress on the first task.

She offers the following suggested interventions to use before stressful events.

1. Write about your values. McGonigal (2016) cites research that writing about values changes how you relate to stressful events and your perception of your ability to cope with them. When you write about your values you feel more connected to them, which makes you are more

likely to believe that you can improve a situation through your efforts, and more likely to take positive action and less likely to try to avoid the situation. Writing about values helps you develop a more optimistic mindset: specifically, it makes you are more likely to think of adversity as temporary, and less likely to think that the adversity reflects on your character.

Review a list of values and choose three that are important to you, then spend 10 minutes writing about one or more of these. You can choose to repeat this before a stressful event. (See Appendix I, item 5, for a complete for a list of suggested values for this exercise.)

2. Turn nerves into excitement. McGonigal (2016) suggests that you can begin to think of your own stress response as a resource. She cites several studies in which participants, who actively looked at their stress response as beneficial, performed better on subsequent tasks. Before a stressful event, when you are starting to feel nervous, tell yourself that those physical reactions are signs that your body is preparing you to meet the challenge. Try talking about your physical experience as "excitement" instead of "nerves." Recognize these signs of stress as signs that your body is trying to give you more energy to meet a challenge.

3. Anticipate stressful events as learning opportunities. McGonigal (2016) recommends actively thinking about upcoming stressful events as learning opportunities. Labeling them this way helps shift you to a Growth Mindset, and shifts your stress response to a challenge response, which will facilitate learning from the event.

Engage Stress-is-Enhancing Interventions

McGonigal (2016) suggests that during adversity you can view anxiety as draining and depleting, or energizing and motivating; moreover, she emphasizes that your perception of stress is a choice, and choosing to view anxiety as excitement makes a difference in how this feeling will affect your body and performance.

She offers one intervention for working with stress in the moment.

1. Turn threat to challenge. McGonigal (2016, p. 120) recommends that when you feel signs of stress (e.g., heart pounding, breath deepening, butterflies), you can recognize that this is your body's way to give you more energy to meet challenge. When you feel these sensations, remind yourself that the stress response gives you access to your strengths, and shows that your body recognizes that this is an important situation. Pause to remember why this situation is important to you. Once you have recognized the sensations of stress, don't try to minimize them or make them go away; instead, think about how you are going to use that energy, strength and drive to achieve your goals. Instead of taking a deep breath to calm down, take a deep breath to sense your energy. Then put the energy to use, and ask yourself, "What action can I take, or what choice can I make, that is consistent with my goals in this moment?" (See Appendix I, item 6, for a more complete description of this exercise.)

Process Stress-is-Enhancing Interventions

McGonigal (2016) recommends reflecting on past stressful events to harvest the lessons from them. Writing about past events, and reflecting on your values and actions, helps to move these lessons into memory, and has been shown to change mindset. Post-traumatic growth is the

experience of learning and developing new skills as the result of a traumatic experience.

McGonigal (2016) notes that post-traumatic distress is thought to be the engine of post-traumatic growth. When an individual looks at how they have responded to adversity they create the conditions for post-traumatic growth. McGonigal (2016) recommends acknowledging the pain of the event and also trying to see if there was any benefit that resulted. Studies about post-traumatic growth have shown that even when people struggle to identify benefits, the exercise can help them reduce their subsequent anxiety or depression about the event (McGonigal, 2016).

1. Harvest experience from a set-back (Based on McGonigal, 2016). This exercise could be used after a feedback conversation, especially if the feedback was telling you that you had failed in some way. Write about the conversation. Write about what happened as objectively as possible. Why was this experience important to you? What attitudes, strengths or beliefs can you draw on to help you deal with this? Are there other people who can help you?

2. Turn adversity into a resource. (See Appendix I, item 7, for a more complete description of this exercise.) McGonigal (2016) says that adopting a Growth Mindset can help you cope with difficult situations more effectively. This exercise is intended to help you appreciate how you have grown through adversity, which can help you cultivate a Growth Mindset (McGonigal, 2016, p. 195). Think about a past stressful experience through which you persevered or from which you learned something. Think about what the experience taught you about your strengths and how to cope with stress. Then, set a timer for 15 minutes and write about any or all the following questions:

- What did you do to help yourself get through the experience? What personal resources do you draw on, and what strengths did you use? Did you look for information, advice, or other support?
- What did this experience teach you about how to deal with adversity?
- How did this experience make you stronger?
- Now think about a current situation with which you are struggling (for example, a recent negative feedback conversation):
 - Which of these strengths and resources can you draw on in this situation?
 - Are there any coping skills or strengths you want to develop? If so, how could you begin to do so using this situation as an opportunity to grow?

3. Tell your own story of growth and resilience. McGonigal (2016, p. 216)

recommends that one of the best ways to notice, value, and reflect on your growth from a difficult experience is to write about it as if you were a journalist recounting the story as a restorative narrative. Restorative narratives tell both the traumatic aspects of the story, as well as the showing subsequent growth and healing. She suggests choosing an experience that you could view as both stressful and a source of growth or meaning, for example, perhaps you experienced a difficult feedback conversation, and managed to learn something from it because of your efforts. Write a restorative narrative about that experience as if you were an outside observer. What happened? What were the challenges that you faced? What was the turning point in the story, a moment when you were able to re-engage or find meaning? What evidence would a journalist use to show your strength and resilience? What do you do now that demonstrates what you have learned or how you have grown? What would friends or family say

about how you changed as a result? Are there artifacts (e.g., photos, documents) that provide evidence of your growth or resilience? (See Appendix I, item 8, for a more complete description of this exercise.)

4. Find an upside in adversity. McGonigal (2016) suggests spending some time thinking about whether there are any benefits from any current stressful experiences that you are dealing with. Are there any ways that your life is better? Have you changed in any positive ways because of trying to cope with the trauma? (See Appendix I, item 9, for more details on this exercise, including a list of potential benefits on which you can reflect.)

Meaning

Meaning Background

Meaning plays a role in how an individual hears, accepts, and addresses critical feedback. Meaning can help provide more nuance to task-specific suggestions. For example, employees are more likely to address feedback that explains the why behind the information (Loftus & Tanlu, 2017). Comments like, "You should clean up the typos in your PowerPoint because that will make you look more professional" can help connect a criticism to a specific reason for improvement. Talking about causality can also be an opportunity to put the feedback in a larger, more meaningful context, "... fix your typos, because when you look more professional, you are a more effective representative of our product; people who use our product are figuring out how to end global warming." Connecting daily activities to a larger purpose clarifies priorities, and builds motivation for those activities. Researchers have found that individuals who see meaning in their work, or view their daily activities as a calling, are more motivated, experience less stress and more personal fulfillment, show greater job satisfaction and engagement, and develop greater self-esteem (Berg, Dutton, Wrzesniewski, 2011). These are conditions that are also associated with being more receptive to critical feedback (Kernis et al., 1989).

Martela and Steger (2016) theorize three ways of thinking about meaning in life: coherence, purpose, and significance. Coherence is the ability to look at the events of one's life and find a connection or patterns that enable you to create a narrative of your experience. Purpose refers to having a direction and life goals that help organize action and manage behavior to help pursue those goals. Significance relates to the idea that your actions have value or worth, or that you and your work matters. They offer evidence that finding meaning on these dimensions is related to better life outcomes (Martela & Steger, 2016).

Meaning is a dimension of PERMA; there is evidence that meaning is associated with feelings of well-being (Seligman, 2012). Meaning is also connected to ideas from Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Self-Determination Theory claims that goals that align with deeply held values feel autonomously chosen; these goals will be naturally and intrinsically motivating, as we are drawn to activities that help satisfy our need for autonomy.

Meaning also plays a role in sustaining grit. Duckworth (2016) defines grit as passion and perseverance towards a goal; gritty individuals pursue goals with a determination that helps them to overcome obstacles. Duckworth (2016) says that grit is sustained by purpose and a feeling that your activities matter; gritty people connect their activities to the larger world to develop this sense of purpose. Gritty people demonstrate resilience and a learning mindset, both qualities that will make them more receptive to negative feedback (Zingoni & Byron, 2017).

Prilletensky (2016) argues that feelings of meaning and mattering are fundamental to well-being. He defines well-being as devotion to a worthy cause, like love, compassion, faith, peace or the environment, and involves investing in activities that align with goals and values (Prilletensky, p. 11). Mattering is the sense that our contributions are valued, which requires external validation. To find meaning and mattering, he argues for the need to make your environment match your needs, values and goals, through factors like how you spend your time, where you work, what you do. His model of well-being also considers environmental factors that may impact the individual but which they can't control (e.g., social and economic factors); he captures these elements in a model he calls I-COPPE.

Hansen and Keltner (2012) have identified eight sources for meaningful work experiences: purpose/contributions beyond oneself; learning; accomplishment; status; power; belonging to a community; agency/mattering; autonomy. While status and power don't align with

research on contributors to well-being, the remaining items on that list are part of theories of well-being ranging from PERMA (Seligman, 2012), to Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2008), to I-COPPE (Prilleltensky, 2016).

How Can Meaning Impact Receipt of Feedback?

Feedback recipients who have a greater appreciation for the meaning of their work will likely be more motivated to want to improve their performance, because they will be able to connect their performance on those activities to their own intrinsic goals. Connecting to meaning can fuel grit, which can make an individual more receptive to feedback. Understanding the why behind negative feedback might help frame that feedback in a way that makes a recipient more open to hearing it (Christensen-Salem et al., 2018). Feeling that one's work matters and has meaning is likely to influence the way negative feedback is received.

Environmental Interventions for Meaning

Meaning is a characteristic of the environment, not of the individual: one's work has meaning in the context of one's job, one's organization, and the world. Unlike many of the other interventions, meaning interventions aren't about changing aspects of the individual, rather they are intended to help the individual find or create meaning in their work. Here are some ways of helping you connect your work to a larger purpose.

1. Connect your goals to organizational goals. If you work for an organization, a basic line of inquiry is how the work that you are being held accountable for connects to the larger

organizational purpose. Start by looking at your job description and goals. If you don't have goals, work with your manager to set them (see the Goal-Setting section for more information).

- Consider the following questions for yourself: How do I think my goals align with the corporate mission? What tasks am I doing that support the organization's goals? Is there any work that I'm doing that I can't align? Why am I doing it?
- Consider engaging with your manager on the following questions and see if their answers match yours: Can you help me see how my goals connect with the corporate mission? What work do you think is most important for me to be doing to support those goals? Can you help me understand why I should continue this work that is unaligned with that mission? What's something I can do as part of my job, that would help you meet your goals?
- Once you have these answers, consider the impact on your perspective. Does this help you see your work in a new way?

2. 7 ways to find meaning at work. David Brooks of the New York Times and Arthur Brooks of the American Enterprise Institute, were interviewed about meaning at work (Friend, 2016). They suggested answering the following questions to find meaning at work. Once you answer these questions, consider whether the answers have given you a different way to think about your work, or a new perspective on the meaning of your work.

- Why do you work? What's your answer to that question?
- How does your job match with your values? Consider making a list of your top five values, and comparing these to your organization's goals. Do those align?

- When you think about your day, what moments are the most meaningful? What about them feels meaningful?
- Who do you serve? Your family? Your community? Humanity? How does that satisfy your sense of purpose?
- Ask why you do what you do? Why do you do this particular job?
- What would you do if you weren't afraid? What kinds of pain are you willing to endure? What do you need to avoid?
- Where else do you derive meaning? What other aspects of your life provide meaning? Does work help or hinder your ability to support that purpose?

3. What's your source for meaning? Hansen and Keltner (2012) have identified eight sources for meaningful work experiences; six align with recognized models of well-being. Consider each of these on the list below. Are they important to you? If so, how are you satisfying this source of meaning?

- Purpose/contributions: Does your work impact others? Who? How?
- Learning: Are you expanding your skills? Learning new material? Growing in your role?
- Accomplishment: Are you feeling accomplishment? Are you recognized for your accomplishments?
- Belonging to a community: Do you feel part of a community with your work? Is that satisfying?

- **Agency/Mattering:** Does your work matter? Is your work valued by your organization? Can you see how your contributions make a difference to the organization?
- **Autonomy:** Do you have the autonomy to work the way that you would like?

4. Job crafting. Job crafting is the process of employees redefining their work in personally meaningful ways (Berg et al., 2011). Researchers studied people with jobs that might be considered menial, for example hospital custodians. They found that many of these people were able to imbue their jobs with meaning, and make their job a calling in ways that resulted in increased job satisfaction, motivation and performance (Berg et al., 2011). From this research a methodology emerged that anyone can apply to their work to build meaning. The exercise involves identifying your current tasks, and assessing where you spend your time and energy. Then you identify values, strengths and passions and relate those to your current tasks, looking for opportunities to change either the activities that you do, the people with whom you interact, or the way you think about the purpose of the work that you are doing. Using this framework gives you an opportunity to recognize that you may have more freedom in choosing how and what you do, or thinking about the meaning of what you do (Berg et al., 2011). Even if you cannot change the work itself, changing your perceptions of the meaning of that work can provide new motivation for old tasks. (See Appendix J, item 1, for a link to job crafting resources.)

5. Coherence, purpose, significance. Martela and Steger (2016) suggest these three dimensions are how we experience meaning. Can you apply these to your work? Consider spending some time writing the answers to the following questions:

- Coherence is the ability to look at the events of one's life and find a connection or patterns that enable you to create a narrative of your experience. Can you tell a story of how you came to do the work that you are doing?
- Purpose refers to having a direction and life goals that help organize action and manage behavior to help pursue those goals. Can you explain your life goals and how this work supports those goals?
- Significance relates to the idea that your actions have value or worth, or that you and your work matters. How would you explain to someone else how your work matters? What's the meaning that you derive from it? How does it affect the world beyond you?

Personal Meaning Interventions

Prilletensky (2016) argues that the feeling that your work has meaning and matters is fundamental to your well-being, along with other factors that he captures in a model of well-being called I-COPPE, which identifies different domains essential for well-being. These include Interpersonal, Communal, Occupational, Physical, Psychological, Economic. The objective is to maximize satisfaction in each domain to build well-being.

1. Take the I-COPPE survey. Taking this survey can provide insights into which domains you are currently maximizing; the survey may also give you insights into areas in which to invest to find more meaning in life. (See Appendix J, item 2, for a link to this survey.)

Prepare Meaning Interventions

Employees who see meaning in their work are more open to feedback (Berg et al., 2011), while feedback that provides explanation of causality is more easily accepted (Loftus & Tanlu, 2017). An individual preparing for a feedback conversation could make use of these findings to increase the likelihood that the conversation will be productive.

1. Review your "why." The exercises in the Environmental and Personal intervention sections were intended to help you develop a clearer sense of your purpose and how you derive meaning at work. Reviewing your answers to questions about meaning prior to a feedback discussion will remind you of your values and your purpose, and help set the conditions for you to hear feedback from that perspective.

Engage Meaning Interventions

Use feedback conversations as an opportunity to learn more about motivation for the feedback, or how your work supports either organizational goals or your goals and values.

1. Ask "why?" When you receive feedback, clarify why the feedback is important to help you understand how to take action. For example, consider:

- Ask how the feedback will help your performance, "How will taking a presentation skills class help me on project X?"
- Ask how the feedback will relate to your career goals, "How will improving my presentation skills make me a better engineer?"
- Ask how the feedback will help you achieve a larger goal, "How will my performance help the company?" or "How will my improving help the company help our customers?"

Process Meaning Interventions

When you are reflecting about what you heard after a feedback conversation, you may realize that your manager did not provide you with causal information to explain their feedback. If you don't understand the why behind their feedback, you may need to circle back to get more understanding.

1. Reflect on meaning. After the conversation, think about what you heard. How does that information match your understanding about your goals and organizational mission or priorities? Does that information feel motivating or leave you puzzled? Perhaps get advice from a trusted other to help you understand or think through the implications.

2. Confirm understanding.

- Ask why? Go back to the person who provided the feedback and understand the context behind the feedback.

- Ask yourself, is this enough? Is there any additional information that could help you understand this feedback better? Who can provide it? What will you do next?

High-Quality Connections, Psychological Safety, Feedback-Seeking, & Hope Theory

Background

Strong social relationships are important for overall well-being. In the late 19th century, Emile Durkheim found correlations between suicide rates and isolation; in contrast, tightly knit communities offered models where shared values helped people flourish (Haidt, Seder, & Kesebir, 2008). More recent data show similar results: people connected to other happy people are more likely to be happy in the future (Christakis & Fowler, 2009). There are physical health benefits too: social connections have been linked to stronger immune systems and speedier recovery from surgery (Holt-Lunstad, Smith, & Layton, 2010).

Strong, trusting relationships impact receipt of negative feedback. Receiving feedback from a trusted and credible source contributes to a receiver's willingness to hear and act on the information (Ilgen et al., 1979). So, what contributes to an individual being surrounded by trusted and credible sources? There are several theories that offer answers: Leader-Member Exchange Theory (Chen et al., 2007), High-Quality Connections (Dutton, 2006), Psychological Safety (Edmonson, 1999), and Hope Theory (Magyer-Moe & Lopez (2015).

Leader-Member Exchange Theory (LMX) describes the interactions between supervisors and subordinates, and the motivation for those interactions (Chen et al., 2007). LMX suggests that high-quality LMX relationships are defined by supervisors taking beneficial actions on behalf of their subordinates, which creates feelings of obligation for the subordinates to reciprocate in equally positive ways, by, for example, doing good work on needed projects (Chen et al., 2007). LMX theory proposes that as the quality of LMX increases, supervisors provide more support and resources to subordinates in ways that advance their careers; subordinates

reciprocate by continuing to improve their performance and reliably deliver results to their managers.

High quality LMX relationships are built on trust, respect, and mutual obligation (Chen et al., 2007). In this context, subordinates are motivated to seek feedback to understand how to satisfy their supervisor's requirements and expectations (because they want to reciprocate the support the supervisor provides in response to good performance). Negative feedback is more valuable in this context than positive feedback because it helps the subordinate understand what they need to change to satisfy their managers (Chen et al., 2007).

Psychological Safety Theory may explain some of the conditions necessary to support good LMX relationships. While studying factors that contribute to high performing teams, Edmonson (1999) identified psychological safety as a key component. She defines psychological safety as the shared belief in a team that it is safe to take interpersonal risks, including risking appearing incompetent by asking for feedback or help. In organizations that don't exhibit psychological safety, individuals perceive a face threat in speaking up, and fear damage to their image, and by extension to their careers. Teams that exhibit psychological safety support learning, exploration, and risk-taking among their members. People feel more comfortable making mistakes and asking for feedback (Edmonson, 1999). While most research about critical feedback focuses on employee-manager interactions, critical and beneficial feedback can also come from co-workers as well (London, 1995). Working in an atmosphere where co-workers can feel safe to exchange helpful suggestions for improvement is likely to be beneficial for all the members of a team.

Another theory that provides insight into conditions and behaviors that support both LMX and psychological safety is what Dutton (2006) calls high-quality connections (HQCs),

which she describes as connections between people that include positive regard, trust, and engagement. Her research shows that when people are involved in HQCs they feel more engaged, open, and competent, and, they are better able to do their jobs; she speculates this is because psychological safety allows them to focus on their work, while also feeling able to express and resolve feelings of uncertainty. Dutton (2006) offers a variety of approaches for building HQCs in a workplace. Again, the value of HQC's is that they extend beyond the employee-manager relationship to relationships throughout the organization, potentially supporting an atmosphere where colleagues share helpful ideas that help each other grow.

These theories also suggest a path for making feedback-seeking feel safe. Since managers often downplay or avoid providing bad news (Wagoner & Waldron, 1999), employees will benefit if they take the initiative to get the feedback they need to improve their performance. However, employees are sometimes reluctant to seek feedback because they are concerned that this will damage their image (Ashford et al., 2003). Good LMX counteracts some of the costs of feedback-seeking. Data show that strong LMX encourages subordinates to seek negative feedback from their supervisors more frequently; in a trusting relationship, they feel safe to ask for help. Subordinates are more likely to accept and act on feedback because it comes from a trusted source, while managers are less inclined to think poorly of a trusted subordinate after providing corrective feedback (Chen et al., 2007).

Hope Theory also provides motivation to build strong relationships. This theory claims that hope is a process of defining goals and identifying pathways to meet those goals, all of which are fostered by relationships with hopeful others. High-hope relationships can be a determining factor in whether an individual is able to sustain the motivation to meet goals (Magyer-Moe & Lopez, 2015).

How Might Insight from These Theories Impact Receipt of Feedback?

By seeking feedback from trusted others, the individual maintains autonomy and gets information they need to build competence, which should help bolster their motivation. LMX frames feedback-seeking as beneficial, which can help make critical feedback easier to hear. HQC interventions can help build a stronger relationship between a supervisor and an employee, which makes feedback from the manager more credible and more palatable. Hope Theory argues for the importance of supportive others to help reach goals; high-hope supportive others (whether they be managers or colleagues) could help provide perspective to see critical feedback as helpful. It may be outside of the individual's ability to create an atmosphere of psychological safety in their team (on the other hand, they may be able to model behavior for others), or to be fully responsible for developing a trusting relationship with their manager. However, awareness of the factors that contribute to or inhibit feelings of safety can help the individual make better choices for themselves about whether they should seek feedback; helping to create an atmosphere where colleagues feel safe sharing ideas for improvement is beneficial for the employee and the rest of their team.

Finally, employees who recognize their place of employment is psychologically unsafe may in some cases be able to exercise the option to leave. While this is not always an option, and not an easy choice, the drawbacks on health and well-being of working in a hostile workplace are significant, and should be considered as part of anyone's calculation (World Health Organization, 2017).

Environmental HQC Interventions

An individual can't create a psychologically safe environment on their own, and they can't completely control their manager's behaviors or regard. But, they are not without resources for influencing their work environment. An individual can build high-quality connections around them, with their manager and co-workers, and model the way for others around them. The following interventions can be applied both to supervisory staff (to promote HQC or hope-building relationships) or to co-workers (to encourage an environment where co-workers share helpful performance information, or provide supportive relationships). (See Appendix K, item 1, for more HQC resources.)

1. Promote High-Quality Connections (HQC). While an individual may not be able to completely change a workplace, they can beneficially contribute to creating a workplace with greater high-quality connections. Dutton (2018) describes four features of high-quality connections: there's a feeling of vitality and energy for both people; joint sense of participation and responsiveness; positive regard; and accompanying physiological responses. Dutton (2006) recommends the following actions to create high-quality connections. (See Appendix K, item 1, for more details on HQC.)

- **Respectful engagement:** Treating other people with respect; send a message to them that you find them valuable.
- **Task enabling:** Facilitating successful performance in others; takes the form of teaching, helping, nurturing, advocating, accommodating.

- **Trust:** Acting in ways that conveys belief in others' integrity, dependability, and benevolence, and acting in trustworthy ways ourselves; conveying to the other person that we believe they will meet our expectations.
- **Playing:** Participating in activities with the intention of having fun.

2. HQC audit. Dutton (2018) recommends that you regularly review your interactions to see where you do or don't have HQCs. She advocates for consciously investing in high-quality connections: maintain those you have, and invest in ones that are missing. (See Appendix K, items 1 & 2, for a simple audit tool to help you assess your current connections.)

- Identify people with whom you consistently have HQCs.
- What patterns do you notice?
- Who is on your list?
- Who is not on your list?
- Can you draw any conclusions from this?

3. Active constructive responding (ACR). Capitalization is the act of sharing good news with other people (Gable, Gonzaga, & Strachman, 2006). Capitalization has positive effects on the person sharing the information; it leads to an increase in positive affect, greater life satisfaction, and feelings of belonging. Researchers speculate these positive effects accrue because the act of telling the news helps encode the positive memory more effectively (Gable et al., 2006). However, the benefits of sharing good news partially depends on the response of the listener. When the listener responds by showing interest and positive emotions, the teller feels good, and the relationship between the teller and listener is strengthened. This behavior is called

Active Constructive Responding (ACR); in studies, when a partner gave an active constructive response, both partners experienced greater satisfaction, improved relationship quality, and fewer conflicts (Gable et al., 2006).

An active-constructive response is one of four styles of response; responding to positive news with one of the other styles results in either neutral or detrimental impact to the relationship. Here's a diagram that illustrates the 4 response types and what they might sound like (See Appendix K, item 3, for more details and an exercise.)

Figure 6: Active-Constructive Responses

| | Constructive | Destructive |
|----------------|--|--|
| Active | Authentic Support "That's great news! Tell me more about it..." | Negative Focus "New job? Do you think you can handle it?" |
| Passive | Quiet, Understated Support "That's nice." | Ignoring the Event "Wait till you hear about my day!" |

Here are some ways to respond in an active-constructive manner to good news from a co-worker (Reivich & Salzberg, 2018):

- Be curious: ask questions; ask for details: "How did it happen?" "What does this mean for you?"
- Ask about facts or emotions: "How do feel?" "What makes you most proud / excited / happy?"
- Ask them to tell you a story (or help them tell the story to themselves): "How did you find out?" "What happened next?" "What was the best part about it?"
- Use active listening skills.

- Give them your focus and attention (put down your phone, look at them.)
- Don't make assumptions.
- Acknowledge and validate: "You sound really happy." "You must feel really proud."

4. Psychological safety exercise. People feel emotionally safe to take risks in an environment that is psychologically safe (Edmonson, 1999). There are two important elements that contribute to people feeling safe: conversational turn-taking and social sensitivity (Jehlen, 2016). Conversational turn-taking means that everyone in the group gets roughly the same amount of time to speak. This doesn't have to happen in the same meeting, if on average, over time, people all get the chance to speak. Social sensitivity relates to group members being able to understand each other's non-verbal cues and body language; when teams are attuned to each other, they are more likely to create opportunities for everyone to speak up.

One way to build this feeling is to conduct an exercise in which people share progressively more personal information about themselves. An individual who wanted to improve feelings of psychological safety on their team (for example, to improve conditions for receiving feedback) could propose that the team engage in this exercise. (See Appendix K, item 4, for details on this exercise.)

5. Positive introductions. Sometimes teams skip the step of formally introducing a new team member, especially if someone new is joining an existing team. And, often introductions focus just on name, job title, length of time at the company; facts that don't tell you much about the person as a person. Teams that take the time to introduce themselves are more effective (Gawande, 2009). A particularly effective technique is to have people introduce themselves with

a story that reflects themselves at their best. (See Appendix K, item 5, for an example, and instructions on how to do this, based on Peterson, 2006.)

6. Feedback-seeking. Multiple studies advocate for the benefits of a person seeking feedback to help them get the information they need to do their job better (for example, Ashford et al., 2003). Taking the initiative to seek feedback increases feelings of personal control, circumvents managers who are reluctant to provide bad news, and builds stronger LMX. Some ideas for how and when to seek feedback:

- Make sure that you have regular 1-1 meetings with your manager; if these aren't scheduled regularly, take the initiative to schedule periodic meetings.
- Before the meeting, if this isn't a normal part of your routine with your manager, you could send an email saying that you would like to get some feedback about your performance; you may want to point to specific projects to discuss.
- During the meeting, make sure that you ask for feedback if your manager is not providing it. Ask questions like these, prompting for specific examples:
 - Do you have any feedback for me right now?
 - Is there anything you would like me to be doing differently?
 - Can you tell me if my work has had beneficial impact?
 - Is there anything I can be doing for you right now?
 - Are you satisfied with my work? Am I working on the right priorities?

Personal Feedback-Seeking Interventions

Developing skills and instincts to seek feedback are beneficial to an employee who wants to improve their performance. Seeking feedback doesn't come naturally to everyone; as noted in the research, there's a natural reluctance to seek potential bad news, and concern about one's image being damaged by the act of looking for feedback. However, the research is clear that this is a beneficial skill to develop (Ashforth et al., 2003). Here are two interventions to try:

1. Learning goals. People who adopt learning goals are more likely to seek feedback (Ashforth et al., 2003). See the Goal-Setting section for more information.

2. Deliberate practice. Feedback-seeking is a skill like any other. Choosing to deliberately practice improving your ability is likely to be beneficial. See the Deliberate Practice section for more information.

Prepare HQC Interventions

Not applicable.

Engage HQC Interventions

Not applicable.

Process HQC Interventions

Not applicable.

Mental Contrasting with Implementation Intentions (WOOP)

Mental Contrasting with Implementation Intention Background

Another tool for helping you keep focused on your desired outcome during a feedback conversation is mental contrasting with implementation intentions (MCII). Researchers argue that successfully reaching goals depends on converting intentions to strong goal commitment (Duckworth, Kirby, Gollwitzer, & Oettingen, 2013). Research shows that merely having a goal is insufficient to motivate action. In fact, the positive thoughts associated with goal pursuit seem to pull energy away from actual pursuit of those goals: positive thinking can reduce goal achievement (Oettingen, 2015).

Instead, research suggests that to energize goal pursuit, it is helpful to contrast the desired end (or wish) with the reality of the difficulties of reaching that goal. These mental associations of goals and possible obstacles help motivate more effective behaviors. This process is known as mental contrasting (Oettingen, 2015).

In addition, other research has demonstrated that the way goals are verbalized can impact goal achievement. Specifically, goals stated in a format that contains information about execution are more effective. This approach is called "implementation intentions" and is verbalized or written in an If/When... Then... format (Oettingen, 2015). For example, "IF I feel like eating candy, THEN I will drink a glass of water." Or "WHEN I get out of bed, THEN I will immediately put on my exercise clothes." Combining mental contrasting with implementation intentions has shown to be an extremely effective means to increase achievement of academic, health, and emotional goals (Oettingen, 2015).

This process has been captured as an intervention called WOOP. The WOOP acronym stands for Wish, Objective, Obstacle, Plan. In one study of the effects of WOOP on increasing

healthy behaviors, 256 participants were randomly divided in a group that received instructions on WOOP and others who received only general information about diet and exercise. The WOOP group were invited to use the technique to set a physical exercise or diet goal. At four months, the WOOP group was exercising twice as much as the control group; at two years, the WOOP group was eating significantly more vegetables.

Having people take the time to strongly visualize their desired outcome is vital to building motivation; this step facilitates turning an intention into an intrinsically motivated goal. People are more likely to complete goals which are internalized (Oettingen, 2015). Further, the step of considering the obstacle seems to provide energy to pursue the goal, while the action plan formulation makes it easier for people to take appropriate action in the face of that obstacle, because they have planned for that condition.

Why Does "WOOP" Impact Receipt of Feedback?

Several of the interventions in this capstone recommend setting goals for improving the individual's receptivity to feedback, or recommending interventions to help moderate emotional reactions. For example, the Real-Time Resilience technique includes example responses to self-talk that sounds like "If I start getting angry, then I'll take a deep breath" (Reivich & Shatté, 2002). Stress-is-Enhancing interventions recommend a similar formulation, "If I feel myself getting stressed, then I'll remind myself this is my body's way to prepare me for challenge" (McGonigal, 2016). WOOP is an evidence-based recipe for developing and working with these kind of goal statements.

Unlike some of the other topic areas, this intervention only applies to one aspect of the model: preparing for feedback conversations.

Environmental WOOP Interventions

Not applicable.

Personal WOOP Interventions

Not applicable

Prepare WOOP Interventions

Oettigen (2015) reports multiple studies have shown the WOOP goal statement formulation to be effective in helping people achieve their goals. Again, WOOP is an acronym that stands for Wish, Objective, Obstacle, Plan.

1. WOOP. The basic activity can be completed relatively quickly. Oettigen (2015) recommends practicing this activity daily; with practice, she suggests that it will become habitual to formulate goals this way. These are the steps: (see Appendix L, for an example WOOP worksheet).

- **Wish.** In a few words, state an important wish that you want to accomplish. The wish should be challenging, but feasible.
- **Outcome.** What's the best result that will come from accomplishing your wish? How will you feel? (It's important to spend a moment to really visualize this outcome. This step helps build the intrinsic motivation to pursue this goal.)
- **Obstacle.** What's the main obstacle in you that may prevent you from accomplishing your wish? Again, pause and really visualize this, and be honest with yourself.

- **Plan.** State an affirmative action that you can do to tackle the obstacle, as If/When... then I will. "When" would be an observable action, not something internal. "Then I will" should be an action that the person has all the resources to accomplish.

2. WOOP for stressful conversations. WOOP can be an effective tool for turning a potentially stressful conversation into a more positive one. Oettinger (2015) suggests that before starting a difficult activity, like a feedback conversation, take a few minutes to think about your wish (e.g., "I'd really like this be a productive conversation") and outcome ("I would feel so happy if my manager thought I was really open to her feedback, and that we both felt like we understood each other and what I should do next."). Oettinger (2015) advises really taking time to imagine the outcome and emotions associated with that outcome, and then ask what stands in the way of that outcome ("If she brings up that meeting with Jack, I'm going to get angry, because she told me it was okay to proceed.") After imagining the situation, create a plan, "When she mentions Jack, then I will take a breath, and ask her to repeat her last point, which will help me slow down the conversation and give me a chance to listen."

3. WOOP the worst. Oettinger (2015) also offers an idea of how to use WOOP when you are anxious or fear a very difficult outcome. This method is like the worst-case rebuttals that are used in the resilience interventions (Reivich & Shatté, 2002). Specifically, think of the worst thing that could happen because of a feedback conversation: what's the worst possible outcome? Then, identify and imagine how the positive present reality makes that outcome unlikely. Next create a WHEN - THEN statement to remind yourself about the more likely outcome, for

example, "WHEN I start to worry that my rating will drop, THEN I will remind myself that I have a plan for addressing these performance concerns."

Engage WOOP Interventions

Not applicable.

Process WOOP Interventions

Not applicable.

Physical Activity

Physical Activity Background

Physical Activity is an effective intervention to promote emotional well-being. Exercise is an effective intervention for mood regulation, showing beneficial effects in improving a bad mood (Thayer, Newman, & McClain, 1994). Additional research has demonstrated the effectiveness of habitual exercise on emotional regulation (Giles et al., 2017). Exercise has been shown to prevent and treat depression; one study comparing the effects of the anti-depressant Zoloft to exercise showed comparable reduction in depressive symptoms, and lower levels of relapse (Blumenthal, et al., 1999). The effects of exercise can be more immediate than anti-depressants, which often take several weeks to begin to be effective; one study showed that even one 30-minute walk immediately lifted the mood of subjects experiencing major depressive episodes (Ratey, 2017).

Physical activity also impacts mood and intelligence. After exercise, neurons in areas related to attention (i.e. the pre-frontal cortex) show additional activity; one study showed an 11% increase on test scores after exercise compared to a group that hadn't exercised. Movement does not need to be vigorous to be helpful; simply standing while working created a 7% increase in pre-front cortex activity (the part of the brain involved in executive function) (Ratey, 2017).

How Can Physical Activity Impact the Receipt of Feedback?

Studies about feedback conversations include many results that suggest that the negative emotions that result from critical feedback interfere with the process of deriving benefit from feedback. For example, studies about negative feedback report on the negative emotions that a recipient experiences after these conversations (e.g., Rudawsky et al., 1999). Engaging in

physical activity could be an effective tool to help reset a bad mood. Negative emotions interfere with a recipient's ability to accurately appraise information or remain engaged in a conversation (Audia & Locke, 2003); again, if a quick walk could raise someone's mood this could be beneficial before or after a feedback conversation. Negative emotions also reduce creativity and interfere with problem solving (Fredrickson, 2009); physical activity could support broadening-and-building of awareness after a feedback conversation. Overall, exercise has been called a "stellar" positive intervention that boosts positive emotions, engagement, and accomplishment, and provide overall benefits to well-being (Faulkner, Hefferon, & Mutrie, 2015). Entering a feedback conversation with higher well-being, positive mood, or optimistic explanatory style makes feedback conversations go better. Physical activity is reliable tool to enhance these personal characteristics.

I will offer no specific interventions, just the general advice that adopting a practice of being physically active is likely to have a beneficial impact on overall well-being, which is likely to make feedback conversations go better.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness Background

Mindfulness, or meditation, is the practice of training attention to make the practitioner more aware of their thoughts and experience, usually by repeatedly bringing attention back to some object like the breath (Smalley & Winston, 2010). Mindfulness is defined as "the nonjudgmental awareness of experiences in the present moment" (Hölzel et al., 2011, p. 538). Mindfulness is linked to many beneficial health and emotional outcomes that lay the groundwork for overall increased well-being. For example, mindfulness practitioners experience reduced blood pressure, decrease cortisol levels (a hormone related to stress), and improved immune response (Baime, 2017). Mindfulness has been shown to have positive effects on memory, creativity, and information processing speed (Ratey & Loehr, 2011). There's evidence that cognitive-based mindfulness therapy (a combination of mindfulness and psychotherapy) had comparable results to medication on depression, and seems to prevent recurrence of depressive episodes better than medication (Baime, 2017).

Mindfulness practice has been shown to change brain structures associated with emotional regulation and mood control. For example, the brain's anterior cingulate cortex is thought to be involved with maintaining attention; meditators who report increased attentional abilities after meditation show changes to this area of the brain (Baime, 2017). The amygdala is linked to mood control. Studies have shown growth in that area after mindfulness training; remarkably, this growth can happen with as little as eight weeks of practice. Meditators often report increased feelings of calm, suggesting that meditation changes the structure of the amygdala, and that those physical changes support the resulting mood change (Hölzel et al., 2011).

Many studies of the process of providing critical feedback demonstrate that emotional reactivity is a common, and often unproductive, response by a recipient of negative feedback (Audia & Locke, 2003). Experts recommend trying to reduce reactivity in these conversations in order to stay engaged and be able to hear what the feedback giver is saying (Stone & Heen, 2015). Related techniques like controlled breathing or relaxation techniques can also be helpful to calming emotions in the moment and remaining focused (Reivich & Shatté, 2002). A steady practice of mindfulness has been shown to promote positive affect, further contributing to overall well-being (Frederickson, 2009). Mindfulness is sometimes combined with other approaches. For example, a strengths-based mindfulness program has been shown to have beneficial impact on overall well-being; researchers speculate that including a focus on strengths may help overcome barriers to meditation like avoidance and mind wandering (Niemiec & Lissing, 2016). In one study 100% of participants in a strengths-based mindfulness program reported they were better able to manage stressful situations at work after having completed the program (Niemiec & Lissing, 2016).

How Does Mindfulness Impact Receipt of Feedback?

Many of the other interventions in this capstone are aimed at helping an individual stay focused on and engaged in a feedback conversation; mindfulness can create conditions for promoting attention and emotional control. The self-awareness developed by mindfulness may enable individuals to alter their stress mindsets so that they could approach feedback conversation with a healthier stress-is-enhancing response. (McGonigal, 2015). Mindfulness supports the ability to interrupt reactivity and improved concentration (Baime, 2017). Data about changes to the brain suggest better meditation supports increased emotional control

(Holzel et al., 2011); this kind of control may allow a feedback recipient not to be distracted by negative, reactive thoughts.

Finally, mindfulness supports overall increased positive mood and well-being (Baime), which is likely to create conditions for an optimistic mindset, self-compassion, and resilience, all of which are helpful in responding productively to critical feedback.

Environmental Mindfulness Interventions

Not applicable.

Personal Mindfulness Interventions

While mindfulness requires some discipline to begin practice, experts advise that even brief, but regular sessions of mindfulness can be helpful, especially as one begins to establish the habit (Harris, 2014). Mobile applications like Headspace, have been shown effective in promoting well-being (Howells, Ivtzan, & Eiroa-Orosa, 2016); many apps or recorded meditation lessons are available for free, making this a cost-effective and accessible intervention. Because it is generally easier to practice these meditation exercises by listening to a skillful guide, instead of reading about them, I have included only one intervention in this section. In addition, I've included a longer list of free or relatively low-cost resources in Appendix M.

1. Strong mindfulness. Niemiec (2017, p. CSI 66) suggests that drawing on strengths may help you as you are attempting to become more consistent with your meditation process, or help motivate you to grow your practice.

- Name the primary obstacle that gets in the way of practicing mindfulness on a regular basis.
- Brainstorm how each of your top five signature strengths could help you overcome, face, or better manage this obstacle.
- Take action with one or more of these strength strategies at your next practice session.

Prepare Mindfulness Interventions

When there is time to prepare for a difficult feedback conversation, simple mindfulness exercises can be helpful in focusing your attention and increasing the possibility that you will be less reactive in the conversation. The following are some relatively short interventions that could be comfortably used in an office atmosphere to prepare.

1. 3-minute mindfulness break. (Baime, 2017)

- **Begin.** Deliberately adopt an erect and dignified posture, whether you are sitting or standing. If possible, close your eyes. Then, bringing your awareness to your inner experience, ask, what is my experience right now?
 - What thoughts are going through your mind? As best you can, acknowledge thoughts as mental events, perhaps putting them into words.
 - What feelings are here? Turning toward any sense of emotional discomfort or unpleasant feelings, acknowledging their presence.
 - What body sensations are here right now? Perhaps quickly scanning the body to pick up any sensations of tightness or bracing.

- **Gathering.** Next, redirect your attention to focus on the physical sensations of the breath breathing itself. Move in close to the sense of the breath in the belly. Feel the sensations of the belly wall expanding as the breath comes in, and falling back as the breath goes out. Follow the breath all the way in and all the way out, using the breathing to anchor yourself in the present moment.
- **Expanding.** Now expand the field of your awareness around the breathing so that, in addition to the sensations of the breath, it includes a sense of the body as a whole, your posture, and facial expressions. If you become aware of any sensations of discomfort, tension, or resistance, zero in on them by breathing into them on each in breath, and breathing out from them on each out breath as you soften and open.

2. Prepare with self-compassion. Mindfulness is one way of evoking greater feelings of self-compassion, which have been shown to be helpful in managing reactions to negative emotions (Neff, 2011). The following simple exercise could be used prior to a difficult conversation to increase your feelings of self-compassion (Germer, 2009, p. 67).

- Find a comfortable position, close your eyes, and take three relaxing breaths.
- Bring awareness to your body and the sensations occurring there in the moment. Then focus on your breath, and begin to follow each breath.
- After a few minutes, release your attention on your breath, and allow your attention to be drawn to wherever you are feeling a strong emotion in your body (e.g., tightness in the belly, tensions in the arms).

- Soften into that location in your body. Let the muscles be soft without demanding they be soft, more like applying heat to sore muscles. You can say "soft, soft, soft" quietly to yourself to help the process.
- Allow the discomfort to be there. Abandon the wish for the feeling to disappear. Let the discomfort come and go. You might want to repeat the phrase, "allow, allow, allow."
- Now bring some compassion to yourself for suffering this way. Put your hand over your heart and breathe. You can also direct compassion at the part of your body where you are feeling the emotion. You can repeat "love, love, love" or whatever phrase you feel comfortable with.
- Repeat "soften, allow, love," three times, and remind yourself to bring compassion to your discomfort.
- Slowly open your eyes when you are ready.

3. Grabbing truth. (Grant, 2017). This exercise could also be used during a difficult conversation.

- Pause for a moment. Notice sensations of anxiety, discomfort, or tension in your body. Watch them move in your body with curious, compassionate attention.
- Slowly tighten your hand into a fist. Draw attention to the sensations in your hand - the pulsing and tension. Imagine all the sensations in your body gravitating toward your fist. Hold this for a few breaths. Notice that you get to choose how you relate to the feeling of tension in your body.

- Slowly let go of the tension in your fist, and allow your hand to open, palm up.

Notice the sensations in your body, and how they have changed. You were able to open and let go of the tension easily; can you experiment with the idea of letting go of the need to be right in the same way? Instead, can you just witness the emotions in your body as you witnessed the tension in your hand?

- Then ask yourself, what matters most to me in this moment? What do I need or value, and how can I be true to that?
- Set an intention: How would you like to be in the conversation you are about to have or are having? Can you set an intention to try to be that way?

Engage Mindfulness Interventions

Drawing on mindfulness techniques can be helpful during a stressful conversation (Niemic, 2017). The following techniques are relatively brief interventions. The challenge may be to remember to use them. One approach may be to combine these interventions with WOOP (Oettingen, 2015), to create a strategy for remembering to engage and then use these techniques.

1. Mindful pause. (Niemic, 2017). The goal of this intervention is to interrupt automatic thoughts, focus on the present, and also draw on your character strengths in a moment of stress.

- Pause and feel your in-breath and out-breath for 10-15 seconds. Let everything go except for your breath. Give your breath your full attention.
- Ask yourself: Which of my character strengths might I use right now? Trust whatever answer arises for you in the moment.

Niemiec (2017) offers these variations if the calling up a strength isn't natural or helpful:

- Remind yourself of your current role (e.g., in the conversation, as employee, parent, or spouse) and take an action consistent with that role.
- Decide on a strength that you'd like to be able to use; pause, and see what action comes to mind to use that strength.
- Consider how you might bring more goodness into the next moment.

2. Bells of awakening. (Niemiec, 2017). This is based on the Buddhist practice of using naturally occurring cues in the environment to encourage focus on the present moment. Choose a cue you are likely to encounter during your day, especially during difficult moments (e.g., a post-it note, a particular color, the sound of a phone), and remind yourself when you see or hear it to reconnect with your breath.

3. Stop and be. Baime (2017) recommend this very brief exercise for when time is limited:

- Stop: Bring your body to rest, wait there long enough to notice.
- Breathe: Bring all your attention to a single breath. Close your eyes if it is appropriate in the situation. You just have this one breath, so you must catch it.
- Be: At the end of the outbreath, simply let yourself be. Let go completely, when you open your eyes, rest with your environment for a few moments.
- Feel stillness and silence at your center, when you are in the midst of activity.

Process Mindfulness Interventions

A fundamental concept in mindfulness work is to not try to push feelings away (Harris, 2014). Instead the advice is to acknowledge and sit with the feeling, allowing it to integrate into your experience, listening to any wisdom that may be underneath the emotions.

There are a variety of guided meditations available (see Appendix M for resources). The following is a typical example of a mindfulness exercise that could be used to work through strong emotions, like anger, that might come up after a difficult conversation.

1. Anger meditation. (Grant, 2017)

- Sit comfortably with your eyes closed. Notice how your body feels in your chair. Take a few deep breaths, completely releasing the breath.
- Think back on the feedback conversation, and remember your feelings during the conversation. Allow them to grow as strong as is reasonable. You may feel other emotions as well, but stick with one at a time.
- Feel in your body where the anger is, and explore the feeling. You may be tempted to push it away, but instead try to investigate how it feels. When you notice a sensation, check whether it increases or decreases in intensity.
- Practice bringing compassion to the anger. The emotion is normal and everyone experiences it. Hold the emotion with care and gratitude. What does that feel like?
- Thank the feeling and say goodbye to it when you are ready, then slowly bring your attention back to your breath. Stay quiet, or move on to another emotion and repeat the process.

- Once you have finished, think about the sensations you noticed in your body. Did they change as you observed them? Were you able to bring compassion to your feelings of anger, or other feelings? What happened when you did that?

Goal-Setting

Goal-Setting Background

Feedback and goals together support improved performance (Brown et al., 2016). Feedback Intervention Theory posits that employee behavior is regulated by actions taken after feedback identifies gaps in performance (Kluger & DiNisi, 1996). For example, in studies of feedback-seeking behavior, one of the actions feedback-seekers took was to modify their goals (Crommelinck & Anseel, 2013). Negative feedback that illuminates a discrepancy between goals and performance leads to negative affect (Ilies et al., 2007). Goals provide context for feedback: when an employee receives negative feedback, but does not have goals, they can feel helpless from the lack of direction to take action (Sparr & Sonnentag, 2008).

However, Affective Events Theory suggests that an employee's interpretation of feedback and goals influences how they receive critical feedback (Christensen-Salem et al., 2018). Individuals react to events based on how supportive they are of goals, and not just whether the event is positive or negative; that is, an employee who perceives negative feedback will help meet their goals will not react negatively to that information. One of the factors that may influence that interpretation is the kind of goals that the individual is pursuing. Goals can be represented as either learning goals, which focus on developing skills or competence, or performance goals, which focus on achievement (Cianci et al., 2010). When an individual is working to achieve learning goals, negative feedback led to higher motivation and performance (Lechmeier & Fassnacht, 2018). Learning goals may buffer the impact of negative feedback: when an individual is pursuing a learning goal compared to a performance goal they experience less affective reactions to negative feedback, including anxiety and frustration (Ciani et al., 2010).

Several studies provide evidence to support the idea that a Growth Mindset, or learning goals, lead to better acceptance of critical feedback (Cianci et al., 2010). For example, in one study, 40 subjects were primed with learning goals ("Your goal throughout the next task is to learn how to approach the task as well as possible...") while 33 others were given performance goals ("Your goal throughout the next task is to perform as well as possible, achieving the highest score possible.") All subjects received false negative feedback on their performance. Subjects primed with learning goals experienced less tension and performed better on subsequent tasks (Cianci et al., 2010).

Research about goal-setting provides additional insight into how negative feedback may be received. Locke (1996) notes that challenging, specific goals lead to the greatest levels of performance, and that personal commitment is essential when goals are challenging. Commitment comes when the individual believes the goal is personally important and achievable. One paradox is that people typically do not set goals as high for themselves as others would set for them, which is detrimental, as aiming for higher goals leads to greater life achievement. Further, motivation can flag in the pursuit of hard goals. Social support or coaching can be beneficial: others can guide a person to adopt hard goals, act as role models, express confidence in abilities, or providing training to build efficacy. Managers or coaches can provide the feedback that's indispensable in helping guide performance towards achieving goals; without feedback, the individual cannot measure their performance, and so lacks information needed to improve (Locke, 1996).

How might that research impact preparation for receiving feedback? Ideally, as soon as work is assigned, it would be beneficial to have specific goals identified to clarify what success on a particular task will look like. If the manager doesn't assign specific goals, this would be an

opportunity for the individual to take the initiative to clarify the objectives for the work. Taking this initiative is another form of feedback-seeking; seeking feedback bolsters autonomy (taking control of the need for feedback), competence (getting the information needed to advance performance) and relatedness (supporting good leader-member exchange by working to understand the manager's needs) which supports overall well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2008).

How Could Goal-Setting Impact Receipt of Feedback?

Adopting learning goals and a Growth Mindset can change an individual's perspective on critical feedback. With learning goals, and a belief in ability to change, negative feedback becomes helpful data, instead of being perceived as a threat. Research suggests appropriate goals provide beneficial context for understanding and acting on critical feedback: Goal-Setting Theory suggests that the most helpful goals are difficult, but achievable and specific. In addition, individuals may benefit from having someone else help them set appropriately challenging goals.

Environmental Goal-Setting Interventions

If your workplace or manager does not routinely set goals, you can influence your environmental conditions by either asking for goals or proposing goals. Your commitment to setting and working towards goals could convince your manager and others in the organization of the value of having clear, agreed on goals.

1. Ask for or propose goals. See Personal Goal-Setting Interventions, below for more details.

Personal Goal-Setting Interventions

Most workplaces have some process for goal-setting, and it's likely to be most useful if you follow the standard in your workplace, so that your goals align with those of other staff.

There are several things that you might want to keep in mind during this process:

1. Set goals. If your organization has a process for setting goals, learn and embrace it. The more that you understand the process, the more you are likely to understand the goals to which you are being held accountable. If you aren't a person who likes goal-setting, don't skip it.

2. SMART goals. The most widely recommended approach is to create goals that are SMART, or Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound (for example, Esposito, 2015). The letters of this acronym highlight key factors that help make goals practical and beneficial. SMART goals help you understand important details like, exactly what must be done? By when? What will success look like? Having this information available makes it more likely that you can assume responsibility for monitoring your own progress, bolstering your autonomy through the process. Take the time to write the goals down, so that you and your manager have a clear document to reference and discuss in future. (See Appendix N for a worksheet.)

3. Performance versus learning goals. If you can negotiate your goals, you should aim to set learning-focused goals instead of (or in addition to) performance goals. Research shows that people working toward learning goals were less likely to be discouraged by critical feedback

(Ciani et al., 2010). While your goals should be challenging, it's also helpful to make them incremental and aligned with a larger purpose to help build motivation (Locke, 1996).

4. Use Growth Mindset language to talk about goals. Talking about your goals from a learning perspective will help you develop a Growth Mindset towards those goals (Dweck, 2006). Children who were complimented on effort versus performance persisted better on subsequent tasks. You can direct similar language towards yourself. Instead of evaluating your efforts as "failures" when you fall short, talk to yourself about what you learned, and note the effort and persistence that you applied.

5. Track progress on your goals. You will be less surprised by feedback if you are taking steps to monitor your own progress toward your goals.

Prepare Goal-Setting Interventions

Goals can provide helpful context for feedback conversations. In some cases, you can use goals to anticipate negative feedback and prepare yourself emotionally for that information (Stone & Heen, 2015). You can also use your goals to help guide conversations when you sense your manager is reluctant to give you difficult feedback, and you feel that you need it (Wagoner & Waldron, 1999). Taking the initiative to plan the conversation can increase your feelings of autonomy; ensuring the conversation goes well will give you information that you need to improve your competence and is likely to support a better relationship with your manager, all of which should contribute to stronger feelings of well-being for you (Deci & Ryan, 2008).

1. Review your goals prior to a planned feedback conversation.

- **Consider your accomplishments on these goals.** Start with your strengths: what's going well? Where do you think you have gone over and above? How do you know? Have you communicated this progress with your manager?
- **Honestly assess your own progress.** Where do you think you could have done better? What will it feel like to hear your manager say that? Do you have a plan to address the gap?
- **If you are concerned about negative feedback, what's the worst that your manager could say?** What do you think the worst outcome of this conversation could be? Is that realistic? Is there anything you can do to mitigate now? Is there anything you can do to prepare?
- **If your manager is reluctant to give you feedback, can you lead the discussion?** Can you use the goals to structure the conversation? What will you say to your manager?

Engage Goal-Setting Interventions

Many of the interventions for helping feedback conversations go smoothly offer suggestions for ways for the recipient can focus the conversation and gather specific feedback. Goals could be a guiding touchstone for these conversations.

1. Ground feedback in goals. Feedback providers sometimes use vague or unclear language to soften a message, but this makes it harder for the receiver to understand the issues or know what to do next (Wagoner & Waldron, 1999). As a feedback giver is presenting feedback,

the recipient could use their goals as a tool for clarifying, getting context, and prioritizing the information. For example:

- **Clarify.** How does the feedback relate to your current work: "Can I just clarify? Does this feedback relate to my work on Project X?"
- **Get context.** How does this behavior manifest "Could you give me an example? Where have I been doing this on project X?"
- **Prioritize.** How important is it to address this feedback now? "Can you help me think about priorities? Should I work on what you are telling me, or finish what I was doing on Project X first?"

Process Goal-Setting Interventions

A positive action an individual can take after receiving critical feedback is to adjust their goals (Crommelinck & Anseel, 2013). Research on goal-setting shows the benefits a skilled coach can provide in helping someone modify their goals (Locke, 1996) and adopt more useful strategies (Zingoni & Byron, 2017). Feedback can sometimes be demotivating because it calls into question your competence, autonomy or relationships. Taking independent action with respect to your goals after receiving negative feedback can bolster your autonomy. It can build your relationship in the context of LMX, as you manager sees your commitment to deliver the performance they need (Chen et al., 2007). It may also be an opportunity to build competence. Some actions with respect to goal-setting an individual could take after receiving feedback include:

1. Modify goals. After considering the feedback, you could meet with your manager again to either revise or update goals. Especially if you thought that your performance was meeting goals, and you were told it wasn't, updating and clarifying goals would be an important step. In addition to giving you a clearer set of goals to work toward, this could be an important step in demonstrating your commitment to meeting your manager's needs, which can be helpful to your relationship.

2. Modify strategy. You may have received feedback that your approach to meeting your goals was inefficient or ineffective. Soliciting additional ideas from your manager or experienced co-workers about how to modify your performance would probably be beneficial, and will help you build competence.

3. Get additional training. You may realize after the conversation that you don't feel that you have the skill to perform at the level the feedback indicates is needed. If that's the case, asking for additional training or seeking your own resources to build your skills could be beneficial, and support your feelings of competence.

Deliberate Practice

Deliberate Practice Background

One approach that an individual could adopt prior to a planned feedback conversation is to think about the process of learning to benefit from feedback as a skill, and then apply deliberate practice techniques to improve that skill. A similar approach could be applied to building the skill of seeking feedback.

Research has demonstrated that there are few skills that just come naturally or that are inherited; skill develops with practice (Ericsson, Krampe, & Tesch-Römer, 1993). However, while practice is helpful, it's not enough just to put in many hours; people who attempt to learn this way will hit learning plateaus and stop improving. For successful learning to occur, a learner needs to be motivated to improve their skills, they need to practice tasks that are appropriate to their current level of skill or expertise, they need immediate feedback on their performance, and then they need to repeat the same or similar tasks. Feedback is indispensable; without feedback even the most motivated student will be unable to progress.

However, to really progress requires deliberate practice, a highly structured activity with the specific goal of improving performance (Ericsson et al., 1993). In deliberate practice, the learner focuses their efforts systematically on improving aspects of performance that are weak. They look for new methods for approaching their tasks; often this search for new strategies is supported by skilled teachers or coaches, who suggest strategies and offer refinements based on their observations of the current performance.

How Could Deliberate Practice Impact Receipt of Feedback?

Many of the research findings cited in this capstone point to the benefits of a Growth Mindset, and the value of learning goals (Cianci et al., 2010). Deliberate practice provides a process for working with those learning goals to derive the most benefit. Deliberate practice could be used along with many of the other interventions that have been described, like Goal-Setting (to learn to set learning goals), High-Quality Connections (to develop supportive coaching relationships) and a second score (to provide feedback on your progress).

Environmental Deliberate Practice Interventions

Not applicable.

Personal Deliberate Practice Interventions

The Character Lab at the University of Pennsylvania provides resources to teach the skill of deliberate practice to students ("Expert practice," 2018). They suggest the following steps to practice deliberately: (See Appendix O, item 1, for a link to a worksheet and more information.)

- Choose a skill that you want to improve.
- Think of an exemplar of that skill.
- Break that skill into sub-skills.
- Decide on a small sub-skill to practice, preferably one where you need to improve.

(It's important not to only practice the sub-skills you are good at.)

- Practice with 100% focus.
- Get feedback.

- Reflect and adjust: reflect on your performance and feedback, and adjust your approach.

1. Deliberate practice for a feedback conversation. Based on the Character Lab formulation, prior to engaging in a feedback conversation, you may take the following steps, and consider combining this with other interventions:

- **Set your overall goal:** See the Goal-Setting section for more information. For example, a SMART goal about feedback receipt might be "I want to have more productive feedback conversations with Bill (Specific) in which I leave with two ideas about how to improve (Measurable) and I'd like to have completed this goal in three months (Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound).
- **Break your goal into smaller goals.** Consider what subskills you need to improve. For example, "stay calm," "be open to his ideas," "ask questions."
- **Decide on a small skill to practice:** Staying calm. (Consider combining this with WOOP: "When I feel myself starting to get anxious, THEN I will take a conscious deep breath.")
- **Practice the skill in the conversation.**
- **Get feedback:** One option is to be open with your manager prior to this conversation and tell them that you are practicing being more calm during these conversations. At the end of the conversation, you could ask them for feedback on your reaction. Alternatively, if that feels uncomfortable, spend time reflecting on the conversation either by yourself, or with someone you trust and provide feedback to yourself about how you did.

- **Reflect and adjust; second score:** Reflect to decide if you have achieved your goals with respect to a sub-skill. Are you done with that sub-skill? If not, maybe get more specific about what aspects of staying calm you need to improve. "Hmmm... I did ok until he mentioned that presentation with Sally, then I got angry and forgot to breathe. So, I'd give myself a B-. But that's up from a C!"

Prepare Deliberate Practice Interventions

Performance psychology provides techniques to elicit superior performance in domains, like athletics or the military, where excellent performance is crucial. It considers the influence of emotions, physical sensations, thoughts, environmental characteristics, and relationships on performance (Park, 2018). Performance psychology bases its approach on a fundamental belief that mental skills can be learned and trained, just like physical skills, and that the mind/body connections flow in both directions (stress can impact the mind, and the mind can impact stress responses). Feedback conversations could be considered an example of a situation where performance is vital under difficult emotional or environmental conditions.

1. Performance imagery script. Concepts from performance psychology could be used to prepare for any performance situation, including, for example, preparing for a feedback conversation. One technique used frequently in performance psychology is guided imagery, where someone pictures an end goal, as well as the physical, emotional, and environmental conditions along the path to reaching that end goal. The intent is to influence the thoughts that impact behavior, and anticipate and prepare for roadblocks. Imagery works by preparing the body and mind for action, laying down learning patterns in both muscles and neural pathways

that the body and mind can draw on when later required. Researchers show that using imagery tools can support learning, increase confidence, and support goal achievement; it's particularly useful when it is difficult to physically practice a skill (Park, 2018). (See Appendix O, item 2, for a link to an imagery script.)

It's often not possible to rehearse a feedback conversation before you engage in it. Experimenting with imagery can provide an opportunity to build confidence and a feeling of self-efficacy, which has been shown to make you more open to feedback when you receive it (Ilgen & Davis, 2000).

Engage Deliberate Practice Interventions

Not applicable.

Process Deliberate Practice Interventions

An important part of deliberate practice is to reflect on your performance, compare it to your goals and strategies, and then adjust going forward. The following interventions may be helpful to facilitate this.

1. Second score. Giving yourself a grade on how you are progressing toward your goal can be helpful (Stone & Heen, 2015). See previous description of a second score.

2. Get feedback about your response. You might not be able to see your own performance clearly, and you can probably benefit from input about how well you are doing at becoming more open to feedback.

- **Ask your manager.** If you are specifically interested in how well you are responding to feedback from your manager, it may be useful to let them know this. You could consider doing a goal-setting exercise with them, or you could use this as an opportunity to build your LMX relationship: they are likely to appreciate your initiative. You might want to agree on when they will give you feedback. For example, After each meeting? On some other regular schedule? Only when they feel it is necessary? Only when you ask for it? Questions you might ask, include:
 - If I make progress on this goal, what's something you would expect to see me do, or see me do differently (P. Berridge, personal communication, 5/23/18)?
 - How did I do today? Can you give me an example of where I am improving / continuing to be challenged?
 - What would you suggest?
 - Is there anything you could do to help me (P. Berridge, personal communication, 5/23/18)?
- **Ask other people.** If you are receiving feedback in a public setting, consider asking trusted others for feedback about how you are doing. Explain to them that you are intentionally working to improve your receptivity to feedback, and encourage them to be honest with you about what they saw you do or say. Questions you might ask:
 - What did I do or say today that made me seem receptive / not receptive to feedback?
 - Is there anything I'm doing that makes it seem like I'm getting in my own way?
 - What would you suggest?

- Is there anything you can do to help (P. Berridge, personal communication, 5/23/18)?

3. Decide if you need to do anything/ what is it telling you about them. When you receive feedback, you should always recognize that you have the option of not accepting or acting on the feedback. In some cases, the person providing the feedback might not understand the situation, might be only seeing a piece of your performance, might not be in a position to ask or demand that you make the change they are suggesting, or might just be wrong. There are several models to help you decide how to interpret feedback.

- **Responsibility Assignment Matrix (RACI).** RACI matrices provide a way of interpreting feedback received in a matrix organization (Haughey, n.d.). Understanding a feedback provider's role with respect to the project can help you decide if you need to take the advice. While it's good to get perspectives from lots of people to help us understand our blind spots (Stone & Heen, 2015), some advice might be off the mark. For example, if someone with only passing interest in the outcome of the project from an organizational perspective demands large changes in your work, it might not be the right thing to comply; you would need to check this direction change with someone with more direct responsibility for the outcome of the project. A RACI chart is a tool to help you make an informed decision about what to do next.
- **Feedback tells you about the person giving the feedback.** Mohr (2014) suggests that sometimes feedback tells you more about the person who is giving you the information than it does about you or your work. Each person providing feedback is

looking at your work through the lens of what they value. Their comments about what they think is good or bad reflect their values. Understanding that perspective can give you a new lens with which to interpret feedback: in addition to the objective content of their comments, you can spend time thinking about what they are implicitly telling you about what they value. This mindset can give you some emotional distance from their comments. From an LMX perspective, understanding that your manager's comments are also giving you information about their meta-level requirements can give you a whole new level of appreciation of the opportunity provided by getting feedback, as well as a way to create some emotional distance from the feedback.

Conclusion

"Oh, would some Power the gift give us, to see ourselves as others see us." –

Robert Burns

Why is this line of poetry so well-known? I think because, like many great poems, it speaks to a fundamental human truth. Unpoetic, mundane cognitive biases mean that we can't see ourselves clearly, and we must depend on the information that others can provide us to help us do this. Happily, we are surrounded by people who can do this. Sadly, they fear hurting our feelings or damaging our relationships, and we often respond to the gift of their perspective with hostility or defensiveness. Enter positive psychology whose aims reach back to Aristotle's original theorizing that humans flourished when in pursuit of their expression of personal excellence (Melchert, 2002). Positive psychology offers the promise, as well as the theories, interventions and research, that people can do better than merely not being unhappy.

Feedback can be one of the greatest gifts that we receive, allowing us to overcome our blind spots that are obstacles to our reaching our true expression of excellence, if an individual chooses to receive that feedback. Many of us struggle to receive that gift. The interventions described in this capstone can help. But not only can they help someone be more open to feedback, these same interventions support overall development of well-being. Adopting a program to improve one's ability to receive feedback impacts the individual directly, by providing them needed information to prosper professionally, which contributes to well-being. But these same interventions will work directly to help the individual be more mindful, self-compassionate, resilient, optimistic, with a growth-mindset and an appreciation of the value the stress response brings.

Early in the MAPP program we were asked to choose between a red cape, symbolizing a superhero who could stop bad things, and the green cape of a superhero who grew good things. I firmly chose red; as I write this capstone and hear about the U.S. government ripping children from their refugee parents at the border, I want nothing less than a superpower that I could use to stop that. But, at the close of this capstone, and my time in MAPP, I begin to see that perhaps I have adopted at least a reversible cape. By proposing interventions to, as I described it to my friends, "make feedback suck less" I have also laid a path for building overall well-being, by focusing on how to build skills for one specific need.

Appendix A: Introduction to Positive Psychology

To understand the history of positive psychology, it is helpful first to understand the roots of the idea of happiness. McMahon (2018) looks at how the idea of happiness has evolved to explain some of our current expectations about the concept. He cites two foundational eras as having significant influence on our modern perspectives. McMahon (2018) describes the emergence of definitions of happiness during the Axial Age in the first millennium BCE. During this period, cultures as diverse as Greece, China, India, and Palestine taught that happiness was not dependent on accumulation of material goods, but instead based on more transcendent aspirations. Religions in India, China, and Palestine suggested the path to happiness led from actions like gratitude and forgiveness, compassion and friendship, optimism and hope (McMahon, 2018); reaching down through the centuries, these same concepts and methods form the backbone of many interventions aimed at increasing well-being suggested by positive psychologists like Seligman (2012) or Lyubomirsky (2008).

In Greece, Aristotle wrote that eudaimonia, or human flourishing, emerged from humans pursuing their highest expression of personal excellence (Melchert, 2002). Aristotle claimed that happiness is sought for itself, and pursued by striving for excellence or virtue. To Aristotle, the happy person pursues the virtue appropriate to their strengths (e.g., a flutist seeks to be an excellent flutist). Happiness must be actively sought (it can't be given to someone), and habitual and deliberate practice mark the path to virtue development. For example, to build the virtue of bravery one must practice brave acts. However, each person needs to "rationally" seek the virtue appropriate to them (each person has their own expression of excellence, based on their strengths), and aim for an appropriate or "mean" expression of that virtue. People apply "practical wisdom," or a rational assessment to determine their mean (Melchert, 2002).

Centuries later, these themes become central to positive psychology, with Peterson and Seligman (2004) advocating for the value of identifying and development personal character strengths, while Schwartz and Sharpe (2006) contend that practical wisdom is crucial to individuals thoughtfully investing in appropriate expression of appropriately chosen strengths.

McMahon (2018) notes that while acknowledging happiness as rare, in part because self-mastery is required to practice happiness-boosting activities, like meditation and gratitude, philosophy of the Axial age nonetheless established the possibility that happiness was not just random, but could be pursued and achieved through effort. McMahon (2018) suggests that generations later, the Enlightenment, with its conviction that human intelligence could understand and tackle problems in the universe, led to an expectation to a right to happiness. People should not settle for pain, they should demand pleasure and happiness, and actively seek to change themselves, their governments, and their society when it was not forthcoming. This perspective established contemporary expectations of happiness as not only achievable, but a human right (McMahon, 2018).

Peterson (2006) suggests the roots of positive psychology date to those philosophers of the first millennium trying to define the good life and what it means to be happy. Psychology as a discipline emerged in earnest in the late nineteenth century with theorists and researchers like Freud, Jung, and James (Coon & Mitterer, 2012). Freud focused on internal experience and the role of the unconscious, and established the profession of psychotherapy (Seligman, 2018). Slightly later, Pavlov and Skinner launched the study of behaviorism, which came to dominate American psychological research (Seligman, 2018). Behaviorism dismissed the study of internal experience as unnecessary to understanding human behavior, contending instead that all behavior could be explained by the relationship of stimulus, response, and reinforcer (Seligman, 2018).

In 1964, Martin Seligman and Steve Meier conducted a series of experiments that would question and eventually upend the behaviorists' perspective (Seligman, 2018). In the course of studying dogs' responses to shock, these experiments exposed some animals to unavoidable shock; under this condition the animals appeared "helpless," and in subsequent experiments they failed to take simple actions to avoid the shock. Seligman and Maier contended that the animals had learned that nothing they did could change their exposure; this implied that animals were making some calculation, not simply responding, which was antithetical to behaviorism. A series of subsequent experiments provided further support to the idea that behavior was more complex than just stimulus-response-reward; rather, cognition guided behavior. (Seligman, 2018).

Seligman explained this to another researcher, who observed the dogs and commented that the dogs were "depressed" (Seligman, 2018). Seligman spent years studying related phenomenon. These experiments contributed to Aaron Beck's establishment of Cognitive Behavior Therapy, which was grounded in the idea that depression was fundamentally a problem of how people explained the world: change their sad explanations, and their sad feelings would go away. Practice and research provided evidence to support this as an effective treatment for depression and other emotional issues (Seligman, 2018).

Over the next decades of his career, Seligman continued research, while also practicing psychotherapy. The focus of psychotherapy, grounded in its Freudian roots was the amelioration of suffering (Seligman, 2018). With input from a diverse set of advisors (ranging from Mihaly Csizentmihalyi, author of *Flow*, to Seligman's young daughter Nikki), Seligman's perspective on what psychology could offer to people changed. He began to ask how psychology could do more than just make life less bad. Could it advance the study of health, wellness, sanity, and the good life (Seligman, 2018)?

Elected president of the American Psychological Association in 1998, Seligman issued a challenge to the organization to create "a new science of human strengths" which he likened to "A Manhattan project for the social sciences" (Seligman, 1999). This call to action effectively created the study of positive psychology. Seligman gathered leading thinkers to set the strategy for this effort: they identified three key components for study:

- positive subjective experience (e.g., happiness, pleasure, fulfillment)
- positive individual traits (e.g., character, traits, values)
- positive institutions (e.g., families, schools, government) (Seligman, 2018).

The field has blossomed. A Google Scholar search for the term "positive psychology" returns nearly 3,000,000 results. Myriad books, government initiatives, journals, websites, classes, research institutions, and degree programs continue to support this development (Seligman, 2018). To sample the field, here are a summary of four key topics and initiatives.

Study of positive emotions. Barbara Frederickson (1998) asked the important question, "What good are positive emotions?" The role of negative emotions is clear from an evolutionary perspective: they warn of danger, prepare the body for defensive action, and generally work to keep an individual safe and alive. So, what evolutionary benefit do positive emotions provide? Frederickson showed that they broaden awareness, and allow the individual to build resources. Positive emotions literally broaden awareness, making one see more, explore more, and reach out into the world. This has a different sort of survival benefit: it brings the individual into contact with new resources, and helps them develop new skills (Frederickson, 1998). Later research supported this theory, and also showed that positive emotion is associated with other health and emotional benefits (Seligman, 2018).

Measurement of subjective well-being. Edward Diener had spent years trying to measure "happiness" before Seligman issued his call to action (Seligman, 2018). As Seligman explains, happiness is a thing, but a hard to measure thing: it was necessary to develop a construct, or very specific criteria that could be measured instead (Seligman, 2012). The measurable construct is subjective well-being. Diener's work eventually led to develop of tools like the Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS); subsequent studies showed this tool was an effective measure of subjective well-being (Watson et al., 1988). Having tools that could measure subjective well-being meant that interventions designed to impact happiness could be tested to show their impact (Seligman, 2012).

Theories of well-being. There are many theories of what contributes to well-being. Seligman offered PERMA, an acronym for the elements he thought were fundamental, including positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning and achievement; subsequent research has shown that interventions aimed at these dimensions increased well-being (Seligman, 2018). Self-Determination Theory argues that people have innate needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness; support shows these elements offer another important perspective on what contributes to well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Prilleltensky (2016) offers a theory that considers the role of the environment in determining well-being: he argues that fulfillment along interpersonal, community, occupation, physical, psychological, and economic dimensions correlate to well-being. Huppert and So (2013) took still another approach, developing criteria for well-being based on criteria for depression. They provide data to support a model that includes the opposite of each depressive symptom, including competence, emotional stability, self-esteem, meaning, optimism, positive emotions, positive relationship, resilience, engagement, and vitality. The importance of these theories is that they provide insight into what aspects of a

person's life could be changed to increase their well-being. For example, all these theories emphasize the need for close and caring relationships: if a person's score on the PANAS, for example, is low, then one answer may be to look at how an individual could build a stronger network of relationships.

VIA Classification. Finally, a key foundational work in the early days of positive psychology was the development of the VIA Classification of character strengths and virtues, which the authors dubbed a "Manual of the Sanities" (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The goal was to create a tool that would facilitate the study of human strengths. Peterson led a multi-year effort to catalog virtues that were cross-culturally representative of key positive human traits; eventually 24 were identified. Later research developed a questionnaire to enable people to identify which of these strengths were more central to their lives, as well as interventions to develop and use these strengths (Niemiec, 2017). Research has shown support for the value of this work: people who identify and make use of their key strengths rate themselves as happier (Niemiec, 2017). Many programs designed to increase well-being start with identification of signature strengths, and encourage people to build on those (Niemiec, 2017).

Why is positive psychology important? For evolutionary reasons, humans can easily see the negative and spot potential danger (Seligman, 2018). While adaptive, when the environment was more dangerous, the world we live in does not present the same kind of daily struggle and threats to life as that of our ancestors who left us with this negativity bias. Research shows that a negative, or pessimistic explanatory style (expecting danger around every turn) is bad for health, well-being, productivity, and a host of other criteria. In contrast, a more optimistic outlook, and positive emotions generally, have been shown to promote health and happiness (Seligman, 2018). But, in Seligman's words, this doesn't come naturally:

“The upshot is that the pessimistic mind-set needs no advocates and no teaching. People do not need to have the fact that world is full of loss, danger, and trespass drummed into them. Contrary to cocktail party chatter, there is nothing wise or sophisticated about pessimism. It is the human default... Pessimism is lazy, it comes easily and naturally. If you actually live in a more benign world than the Pleistocene and want to enjoy your species' hard-earned prosperity, you have to break out of the negative. What needs teaching - what needs nurturance, support, and justification - is an optimistic view of the world.” (Seligman, 2018, p. 208)

The goal of positive psychology is to provide that nurturance, support, and justification.

Appendix B.1 Interventions Map

Interventions Map. This table summarizes all the interventions, by topic. CORE techniques build capabilities over time; SITUATIONAL techniques should be applied as needed before, during or after a feedback conversation. Details for each intervention are in the corresponding topic area.

| Topics | CORE | | SITUATIONAL | | |
|---|---|---|--|---|---|
| | Environmental <i>Aspects of your workplace that you may be able to influence; influence these to make it easier to hear, accept and act on feedback in general</i> | Personal <i>Aspects of your skill or character that you can influence; build these to make it easier to hear, accept and act on feedback in general</i> | Prepare <i>Skills and techniques to help prepare for specific feedback conversations</i> | Engage <i>Skills and techniques to help engage productively in specific feedback conversations</i> | Process <i>Skills and techniques to help process feedback from specific conversations</i> |
| Well-Being <i>Appendix C</i> | NA | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Physical Activity ▫ Mindfulness ▫ PANAS ▫ PERMA ▫ Three good things ▫ Positive portfolio | NA | NA | NA |
| Character Strengths <i>Identify and develop your character strengths to draw on during adversity, to solve problems, to flourish</i> <i>Appendix D</i> | NA | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ VIA survey ▫ Aware-Explore-Apply ▫ Strength subtraction ▫ Strength spotting ▫ Use signature strengths in new ways. ▫ Character Strengths 360 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Apply your signature strengths in new ways ▫ Acting “As If” ▫ Resource Priming ▫ Create a strengths habit (+WOOP) ▫ Personal Model of Resilience (PMR) | NA | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Positive reappraisal with strengths ▫ Character-strength alignment ▫ Strength-based problem solving |

| | Environmental | Personal | Prepare | Engage | Process |
|--|----------------------|--|--|---|--|
| <p>Resilience <i>Resilience skills help you bounce back from adversity and face challenges calmly</i></p> <p><i>Appendix E</i></p> | NA | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Resilience Quotient Test ▫ Learning Your ABCs ▫ Avoiding Thinking Traps ▫ Detecting Iceberg Beliefs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Pre-game ATC ▫ Real-time Resilience ▫ Shuffle those thoughts! | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Focusing techniques ▫ Working with ambiguous feedback ▫ Is the feedback giver triggered? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Challenging beliefs ▫ Putting it in Perspective |
| <p>Growth mindset <i>Develop a growth mindset to find the learning opportunities in challenges</i></p> <p><i>Appendix F</i></p> | NA | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Commit to a Growth Mindset ▫ Learn about Growth Mindset ▫ 25 ways to develop growth mindset ▫ Develop Grit ▫ Lower the stakes / up the frequency | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Anticipate learning ▫ Commit to curiosity | NA | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Reflect on a recent event |
| <p>Thanks for the Feedback <i>Skills to help you understand feedback, manage feedback conversations, and decide what to do with what you hear</i></p> <p><i>Appendix G</i></p> | NA | NA | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Reminders about reality ▫ Prepare for the worst outcome ▫ Growth mindset ▫ Navigating conversations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Clarify intent ▫ Sort for coaching ▫ Separate judgment, assessment, and consequences ▫ First, understand ▫ Label spot ▫ Where's it coming from / where's it going to ▫ Work together ▫ Relationship issues ▫ Clarify your contribution ▫ Don't switchtrack ▫ Check in and name your reactions. ▫ Check for distortions ▫ Switch perspective ▫ Name one thing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Notice blind spots ▫ Reject feedback ▫ Get feedback on your reactions ▫ Look for messages in your reactions ▫ Second score |

| | Environmental | Personal | Prepare | Engage | Process |
|---|---|---|---|--|---|
| <p>Self-Compassion <i>Develop skills to help you be better able to hear, accept and act on critical feedback, without turning it back on yourself</i></p> <p><i>Appendix H</i></p> | <p>NA</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Self-compassion survey ▫ How would you treat a friend? ▫ Seeing yourself as you are ▫ Non-violent communication ▫ Changing critical self-talk ▫ Moving past regret ▫ Letting go of our self-definitions by identifying our interconnectedness ▫ Noting practice ▫ Self-compassion journal ▫ Self-compassion meditation ▫ Self-compassion workbook | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Identify what you really want | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Self-compassion mantra | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Dealing with difficult emotions meditation ▫ Compassion after a difficult conversation ▫ Transforming negativity ▫ Finding the silver lining |
| <p>Stress-is-enhancing <i>Adopting a stress-is-enhancing mindset helps you perform better in challenging situations, feel better, and is better for your body</i></p> <p><i>Appendix I</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ TED talk ▫ Upside of Stress book group | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Adopt stress-is-enhancing mindset ▫ Learn about stress response ▫ Rethink you stress response ▫ Positive stress mindset checklist. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Write about your values ▫ Turn nerves into excitement ▫ Anticipate stressful events as learning opportunities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Turn threat into a challenge | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Harvest experience from a setback ▫ Turn adversity into a resource. ▫ Tell your own story of growth and resilience ▫ Find an upside in adversity |

| | Environmental | Personal | Prepare | Engage | Process |
|--|---|---|--|---|---|
| <p>Meaning <i>Learning to find and create meaning in your job provides perspective to help you understand and integrate feedback</i></p> <p><i>Appendix J</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ I-COPPE | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Connect your goals to organizational goals. ▫ 7 ways to find meaning at work ▫ What’s your source for meaning? ▫ Job crafting ▫ Coherence, purpose, significance ▫ Find your why | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Review your why | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Ask why | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Reflect on meaning ▫ Confirm understanding |
| <p>HQC Psychological Safety Feedback Seeking <i>Developing great relationships helps create an environment where you are more likely to seek feedback</i></p> <p><i>Appendix K</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Promote High-Quality Connections (HQC) ▫ HQC audit ▫ Active-Constructive Responding (ACR) ▫ Psychological safety ▫ Positive Introductions ▫ Feedback-seeking | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Learning goals ▫ Deliberate practice | <p>NA</p> | <p>NA</p> | <p>NA</p> |
| <p>WOOP (Mental contrasting with implementation intentions) <i>Create effective strategies to manage your behavior, overcome obstacles, and meet your goals</i></p> <p><i>Appendix L</i></p> | <p>NA</p> | <p>NA</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ WOOP ▫ WOOP for stressful conversations ▫ WOOP the worst | <p>NA</p> | <p>NA</p> |
| <p>Physical activity <i>Regular physical activity provides as foundation for well-being</i></p> | <p>NA</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Enhance your baseline well-being with regular physical activity | <p>NA</p> | <p>NA</p> | <p>NA</p> |

| | Environmental | Personal | Prepare | Engage | Process |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|
| <p>Mindfulness <i>Practicing mindfulness creates focus and equanimity in the face of challenge</i></p> <p><i>Appendix M</i></p> | NA | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Strong mindfulness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ 3-minute mindfulness break ▫ Prepare with self-compassion ▫ Grabbing truth | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Mindful pause ▫ Bells of awakening ▫ Stop and Be | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Anger meditation |
| <p>Goal-Setting <i>Feedback is more useful in the context of well-crafted and well understood goals</i></p> <p><i>Appendix N</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Ask for or propose goals | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Set goals ▫ SMART goals ▫ Performance vs learning goals ▫ Use Growth-Mindset language to talk about goals ▫ Track progress on your own goals | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Review your goals prior to a planned feedback conversation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Ground feedback in goals. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Modify goals ▫ Modify strategy ▫ Get additional training |
| <p>Deliberate practice <i>Developing skill at accepting and acting on feedback can be practiced and improved, just like every other skill</i></p> | NA | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Deliberate practice for feedback conversation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Performance imagery script | NA | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Second score ▫ Get feedback about your response ▫ Decide if you need to do anything / what's it tell you about them? |

Appendix B.2 Interventions by Challenge

Consider the challenges you face when striving to improve your ability to hear, accept and act on critical feedback.

Review the sample challenge column to find the challenges you face. Then look at the interventions for ideas of things to try. You can find the intervention in the listed topic area.

| Sample Challenge | Interventions | Topic | |
|--|--|-------------------------|------------|
| Difficulty staying calmly focused and engaged during the feedback conversation. | Focusing techniques | Resilience | |
| | WOOP WOOP for stressful conversations | WOOP | |
| | Noting practice Self-compassion mantra | Self-Compassion | |
| | Grabbing truth Mindful pause Bells of awakening Stop and Be | Mindfulness | |
| Reactivity or defensiveness during feedback conversations. | Pre-game ATC Focusing techniques Working with ambiguous feedback Is the feedback-giver triggered? | Resilience | |
| | Commit to a Growth Mindset Learn about Growth Mindset | Growth Mindset | |
| | WOOP WOOP for stressful conversations WOOP the worst | WOOP | |
| | Prepare for the worst Reminders about reality Growth Mindset Check in and name your reactions Check for distortions Second score Navigating conversations Don't switchtrack Name one thing Where's it coming from / where's it going to Work together Relationship issues Switch perspective | Thanks for the Feedback | |
| | Self-compassion mantra Identify what you really want | Self-compassion | |
| | Mindful pause Bells of awakening Stop and Be | Mindfulness | |
| | Deliberate practice for feedback conversations Performance imagery script Get feedback about your response | Deliberate practice | |
| | Pessimistic why thoughts before, | Pre-game ATC | Resilience |

| | | |
|--|--|-------------------------|
| during or after a feedback conversation. | Challenging Beliefs Avoiding Thinking Traps Real-Time Resilience Shuffle-those thoughts! | |
| | Notice blind spots Reject feedback | Thanks for the Feedback |
| | Anger meditation | Mindfulness |
| | Dealing with difficult emotions Compassion after a difficult conversation | Self-compassion |
| Catastrophizing: applying worst-case scenarios to implications of feedback conversations. | Putting it in Perspective Avoiding Thinking Traps Detecting Iceberg Beliefs | Resilience |
| | Prepare for the worst Reminders about reality Separate judgment, assessment and consequences | Thanks for the Feedback |
| | Dealing with difficult emotions Compassion after a difficult conversation Moving past regret | Self-compassion |
| | Harvest experience from a setback Turn adversity into a resource Find an upside in adversity | Stress-is-enhancing |
| | Anger meditation | Mindfulness |
| Ruminating or getting stuck on negative emotions after feedback conversations | Dealing with difficult emotions Transforming negativity Moving past regret | Self-compassion |
| | Harvest experience from a setback Turn adversity into a resource Find an upside in adversity | Stress-is-enhancing |
| | Anger meditation | Mindfulness |
| Difficulty processing information after a feedback conversation. | Turn adversity into a resource Find an upside in adversity Finding the silver lining Moving past regret | Self-compassion |
| | Challenging Beliefs Putting it in Perspective | Resilience |
| | Anger meditation | Mindfulness |
| | Decide if you need to do anything / what's it tell you about them? | Deliberate practice |
| | Positive reappraisal with strengths Character-strength alignment Strength-based problem solving | Character Strengths |
| | Notice blind spots Reject feedback Second score Look for messages in your reactions Get feedback about your reactions Look for messages in your reactions Where's it coming from / where's it going to Work together Relationship issues | Thanks for the Feedback |

| | | |
|--|---|--------------------------------|
| | Dealing with difficult emotions meditation Compassion after a difficult conversation Transforming negativity Finding the silver lining | Self-compassion |
| | Turn threat into a challenge Harvest experience from a setback Turn adversity into a resource Find an upside in adversity Compassion after a difficult conversation | Stress-is-enhancing mindset |
| | Reflect on a recent event | Growth Mindset |
| Harsh or overly critical self-judgment after a feedback conversation. | Self-compassion survey How would you treat a friend? Seeing yourself as you are Non-violent communication Changing critical self-talk Letting go of our self-definitions by identifying our interconnectedness Self-compassion journal Moving past regret | Self-compassion |
| | Second score Clarify your contribution Separate judgment, assessment and consequences | Thanks for the Feedback |
| | Harvest experience from a setback Turn adversity into a resource Find an upside in adversity | Stress-is-enhancing |
| | Anger meditation | Mindfulness |
| Do you find that your co-workers and workplace talk a lot about stress ? | Ted talk viewing party <i>Upside of Stress</i> book group | Stress-is-enhancing |
| Do you wish you felt less stressed by challenging situations? | Adopt stress-is-enhancing mindset Learning about the stress response Rethink your stress response Write about your values Turn nerves into excitement Turn threat to challenge Find an upside in adversity Positive stress mindset checklist | Stress-is-enhancing |
| | WOOP | WOOP |
| Do you need to improve your growth- mindset , your perspective on intelligence and skill as malleable, or your ability to regard challenges as learning opportunities? | Anticipate stressful events as learning opportunities Turn adversity into a resource Tell your story of growth and resilience Turn threat into a challenge Harvest experience from a setback Find an upside in adversity | Stress-is-enhancing |
| | Commit to a Growth Mindset Learn about Growth Mindset Lower the stakes / up the frequency Anticipate learning Commit to curiosity 25 ways to develop Growth Mindset | Growth Mindset |

| | | |
|--|--|----------------------------------|
| | Develop grit Reflect on a recent event | |
| | Strong mindfulness | Mindfulness |
| | Second score | Thanks for the Feedback |
| | Finding the silver lining | Self-compassion |
| | Performance vs learning goals Use Growth-Mindset language to talk about goals Track progress on your own goals | Goal-setting |
| Do you feel unprepared for receiving feedback? | 3-minute mindfulness break Grabbing truth Prepare with self-compassion | Mindfulness |
| | Deliberate practice for feedback conversations Performance imagery script | Deliberate practice |
| | Create a strengths habit (+WOOP) | Character Strengths |
| | Navigating conversations Clarifying intent First, understand Label spot Don't switchtrack | Thanks for the Feedback |
| Are you puzzled about what to work on after receiving feedback? | Modify goals Modify strategies Get additional training Set goals SMART goals Performance vs learning goals Use growth-mindset language to talk about goals Track progress on your own goals Review your goals prior to a planned feedback conversation Modify goals | Goal-Setting |
| | Find your why Review your why Ask why? Connect your goals to organizational goals 7 ways to find meaning at work What's your source for meaning Coherence, purpose, significance Confirm understanding | Meaning |
| | Decide if you need to do anything / what's it tell you about them? | Deliberate practice |
| | Separate judgment, assessment and consequences Name on thing | Thanks for the Feedback |
| | | |
| Do you wish you were getting more and better feedback from your manager and co-workers? | Promote High-Quality Connections (HQC) HQC audit ACR Psychology safety exercise Positive introductions | HQC, LMX, feedback-seeking, hope |

| | | |
|--|---|----------------------------------|
| | Is the feedback giver triggered? | Resilience |
| | Ask for or propose goals Set goals SMART goals Performance vs learning goals Track progress on your own goals Review your goals prior to a planned feedback conversation | Goal-Setting |
| Do you know the why behind your tasks? Do you understand how your tasks fit into the big picture? Does your job align with your needs and values? | Find your why Job crafting Reflect on meaning Find your why Review your why Ask why? I-COPPE Connect your goals to organizational goals 7 ways to find meaning at work What's your source for meaning Coherence, purpose, significance Confirm understanding | Meaning |
| | Write about your values | Stress-is-enhancing |
| | Deliberate practice for feedback conversations Performance imagery script | Deliberate practice |
| | Ask for or propose goals Set goals SMART goals Performance vs learning goals Track progress on your own goals | Goal-Setting |
| Are you often surprised by the feedback that you receive? | Ask for or propose goals Set goals SMART goals Performance vs learning goals Track progress on your own goals Review your goals prior to a planned feedback conversation Ground feedback in goals Modify goals Modify strategy Get additional training | Goal-Setting |
| | Feedback-seeking HQC audit Promote High-Quality Connections (HQC) | HQC, LMX, feedback-seeking, hope |
| | Deliberate practice for feedback conversations Performance imagery script | Deliberate practice |
| Would you like to improve your ability to hear, accept and act on feedback ? | Deliberate practice for feedback conversations Performance imagery script | Deliberate practice |
| | Applying signature strengths in new ways Acting "As If" | Character strengths |

| | | |
|--|--|-------------------------|
| | Resource priming Personal Model of Resilience | |
| | WOOP | WOOP |
| | Second Score | Thanks for the Feedback |
| | Resilience Quotient Test Pre-game ATC | Resilience |
| Do you feel your overall well-being could be improved? Are you pessimistic? | PANAS PERMA Three good things Positive portfolio | Well-being |
| | Physical activity | Physical activity |
| | Mindfulness Strong mindfulness | Mindfulness |
| | Resilience Quotient Test Real-Time Resilience Learning your ABCs Putting it in Perspective Avoiding Thinking Traps Detecting Iceberg Beliefs | Resilience |
| | VIA survey Strength subtraction Strength spotting Aware-Explore-Apply Use signature strength in a new way Character Strengths 360 | Character Strengths |
| | Self-compassion survey How would you treat a friend? Seeing yourself as you are Non-violent communication Changing critical self-talk Self-compassion journal Self-compassion meditation Self-compassion workbook | Self-compassion |

Appendix B.3 What Theories Apply to Negative Feedback?

This is a summary of what all the theories described above imply about negative feedback.

| Theory | Implications for establishing conditions to support hearing, accepting and acting on feedback |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Feedback Intervention Theory (FIT) | Keep focus on focal task or task learning level and away from self; prevent rumination on self or threats to self |
| Negative Feedback Model | <p>Create conditions for recipient to accept responsibility without lowering self esteem</p> <p>Learning goals and Growth Mindset are important</p> <p>Assist recipients in identifying better future strategies</p> |
| Self-Determination Theory (SDT) | <p>Maintain autonomy by seeking feedback</p> <p>Boost competence by seeking feedback</p> <p>Relationships support exchange of feedback: feedback is more credible and accepted coming from a caring source</p> |
| Cognitive Interference Hypothesis | Reduce off task rumination; stay focused on task |
| Face threat | <p>Feedback-seeking to counteract managers withholding information</p> <p>Employees should develop skill in processing emotional and face-threatening information so they can benefit from the information</p> <p>Employees who feel safe are likely to ask more clarifying questions that will get them the information they need to understand the feedback</p> |
| Hope Theory | <p>Specific suggestions to address performance gaps lead to better outcomes (e.g., help employees identify pathways)</p> <p>Plan for roadblocks, and develop strategies for dealing with those</p> <p>Draw on supportive relationships to maintain hope/motivation and support for executing strategies/pathways; also, to lean on for support when getting negative feedback</p> |
| Goal-Setting | <p>Feedback is more effective in the context of goals that indicate desired level of performance</p> <p>Harder goals yield better overall performance</p> <p>Supportive coach/manager helpful to set goals, boost motivation, provide strategies to support and feedback; these help boost self-efficacy</p> |
| Self-efficacy | Individual will accept goals they believe they can achieve |
| Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) | Feedback-seeking is beneficial for the individual to get the information they need to perform better, which in turn helps support the relationship with their manager; this supportive relationship makes critical feedback |

| | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| | easier to hear and accept |
| High-Quality Connections (HQC) | Can help build a stronger relationship between manager and a team, and between team members, which again, makes the feedback more credible and palatable |
| Psychological Safety | Influences whether an individual feels safe seeking feedback Influences feedback-seeking between employee and manager, and employee and co-workers |
| Affective Events Theory | If the individual can perceive feedback as beneficial it can produce positive affect, which can broaden-and-build creative thought |
| Broaden-and-Build | Positive affect supports growth, creativity Positive relationships can help build positive affect |

Appendix C Well-Being Interventions

C.1 Physical activity. See that section of capstone.

C.2 Mindfulness. See that section of capstone.

C.3 PANAS. The American Psychological Association owns the copyright on the PANAS, and it is possible to get copies of it online. Here's one link:
https://booksite.elsevier.com/9780123745170/Chapter%203/Chapter_3_Worksheet_3.1.pdf

You may want to take the PANAS prior to starting to use any of the interventions in this capstone, and then retake it after some time has passed to help you assess the impact of the interventions.

C.4 PERMA. PERMA is a model used to define and measure the construct of well-being (Seligman, 2012). PERMA defines five elements as essential to well-being including positive emotion, engagement, meaning, positive relationships, and accomplishment. The theory claims that each component is important to human flourishing, and that each can be increased with positive intervention techniques. Research has demonstrated support for this theory and various techniques have emerged to maximize elements of PERMA (Seligman, 2012).

To understand which elements may benefit from attention, the Authentic Happiness website offers a PERMA questionnaire that can give you insight into your current level of satisfaction with each element of the model.

The PERMA meter measures your PERMA, lets you see how you compare to other people, and allows you to track your results over time:

<https://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/questionnaires/perma>

The advantage of this survey tool is that the results could be used diagnostically, that is, if your R score is low, then you should look at intervention ideas to boost that in order to increase your PERMA score, which should, in turn, increase your well-being ratings.

<https://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/questionnaires/perma>

People with greater well-being, as measured by their PERMA scores demonstrate characteristics that may make them more open to feedback. For example, people with higher well-being perform better at work, have greater levels of self-control and self-regulation, and show lower levels of anxiety.

C.5 Three good things. Many variations of this exercise are available on the internet; and there are also apps and physical journals available to support adopting this intervention. You may want to experiment with different styles or implementations until you find the one that works best for you. The following instructions come from Peterson (2006, pg. 38):

At the end of each day, after dinner and before going to sleep, write down three things that went well during the day. Do this every night for a week. The three things you list can be relatively small in importance, e.g., “My husband picked up my favorite ice cream for dessert on the way home from work today” or relatively large in importance, e.g., “My sister just gave birth to a healthy baby boy.” After each positive event on your list, answer in your own words the question “Why did this good thing happen?” For example, you might speculate that your husband picked up ice cream “because he can be really thoughtful” or “because I remembered to call him from work and remind him to stop by the grocery store.” When asked why your sister gave birth to a healthy baby boy, you might explain, “God was looking out for her” or “She did everything right during her pregnancy.”

C.6 Positive portfolio. For complete details on this exercise, see *Positivity*, page 216 (Frederickson, 2009). She suggests:

- Collect items to which you feel a connection, and which evoke the emotion that you are hoping to kindle.
- The portfolio can be real (pictures, letters, mementos) or virtual (playlist, online photo album).
- She recommends investing time in collecting these items, as part of the benefit of this exercise may be derived from the search for the items. Once you have the portfolio established, continue to add to it as you find new things that you think belong there.
- Store the portfolio where you can find and access it when needed. If it’s a physical portfolio, keep it wherever you are likely to need it (so, keep a pride-in-work achievement portfolio at your work office, or put materials in a file folder that you can easily transport or keep with you).
- Variety and novelty helps keep this tool evocative. If you look at it every day, you may start to get bored with it. She suggests either only using it when you need a boost, or creating a few different portfolios to evoke different emotions and then rotate your attention among them.

Here are some of the example questions Frederickson (2009) offers to help you think about what you might want to include in a pride portfolio, which might provide a useful boost before a feedback conversation.

1. When you have felt most proud of yourself, fully confident in your abilities and self-assured?
2. When have you done something praise worthy? Achieved something through your own concerted efforts?
3. What makes you hold your head high and stand up tall? What makes you want to share your good news with others?
4. What draws you to dream big, into visions of what you might accomplish in the future?

Appendix D Character Strengths

D.1 Take the survey: The VIA Survey of Character strengths

<http://www.viacharacter.org/www/Character-Strengths-Survey> has been taken by over five million people worldwide, and has been shown to have good reliability and validity (Niemiec, 2017). The survey is free, takes about 15 minutes to complete, and provides the recipient with a list of ranked character strengths.

After taking the test, you will have clearer insights into your strengths, and can begin leveraging those strengths through a variety of interventions to boost mood, increase motivation, and support well-being (Niemiec, 2017).

D.2 Read about your strengths: Learn more about your strengths, by reading descriptions of all the strengths here: <http://www.viacharacter.org/www/Character-Strengths>

D.3 Strength Spotting in Self Worksheet *(from R.M. Niemiec: Character Strengths Interventions, 2017)*

Monitor your behavior a few times a day. Which strengths do you use most frequently? How are you using them? After a few days, see if there are patterns of which strengths you notice. Are you using some more than others? Are you increasing your use of any?

| Day of the week / Time | Current Activity | Character Strength(s) | How am I using my strengths? | Comments (e.g., emotions, obstacles to using strengths, strength intentions) |
|------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|--|
| Day: Time: | | | | |
| Day: Time: | | | | |
| Day: Time: | | | | |
| Day: Time: | | | | |
| Day: Time: | | | | |
| Day: Time: | | | | |

D.4 Character Strengths 360

(From R.M Niemiec, 2017, *Character Strengths Interventions*)

See next page for a copy of the Character Strengths 360 tool that you can use to collect information about your core strengths by asking for feedback from others.

Steps to use the Character Strengths 360:

1. Use the survey on the following page. Copy that page onto another sheet and leave the other side of the page blank.
2. Distribute the survey to people who know you. They don't have to know you well. Gather feedback from 10 or more people. Try to gather people from across different domains of your life, e.g., personal/home (parents, siblings, spouse/partners, children), work, school, friends, spiritual, community.
3. Ask each person to honestly fill the form out by selecting only those character strengths that they perceive most strongly describe you. It's generally a good idea to limit the quantity of strengths to five to seven at most. It's also usually helpful to give them a reasonable deadline, perhaps two weeks after they receive it. If you aren't getting enough responses, you may want to ping them with a polite reminder.
4. Emphasize the second step on the page, which asks the person to offer a concrete example or story for each strength they spot.
5. Gather the feedback from everyone. Look for common themes across the story and top character strengths.
6. Compare your VIA Survey results with the Character Strengths 360^o results.
 - **Strong signature strengths.** Which strengths were rated highly by both you and others?
 - **Possible blind spots.** What strengths did others note, but not you?
 - **Potential opportunities.** What strengths rank high on your survey, but not by others?
7. Take action. Review your insights and put one of your insights to use.

Character Strengths 360 Survey

Thank for agreeing to help me know myself better. The information that you provide on this form will help me understand how others see me. Please be as honest as you can. I'd appreciate if you return this form to me by [date]

Step 1. Below is a list of 24 character strengths. Which of these **most strongly** describes me and how you see me operate in life? Check off the strengths that you see most clearly in me. Choose about 5 strengths, but no more than 7.

- Creativity:** ingenuity; sees & does things in new/unique ways; original & adaptive ideas
- Curiosity:** novelty-seeker; takes an interest; open to different experiences; ask questions
- Judgment:** critical thinker; analytical; logical; thinks things through
- Love of learning:** master new skills & topics; passionate about knowledge & learning
- Perspective:** wise; provides wise counsel; sees the big picture; integrates others' views
- Bravery:** valorous; does not shrink from fear; speaks up for what's right
- Perseverance:** persistent; industrious; overcomes obstacles; finishes what is started
- Honesty:** integrity; truthful; authentic
- Zest:** enthusiastic; energetic; vital; feels alive and activated
- Love:** gives and accepts love; genuinely values close relations with others
- Kindness:** generous; nurturing; caring; compassionate; altruistic; nice
- Social intelligence:** aware of the motives and feelings of oneself & others; knows what makes other people tick
- Teamwork:** a team player; community-focused, socially responsible; loyal
- Fairness:** acts up principles of justice does not allow feelings to bias decisions about others
- Leadership:** organizes group activities; encourages and leads groups to get things done
- Forgiveness:** merciful; accepts others' shortcomings; gives people a second chance
- Humility:** modest; lets accomplishments speak for themselves; focuses on others
- Prudence:** careful; wisely cautious; thinks before speaking; does not take undue risks
- Self-regulation:** self-controlled; disciplined; manages impulses & emotions
- Appreciation** of beauty & excellence: awe-filled; quickly moved to wonder; marvels at beauty & greatness
- Gratitude:** thankful for the good: expresses thanks; feels blessed
- Hope:** optimistic; future-minded; has a positive outlook
- Humor:** playful; enjoys joking and brings smiles to others; lighthearted
- Spirituality:** religions and/or spiritual; practices a faith; purpose- & meaning-driven

Step 2: On the back of this page, please give a brief example or explanation of how you see me displaying each strength that you checked off.

D.5 Personal Model of Resilience (PMR)

This method assumes that each person has some areas in which they already demonstrate strengths, specifically areas related to passionate interests, committed values, or small “can’t miss” daily activities. Consistent with Niemiec’s (2017) idea of strength spotting, Padesky and Mooney (2012) suggest that people are often unaware of their strengths, and need to explicitly look for them.

Step 1: Search for Strengths. The first step is to think about an area of successful activity, where you were able to successfully overcome obstacles: what strengths or strategies do you use to overcome obstacles in that area?

Step 2: General strategies: Having identified strengths you previously used to overcome obstacles, think about how to turn these strengths into general strategies. Are there words or images that help capture the essence of the strategy. For example, “When I’m interested in learning something new, I ask a million questions, and I can usually get an answer. I’ll think of myself like a journalist, trying to get the details for a story.”

Step 3. Apply to a current situation. Thinking about the situation in which you need to demonstrate resilience, consider these general strategies. How could those strategies be applied to the problem area? Approach this with a Growth Mindset: focus on growing strengths, not outcome (so, the goal isn’t to make the difficult situation go away, it’s to strive for more adaptive behavior in the face of the difficult situation).

Step 4. Test out the strategies. Design some experiments to try the strategies and see what happens; before trying the behavior, predict what will happen because of using the behavior. Also, explicitly review the strategies periodically to remind yourself to employ them and try the experiments. Review what happened, compare with your prediction, and modify your strategies as needed.

| STEP | DETAILS |
|----------------------|--|
| Search for strengths | Look at positive, sustained activities How are obstacles overcome? What strengths are used? |
| Construct PMR | Turn strengths into general strategies Use evocative language Consider images and metaphors |
| Apply PMR | Identify problem in need of resilience Plan for which PMR strategies to use Focus on resilience, not outcome |
| Practice | Design behavioral experiments Make resilience predictions Review PMR Reflect and adapt |

Here's a worked PMR example:

| Problem: My boss keeps yelling at me for minor things I do wrong. | | |
|--|--|---|
| Strengths | Strategies | Images |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committed to my group • Like to make people feel good • Think about my friends laughing and feeling better • Work a long time without getting tired • Good sense of humor • Good ideas • Make a good vlog when I stick to it | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think about how I can help others • Trust my ability to work hard • Use humor • Give myself time to think of good ideas • Use criticism or a mistake as a chance to make something work better | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disc jockey • Flexible toughness • Stay on a bucking bull |
| <p>Experiment: Tomorrow I'll try to greet my boss with a smile and make an appropriate joke to see if that changes his response to me.</p> | | |

Appendix E Resilience

E.1 Resilience Quotient Test available here:

<http://static.squarespace.com/static/505e36edc4aa069d5ffdb5d2/t/507704d5e4b0f78dc5b6b683/1349977301472/>

Resilience is characterized by factors like emotion regulation, optimism, and empathy. This test helps you understand which factors you already demonstrate, and which you can grow. In addition, based on your scores, this tool suggests appropriate interventions to build your skills (Reivich & Shatté, 2002).

The table below shows you how to score the test.

| | |
|--|---|
| Emotion regulation. People with greater emotion regulation can stay calm under pressure; resilient people use these skills to help control emotions, attention, behavior. People with low scores experience greater amounts of anxiety, sadness, anger, and have a harder time getting their emotions in control once they have been triggered. | |
| Add these scores: 13, 25, 26, 56 Positive total: | Above average: >13 Average: 6-13 |
| Add these scores: 2, 7, 23, 31 Negative total: | Below average: < 6 [skills 1 + 6] |
| Positive total minus Negative total = Emotional regulation score | Recommended interventions: Learning Your ABC's and Calming and Focusing |

| | |
|--|--|
| Impulse regulation. Impulse control and emotion regulation are closely related. | |
| Add these scores: 14, 15, 42, 47 Positive total: | Above average: >0 Average: -6 - 0 |
| Add these scores: 11, 36, 38, 55 Negative total: | Below average: < -6 |
| Positive total minus Negative total = Impulse control score: | Recommended interventions: ABCs, Thinking Traps, Challenging Beliefs |

| | |
|---|--|
| Optimism. Resilient people are more optimistic, and have stronger self-efficacy. | |
| Add these scores: 18, 27, 32, 53 Positive total: | Above average: > 6 Average: -2 and 6, inclusive |
| Add these scores: 3, 33, 39, 43 Negative total: | Below average: < -2 |
| Positive total minus Negative total = Optimism score: | Recommended interventions: Challenging Beliefs and Putting it in Perspective |

| | |
|---|--|
| Reaching Out. People with lower reaching out scores tend to overestimate the probability that failure will lead to catastrophic outcomes | |
| Add these scores: 6, 8, 14, 40: Positive total: | Above average: > 9 Average: 4 and 9, inclusive Below average: < 4 Recommended interventions: Detecting Icebergs, Challenging Beliefs, Putting It in Perspective, Real-Time Resilience |
| Add these scores: 16, 35, 45, 51: Negative total | |
| Positive total minus Negative total = Reaching out score: | |

| | |
|---|--|
| Causal analysis and resilience. Causal analysis refers to people’s ability to accurately identify the causes of their problems; if you can’t accurately identify the causes of events, you are likely to repeat the same behaviors / mistakes in reaction to events in future. This is related to the habitual way that you explain what happens to you. People with a pessimistic explanatory style have “me, always everything” explanations for events; these people tend to ruminate and are less able to find solutions. In contrast, people with an optimistic explanatory style have “not me, not always, not everything” for events. More resilient people are more optimistic and have greater cognitive flexibility; they are less likely to ruminate. | |
| Add these scores: 12, 19, 21, 48 Positive total: | Above average: > 8 Average: 0 and 8, inclusive Below average: < -0 Recommended interventions: Challenging Beliefs |
| Add these scores: 1, 41, 44, 52 Negative total: | |
| Positive total minus Negative total = Causal analysis score | |

| | |
|---|---|
| Empathy. The empathy score shows how well you can read other people’s cues to their psychological and emotional states; people low in empathy are more likely to show non-resilient patterns of behaviors. | |
| Add these scores: 10, 34, 37, 46 Positive total: | Above average: > 12 Average: 3 and 12, inclusive Below average: < 3 Recommended interventions: Learning Your ABCs and Detecting Icebergs |
| Add these scores: 24, 30, 50, 54 Negative total: | |
| Positive total minus Negative total = Empathy score | |

| | |
|--|---|
| Self-efficacy. Self-efficacy represents our belief that we can solve the problems we experience and have faith that we will be successful. People with higher self-efficacy tend to react less strongly to negative feedback. | |
| Add these scores: 5, 28, 29, 49 Positive total: | Above average: > 10 Average: 6 and 10, inclusive Below average: < 6 Recommended interventions: Avoiding Thinking Traps and Challenging Beliefs |
| Add these scores: 9, 17, 20, 22 Negative total: | |
| Positive total minus Negative total = Self-efficacy score | |

E.2 Learning Your ABC's (Reivich & Shatté, 2002).

ABC is an acronym for Adversity – Belief – Consequences. Use this tool to help you see patterns in your thinking about adversities or challenges.

Review one or more recent events that you experienced as adversities. With those in mind, consider the following (see worksheet on next page).

1. What was the **Adversity**? What, when and where did it happen? Describe the event as objectively as possible.
2. Identify the **Consequences** in terms of emotions and behavior: What did you feel? What did you do? Rate the intensity of the emotion.
3. Capture your “ticker-tape” self-talk that happened during the adversity. These are your **Beliefs**. Try to capture an unfiltered record of what you were telling yourself during the adversity.
4. **Review what you have captured:**
 - Are there patterns?
 - Do your adversities happen in specific situations or with specific people?
 - Look at situations where you are confused by your reactions or your reactions were counterproductive.
 - Do you feel stuck with certain emotions?
 - Do your beliefs have themes or follow patterns?
 - Do you have more why/causal beliefs or what's-next/implication beliefs?
 - Do you tend to overestimate or underestimate the implications of the event (e.g., do you catastrophize or minimize?)
 - Do you have an optimistic (Not me, not permanent, local) or pessimistic (me, always, everything) explanatory style?

Notice if you experience an “aha” moment when you look at this: when you review what you believed about the event does your reaction make some kind of sense?

ABC Worksheet (based on Reivich & Shatté, 2002).

| Step 1: Describe the adversity <i>Describe the adversity as objectively as possible (who what, when and where)</i> | Step 3: Ticker-tape beliefs <i>What did you say to yourself? Don't censor.</i> | Step 2: Consequences <i>What were your emotions and behaviors during the adversity</i> |
|--|--|--|
| | | Emotions: Behaviors: |
| | | Emotions: Behaviors: |
| | | Emotions: Behaviors: |

Make sure you have identified a Belief for each Consequence and that there is a Consequence for each belief.

E.3 Thinking Traps

The following are a list of common thinking traps, and some suggestions about what to do if you feel like you are falling into one of these traps (Reivich & Shatté, 2002)

| Trap | Details | How to avoid |
|---|---|---|
| Jumping to conclusions | | Slow down. Ask what evidence you are using to draw your conclusion? Are you certain, or are you guessing? |
| Tunnel vision | Seeing only the negative aspects of the situation | Focus on the big picture. Ask: What is a fair assessment of the entire situation? What is the big picture? How important is this one aspect of the big picture? |
| Magnifying and minimizing Or All or nothing thinking | Usually magnify the negative and minimize the positive But may also minimize the negative and magnify the positive (overly optimistic) | Look for shades of gray. Ask: Is there a narrower explanation than the one I've assumed to be true? Is there a nuance I'm missing? Is there a specific behavior that explains the situation? |
| Personalizing | Attribute blame to one's self Often leads to sadness But also look at what you can control about the situation Not good to systematically ignore external factors Self-efficacy hinges on whether you believe the internal causes are changeable or not | Strive for balance. Ask: Were there any good things that happened? Did I do anything well? Or... Am I overlooking any problems? Were there any negative elements that I am dismissing the importance of? How did others or circumstances contribute to the problem? |
| Externalizing | Opposite of personalizing: always blaming others; fail to locate those elements of an adversity that are your own doing and within your control to change | Look outward. As: How much of a problem is due to others, and how much is due to me? How did I contribute? |

| | | |
|----------------------------|---|--|
| Overgeneralizing | Effectively attributes cause to character not behavior | Focus on the behavior and specifics of the situation. Is there a specific behavior or circumstance that explains the situation? |
| Mind reading | Are you trying to read another person's mind or expecting them to read your mind? | Speak up and ask questions of others. But first, ask yourself: Did I make my beliefs or feelings known directly and clearly? Did I convey all the pertinent information? Did I ask for information? Am I expecting the other person to work hard at figuring out my needs or goals? |
| Emotional reasoning | Drawing conclusions about the world based on your emotional state (I feel good, so everything must be good) | Separate feelings from facts. Ask: Have there been times when my feelings didn't accurately reflect the facts of a situation? What questions must I ask to know the facts? |

E.4 Detecting Iceberg Beliefs

Many of us hold fundamental beliefs about how the world “should” work or how we should be in it, and these beliefs influence our thinking, often below the level of consciousness. Reivich and Shatté (2002) call these “Iceberg Beliefs.”

Icebergs can be adaptive when they direct behavior to align with deeply held values. However, they can also minimize our effectiveness, causing disproportionate reactions or unhelpful behaviors, which often take us by surprise. Iceberg Beliefs can become too rigid, causing repeated unhelpful emotional patterns. In addition, it’s possible to hold two contradictory Iceberg Beliefs, which can explain why it’s difficult to make decisions on specific issues. Identifying and addressing Iceberg Beliefs can help you prevent recurring dysfunctional patterns.

Reivich and Shatté (2002) offer two clues that there is an Iceberg Belief at the base of reactions:

1. We describe a situation using the word “should.” “He should have been more careful.”
2. Our reactions are disproportionate to the adversity we encountered.

Disconnects between emotions and behaviors in challenging situations are potential signs of underlying Iceberg Beliefs. For example: when your thoughts cannot explain the intensity of your emotions and behaviors, the emotions seem out of proportion to the adversity, the behaviors seem inappropriate, or you are puzzled by your reactions.

Patterns of beliefs lead to typical emotional consequences, as seen here. The way to interpret this chart is this: if you experienced a situation where anger would have been an appropriate consequence (e.g., someone stole your parking spot, which is typically experienced as a violation of rights which results in anger, and you felt guilt instead), there’s a chance that there is an underlying Iceberg Belief at play.

| Belief | Consequence | Example |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------|--|
| Violation of your rights | Anger | “I can’t believe that guy just stole my parking spot. I’m so angry.” |
| Real-world loss or loss of self-worth | Sadness, depression | “I didn’t get accepted to Penn, I’m so depressed. I feel worthless.” |
| Violation of another’s rights | Guilt | “I didn’t mean to interrupt her in that meeting. I feel terrible.” |
| Future threat | Anxiety, fear | “My kids are late coming home. Obviously, they have been in a car accident.” |
| Negative comparison to others | Embarrassment | “My presentation looks so crappy next to hers. I’m so embarrassed.” |

Steps to Detecting Icebergs:

| Describe the Adversity, your ticker-tape Beliefs, and the Consequences | |
|--|---|
| Adversity: | <i>Describe what happen, focus on the facts</i> |
| Beliefs: | <i>Capture your thoughts. What exactly did you say to yourself?</i> |
| Consequences: | <i>What happened? Or what did you do?</i> |

Look at what you wrote, and consider:

- Are your C’s out of proportion to your B’s? Is the strength of your reaction not explained adequately by the thoughts you had about the adversity?
- Does the quality of your C seem mismatched to the category of your B, based on the table above? For example, do you feel embarrassed when a more typical consequence would be guilt?
- Are you struggling to make a simple decision?

If you answered yes to these questions, then look at the situation to see if you can identify the Iceberg Belief. Ask these questions about the situation:

- What does this mean to me?
- What is the most upsetting part of this for me?
- What is the worst part of that for me?
- What does that say about me?
- What’s so bad about that?

When you have an “aha” reaction to a response to one of the above questions, you have likely identified an Iceberg Belief that underlies your reaction. For example, “Of course I panicked when my kids were late, I thought they were dead.” Once you have identified an Iceberg Belief, you can apply Thinking Trap techniques to the situation to identify more appropriate responses.

E.5 Pre-Game Your ATC

(From Park, 2018; and Reivich & Salzberg, 2018)

| | |
|--|--|
| Activating event: Describe an upcoming event that may evoke some triggering thoughts or reactions | |
| Thoughts: What will you think to generate the consequences that you want? | Consequences: What emotions, behaviors, and physiology will be most productive? |
| | |

E.6 Real-Time Resilience

Real-Time Resilience is a tool to use in the moment of adversity. It's best to practice this skill before you need it (Reivich & Shatté, 2002). It's based on Challenging Beliefs and Putting it in Perspective, so you may want to familiarize yourself with those techniques before trying this one.

The basic approach is to attack every counterproductive thought with an accurate response. Based on Cognitive Behavior Therapy (Reivich & Shatté, 2002), repeating this technique over time will help change your habitual thinking patterns (including thinking traps, or pessimistic explanatory style) to more adaptive, realistic, optimistic and helpful responses. Because your thoughts drive your behavior, reactions, and emotions, being able to intervene and interrupt negative thoughts and ruminations is essential to gaining control of your reactions in the moment of adversity.

As pessimistic or non-resilient thoughts come up, counter each with a more realistic, or adaptive one. Start your counter-arguments with one of the following tag lines:

Three tag lines for Real-Time Resilience:

| | |
|--|--|
| 1. A more accurate way of seeing this is... | Come up with one other way to explain the situation that you think is more accurate than your initial belief |
| 2. That's not true because... | Fight the confirmation bias by targeting it directly Be as specific and detailed as possible, the more concrete your evidence, the more effective your response |
| 3. A more likely outcome is... and I can [do this] to deal with it | Identify one of the most likely outcomes and one step you can take to deal with it |

These are common errors that occur when learning Real-Time Resilience

| | | |
|----------------------------------|---|--|
| Being unrealistically optimistic | Comes up when you are trying to generate a more accurate belief If it's overly optimistic you won't believe it and it won't help you Goal is accuracy, not optimism | Try to craft a response that is optimistic, but still in line with the facts of the situation When it's a good response, you'll feel it |
| Dismissing the grain of truth | You need to acknowledge the truth in your response, or it will lack credibility and you won't believe what you are saying to yourself (and then the belief will come back, because you haven't dealt with the underlying concern) | Acknowledge the truth and the offer yourself a strategy for changing it for the better |

| | | |
|----------------|---|--|
| The blame game | Don't just shift blame (e.g., from yourself to others) | Aim for an accurate accounting of ownership |
| Minimizing | Don't minimize the importance of the situation, because it won't successfully disarm the thought that's describing the root problem | Ask, "What's most likely? How can you cope with that (not dismiss it)" |

Additional tips:

- Be specific and concrete in your rebuttals. One specific piece of evidence is more compelling than generalities. The goal is to PROVE to YOURSELF that the belief is false.
- Effectiveness is more important than speed when you are starting out.
- Check if you are falling into any of the mistakes identified above.
- Practice daily, your skills will improve enabling use this still in the moment, when you need it. Consciously try to use it in the moment.
- Try all the tag lines, but stick with the one that feels most natural.

Build your skills, shuffle those thoughts! (Frederickson, 2009)

To build skills, practice Real-Time Resilience before you need it. Write your typical negative thoughts, or negative thoughts that you can anticipate having before a stressful event on index cards, one thought per card. Shuffle the cards and practice refuting the thoughts as they come up. As you notice new negative thoughts, add them to your deck.

E.7 Focusing Techniques

The following mental games provide helpful distraction from negative or ruminating thoughts. Choose one, and do it for about two minutes (from Reivich & Shatté, 2002).

| Game | Description |
|---------------|--|
| Alphabet Game | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Name someone, e.g., an actor, for each pair of initials (AB = Annette Benning) - Can restrict to a specific category (food, animals, books) - Choose one initial: name celebrities whose last name starts with B |
| Categories | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Choose a category and name as many items as possible within 2 minutes, e.g., vegetables, resorts, books, Oscar-winning movies - Make it more challenging by making it alphabetical |
| Rhyming | Select a word and see how many rhymes you can come up with in two minutes |
| Math | Count back from 1000 by seven Rehearse multiplication tables |
| Memory | Name all your school teachers, starting in kindergarten Walk through your childhood home |
| Song Lyrics | Recite lyrics from your favorite song |
| Poetry | Memorize an uplifting poem and recite it when you need to refocus |
| 54321 | Name: 5 things you can see 4 things you can touch 3 things you can hear 2 things you can smell 1 thing you can taste |

E.8. Challenging Beliefs

Challenging beliefs is a skill that you can use to get a more realistic perspective on adversities. For people whose thoughts during adversities focus more on the “WHY” of an event, this skill can help them get out of unhelpful thinking patterns.

Recurring thinking patterns about causes limit your options for dealing with the situation, because you continue to return to the same solutions that have not been previously effective. Getting a clearer perspective on what contributed to the adversity will give you more effective options for dealing with them. Reivich and Shatté (2002) suggest these steps:

1. Objectively describe a recent adversity, and then identify the beliefs and consequences that event.
2. Look at the beliefs you wrote. Focusing on the “why” beliefs, especially the most important or most changeable (e.g., why beliefs about yourself are changeable, why beliefs about your boss’s behaviors are not).
3. For each why belief, consider what evidence supports or undermines that belief.
4. Then consider, what are some alternative ways to look at the causes.
5. What’s the most realistic alternative? What will you do as a result?

9. Putting it in Perspective

This skill that can help you get a clearer picture of the implications of what was said in a feedback conversation. When your thoughts lead you to incorrect beliefs about what will happen in the future or the likelihood of certain outcomes, this skill can be helpful in clarifying and calming your concerns. This is particularly helpful if you are prone to catastrophizing or minimizing.

Many triggered thoughts are projections about the future. While the final belief may be catastrophic, the chain of evidence that leads there are often mostly logical steps. Because the pattern of reasoning feels logical, it’s easier to get sucked into the conclusion seeming plausible (Reivich & Shatté, 2002)

Here are the steps:

1. For an adversity, like a specific feedback conversation, write down each thought as it occurred to you (worst-case beliefs).
2. For each thought, evaluate if it’s an absolutely true fact or a supposition, then consider how likely this is to happen.
3. Generate a low probability best-case alternative. Doing this forces you out of your worst-case scenario thinking, and brainstorming about silly alternatives is funny, increasing your positive affect. Your best-case story should make you laugh.
4. Now, identify the most likely implications of the adversity. This should leave you with a smaller number of more plausible outcomes to address. Because they are more plausible, more will be within your capability to address.
5. Finally, reflecting on this exercise when you are done to see if you can detect any recurring patterns of thinking traps or Iceberg Beliefs that you may want to be aware of in future.

Appendix F Growth Mindset

F.1 Watch this video. Learning about Growth Mindset is an effective way to begin to adopt one:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9DVdclX6NzY>

F.2 25 Simple Ways To Develop A Growth Mindset

from <https://www.opencolleges.edu.au/informed/features/develop-a-growth-mindset/>

1. Acknowledge and embrace imperfections.

Hiding from your weaknesses means you'll never overcome them.

2. View challenges as opportunities.

Having a Growth Mindset means relishing opportunities for self-improvement.

3. Try different learning tactics.

There's no one-size-fits-all model for learning. What works for one person may not work for you.

4. Follow the research on brain plasticity.

The brain isn't fixed; the mind shouldn't be either.

5. Replace the word "failing" with the word "learning."

When you make a mistake, or fall short of a goal, you haven't failed; you've learned.

6. Stop seeking approval.

When you prioritize approval over learning, you sacrifice your own potential for growth.

7. Value the process over the end result.

Intelligent people enjoy the learning process, and don't mind when it continues beyond an expected time frame.

8. Cultivate a sense of purpose.

Dweck's research also showed that students with a Growth Mindset had a greater sense of purpose. Keep the big picture in mind.

9. Celebrate growth with others.

If you truly appreciate growth, you'll want to share your progress with others.

10. Emphasize growth over speed.

Learning fast isn't the same as learning well, and learning well sometimes requires allowing time for mistakes.

11. Reward actions, not traits.

Tell students when they're doing something smart, not just being smart.

12. Redefine "genius."

The myth's been busted: genius requires hard work, not talent alone.

13. Portray criticism as positive.

You don't have to use that hackneyed term, "constructive criticism," but you do have to believe in the concept.

14. Disassociate improvement from failure.

Stop assuming that "room for improvement" translates into failure.

15. Provide regular opportunities for reflection.

Let students reflect on their learning at least once a day.

16. Place effort before talent.

Hard work should always be rewarded before inherent skill.

17. Highlight the relationship between learning and "brain training."

The brain is like a muscle that needs to be worked out, just like the body.

18. Cultivate grit.

Students with that extra bit of determination will be more likely to seek approval from themselves rather than others.

19. Abandon the image.

"Naturally smart" sounds just about as believable as "spontaneous generation." You won't achieve the image if you're not ready for the work.

20. Use the word "yet."

Dweck says "not yet" has become one of her favorite phrases. Whenever you see students struggling with a task, just tell them they haven't mastered it yet.

21. Learn from other people's mistakes.

It's not always wise to compare yourself to others, but it is important to realize that humans share the same weaknesses.

22. Make a new goal for every goal accomplished.

You'll never be done learning. Just because your midterm exam is over doesn't mean you should stop being interested in a subject. Growth-minded people know how to constantly create new goals to keep themselves stimulated.

23. Take risks in the company of others.

Stop trying to save face all the time and just let yourself goof up now and then. It will make it easier to take risks in the future.

24. Think realistically about time and effort.

It takes time to learn. Don't expect to master every topic under the sun in one sitting.

25. Take ownership over your attitude.

Once you develop a Growth Mindset, own it. Acknowledge yourself as someone who possesses a growth mentality and be proud to let it guide you throughout your educational career.

F.3 Developing Grit

Grit is defined as passion and perseverance towards a goal; gritty individuals persist in goal pursuit with a single-minded focus that enables them to overcome obstacles (Duckworth, 2016). Gritty individuals demonstrate a Growth Mindset, approaching their goals as learning opportunities. They demonstrate resilience in the face of obstacles. Grit is predictive of successful outcomes in a variety of professional and academic domains.

Feedback to a gritty person is just information that's helpful to improve performance to help them reach goals they care about passionately. Any work can be redefined as a passionate calling, in which case grit may apply.

It's possible for individuals to increase grit. Gritty individuals share these characteristics:

Passion: Passionate, curious interest in a topic / goal / pursuit.

Gritty people find their passion over time, through their interactions with the world. Their passions benefit from social support.

To identify your passion, ask yourself these questions:

- What do I like to think about?
- Where does my mind wander?
- What do I really care about?
- What matters to me?
- How do I enjoy spending my time?
- What do I find absolutely unbearable?

Once you have a general idea of interest, then explore and experiment, until you can really identify this as your passion.

Practice: Grit involves systematic and deliberate practice to improve.

Deliberate practice involves setting continually more difficult goals, monitoring progress, aiming for improvement:

1. This process starts with a clear, motivating goal that reflects your passion. Identify a stretch goal in that area, then define incremental goals (but be flexible with those incremental goals).
2. Focus practice on areas of weakness, and practice with full effort.
3. Seek feedback: focus on what was wrong and how to improve. Actively process this feedback: think about what you will do to improve.
4. Repeat these steps and continue to refine performance, reflect.

Purpose: Grit is sustained by purpose and a basic conviction that your work matters.

Many gritty people see their passions as connected to the world beyond themselves. This framing of activities to a larger connection drives a feeling of purpose.

To develop a sense of purpose:

- Reflect on how the work you're already doing can make a positive contribution to society.
- Think about how, in small, but meaningful ways, you can change your current work to enhance its connections to your core values.
- Find inspiration in an inspiring role model.
- Think of your passion as a calling.

Hope: Gritty individuals have hope, and an expectation that their efforts will lead to a positive future.

Adversity becomes an opportunity for learning: the process of overcoming adversity rewires your brain and supports further mastery. This is connected to their Growth Mindset: with optimistic self-talk, gritty individuals persevere in the face of setbacks.

Some additional suggestions for supporting hope:

- Update your beliefs about intelligence and talents: recognize that intelligence is not fixed, it's malleable, through experience and effort.
- Practice optimistic self-talk.
- Ask for help.
- Surround yourself with gritty supportive people.

Appendix G Navigating a Feedback Conversation

(From “Thanks for the Feedback,” Stone & Heen, 2015)

Think of the conversation having an arc: Open - Body - Close

Open by getting aligned: clarify purpose, check status

1. Is this feedback, if so, what kind? Appreciation? Coaching? Evaluation?
 - What is the giver’s purpose?
 - What do they need?
 - What’s the underlying issue?
2. Clarify: Is the feedback a suggestion or command?
3. Is this final or negotiable?
 - If it’s provisional, you may be able to influence the final.
 - If it’s final, spend your time understanding it and talking about effective ways to handle the consequences going forward.

Remember: you can influence the pacing and agenda

- Slow the conversation down.
- Get on the same page “Can we take a minute to step back so I’m clear on our purposes, I want to make sure I’m on the same page as you.” “I want to hear your perspective on this, and then I’ll share my view, and we can figure out where and why our views are different.”

Body: Four skills for managing the conversation:

1. Listening:
 - Ask clarifying questions.
 - Paraphrase the giver’s view.
 - Acknowledge feelings (yours and theirs).
 - Sort for coaching.
2. Asserting:
 - Share your perspective.
 - Advocate.
 - Express yourself (lean in, stick up for yourself without being combative).
3. Process moves: move the conversation in more productive direction.
4. Problem solving, asking Now what? Why does this feedback matter, and what should one or both of us do about it?

Listen for what’s right:

- Make sure you are listening to them, and not just your own internal response.
- Pay attention to when you are triggered.
- When we feel under attack, our curiosity shuts off.

Listen to your inner voice:

- Before getting feedback, have a conversation with your internal voice.
- Don't tell it to shut up or scold it; your voice gets loud when it wants your attention.
- If you give your inner voice attention, it quiets down; so, tune in to what its saying and work to understand it.
- Find the trigger patterns: what gets your inner voice going?
- Negotiate with your inner voice: engage it. Acknowledge and appreciate it. Remind it that understanding doesn't equal agreeing. Give it an assignment: "I need you to be intensely curious about what they're saying. Help me dig in and understand. What's right about what they are saying? Why is it they see things differently?"

Listen actively to the giver:

- Let know that you hear them: you are listening to understand.
- Dig into labels, fill in pieces that you missed.
- Let the giver know that you understand: reward the giver for giving you more information, letting them know you understand lets them feel reassured that they have been clear.
- A later conversation may be necessary to discuss why you aren't taking their advice, but they can't argue that you didn't take them seriously or try to understand.
- Interrupting can be a sign that you are listening well, "Before you go further, can I make sure I understand what you meant by [term x] I want to make sure I'm tracking what you are describing."
- Clarify as you go.

Beware of hot inquiry:

- Feelings leaking out into questions.
- Sarcasm is always inconsistent with true inquiry.
- Replace a hot inquiry like this: "Do you actually think that what you are saying is fair?" with a thoughtful assertion like this: "What your suggesting seems inconsistent with the criteria you have used for others... that doesn't seem fair to me." Then circle back, "Are there aspects of this that I'm missing?"

Assert what you must assert. Otherwise you are withholding pieces of information.

- Shift from "I'm right" to "here's what's left out."
- Effective assertion hinges on a key mindset shift: you aren't seeking to persuade the giver that you are right. You're not trying to replace their truth with your truth. Instead you're adding what's left out. What's left out is your data, your interpretations, your feelings.

Assertion mistakes:

- Truth mistakes. Instead of saying, "That advice is wrong" try saying, "I disagree with that advice."
- Relationship mistakes: Avoid switchtracking: instead of saying, "You're a self-centered jerk" try saying "I'm feeling underappreciated, so it's hard for me to focus on your feedback. I think we need to discuss how I'm feeling, as well as the feedback itself."
- Identity mistakes: Instead of saying, "It's true. I'm hopeless." Try saying, "I'm surprised by this and it's a lot to take in. I want to take some time to think about it and digest what you've said."

Let's come back to it tomorrow." [when you are feeling overwhelmed it's hard to represent your views in a clear or balanced way]

- OR instead of saying, "That's ridiculous. I'm not that kind of person" try saying, "That's upsetting to hear, because it's not how I see myself or who I want to be."

Where's it coming from / where's it going to:

- *Where's the data coming from:* Ask for clarification and details about the label: "When you say 'careless' can you give me an example of what you observed?" Or, ask for more details, "Can you tell me more?" or "I'd like to understand more about what you saw."
- *Where's the data going to:* Ask for coaching, "What's your advice?" "What would you do next?" "Can you show me or give me an example?"
- *Clarify the expectations in evaluative conversations:* Ask, "What were the criteria you used to make this evaluation? What did you consider to be most important? Are there additional concerns or factors I should know about? Can you clarify your expectation and help me understand what makes that factor important to you?"
- *Look forward:* Ask, "What are the consequences?" "How will this affect me in the coming year?" "What should I be thinking about or work on?" "When might we reassess?"

Be your own process referee:

- Process moves: diagnose, describe, propose: comment on the process and suggest how to move forward.
- Problem solve to create possibilities: dig for underlying interests. Three sources of interest behind feedback:
 - helping you
 - helping themselves and the relationship
 - helping the organization / family / someone else
- Try to generate options.
- Separate assessment "How do I rank?", consequences "What does that mean for me?", and judgment "What do you think of me?"

Name one thing:

- "At the end of the day, what is the most important thing I should be working on?"
- "What's one thing you see me doing that gets in my own way?"
- "What's one thing I could change that would make a difference for you?"

Close with commitment:

- Acknowledge, and ask for time to process: "I want to think this over."
- Action plan: Who does what tomorrow? What is each party going to do? What do you each agree to do to make that happen?
- Benchmarks and consequences: How will progress be measured and when? What are the consequences if benchmarks are not met?
- Procedural contracts: When do we talk again, and about what?
- New strategies: New ways to work, not just solutions.

| When your internal voice is saying: | Listen for ... | Questions to ask |
|---|--|---|
| <p>TRUTH triggers</p> <p>“That’s wrong!” “That’s not helpful!” “That’s not me!”</p> | <p>DATA they have that you don’t, and interpretations they have that aren’t the same as mine.</p> <p>IMPACTS you are having that you may not be aware of because of my blind spots.</p> | <p>Can you give me an example? What did that mean to you? What are you worried about? What do you see me doing that’s getting in my own way? How did that impact you?</p> |
| <p>RELATIONSHIP trigger</p> <p>“After all I’ve done for you?” “Who are you to say?” “You’re the problem, not me.”</p> | <p>SWITCHTRACKS that put a second topic on the table about our relationship.</p> <p>SYSTEMS between you and the giver - what are each of us contributing to the issues, and what’s your part in that system.</p> | <p>Help me understand your feedback. Then I want to talk about how / when / why you’re offering it and some of my relationships concerns.</p> <p>What am I contributing to the problem between us? What is most upsetting to you and why?</p> |
| <p>IDENTITY trigger</p> <p>“I screw up everything” “I’m doomed” “I’m not a bad person - am I?”</p> | <p>What’s your particular trigger</p> <p>WIRING - how far do you swing and how quickly do you recover? How do you talk yourself through your triggered states?</p> <p>Can I sort for COACHING focused on the opportunity to grow, rather than the judgment implicit in the evaluation or coaching?</p> | <p>Can you help me get perspective on your feedback? What could I do that would help me improve? What could I change that would matter most?</p> |

Appendix H Self-Compassion

H.1 Take the self-compassion survey. Use this tool to evaluate how self-compassionate you are now: <http://self-compassion.org/test-how-self-compassionate-you-are/>

H.2 Australian Department of Mental Health has an excellent mental health web site that includes a workbook to build self-compassion:
http://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/resources/infopax.cfm?Info_ID=57

H.3 Moving Past Regret journaling exercise. (from M. Tartakovsky, <https://psychcentral.com/blog/a-powerful-exercise-for-moving-past-regret/>)

Try the following journaling exercise to help move through a past regret:

- Write down the decision or situation you deeply regret.
- Reflect on why you regret it. What about it do you regret? Did certain negative consequences cause problems in your life?
- From the perspective of a compassionate friend, write down why you made the decision you made at that time. Try to empathize with yourself. For instance, if you didn't finish college, you might write: "College was hard for you. You were overwhelmed with being away from home, wanting to fit in with new people, and managing the academic load. When your parents suggested you move back home and take some time off, you thought they knew best. You were struggling and you made the decision you thought was best at the time."
- Reflect on whether you'd do anything differently if you were in the same situation in the future. Write down your response.
- Focus on what you can control about your regret today. Write down one or two changes you can make, along with the steps you can take to achieve them.

H.4 Noting practice. Neff (2011) recommends a noting practice to help you become more conscious of what you are experiencing. The intent is to be able to see it more clearly, so that you have more choices about how you respond. Here's a link to one example:
http://self-compassion.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/noting.practice_cleaned.mp3

H.5 Self-compassion meditations: <http://self-compassion.org/category/exercises/#guided-meditations>. Here's a really easy, brief one: <http://self-compassion.org/exercise-2-self-compassion-break/>

H.6 Dealing with difficult emotions Neff (2011) offers a guided meditation to process difficult emotions. This meditation focuses on recognizing and then working through the emotion. Practice loving kindness meditation toward our suffering (available on www.self-compassion.org).

Appendix I Stress-is-Enhancing Resources

I.1 Videos that teach the stress-is-enhancing mindset:

- Kelly McGonigal (2013, TED Talk): https://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend
- Alia Crum (2014, TEDx Talk): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0tqq66zwa7g>

I.2 Learn about the stress response (McGonigal, 2016, p.55)

The Stress Response Helps You Rise to the Challenge, Connect with Others, and Learn and Grow

| How the stress response helps you | How you know it's happening |
|--|--|
| <p>Rise to the challenge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focuses your attention • Heightens your senses • Increases motivation • Mobilizes energy | <p>You notice your heart pounding, your body sweating, or your breath quickening. You are mentally focused on the source of stress. You feel excited, energized, anxious, restless, or ready for action.</p> |
| <p>Connect with others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activates prosocial instincts • Encourages social connection • Enhances social cognition • Dampens fear and increases courage | <p>You want to be near friends or family. You notice yourself paying more attention to others, or are more sensitive to others' emotions. You feel a desire to protect, support, or defend the people, organizations, or values you care about.</p> |
| <p>Learn and grow</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restores nervous system balance • Processes and integrates the experience • Helps the brain learn and grow | <p>Even though your body is calming down, you still feel mentally charged. You replay or analyze the experience in your mind, or want to talk to others about it. A mix of emotions are usually present, along with a desire to make sense of what happened.</p> |

I.3 Rethink your stress response: (McGonigal, 2016, p. 57)

- Think about a recent experience that you would describe as stressful (for example, a feedback conversation).
- Then read the summary chart “The Stress Response Helps You Rise to the Challenge...” above.
- Take a moment to consider which aspects of the stress response were present during or after your stressful experience. Did your body try to give you more energy? How do you know this – what sensations did you feel in your body? Did you seek out social support or contact? What did the impulse feel like? Were you motivated to act or to protect or defend someone or something you care about? How did that motivation express itself? Did you replay the incident in your mind after it was over or talk to someone about it? What emotions were present afterward – or now, as you think about the experience. Take a few minutes to describe in writing what you felt.
- Before, you might have viewed sweaty palms, need for moral support, or rumination afterward as excessive stress symptoms. Maybe you saw them as signs that you weren't handling stress well. Can you choose to rethink these same symptoms as signs your body and brain are helping you cope? If there is one part of your stress response that you particularly dislike or mistrust, consider what role it might play in helping you protect yourself, rise to a challenge, connect with others, or learn and grow. Take a few more minutes to write about your experience from this point of view.

I.4 Positive stress mindset checklist: (Brafford, 2017, p. 116)

- Acknowledge and welcome stress:** “Hello stress. I’m feeling excited. Let’s juice me up with that super-charged hormone mix that will help me be awesome today.”
- You are jittery because you care.** Remember that you’re feeling jittery because you’re doing something important that you care about. It’s a good thing.
- Positively channel your energy.** Think or say, “I’m excited!” Don’t bother telling yourself to calm down. It won’t work and will waste all that good energy that can fuel your performance.
- Think about your strengths.** Give self-efficacy a boost by acknowledging your personal strengths and remembering the times in the past when you successfully handled similar challenges.
- Think about your values.** The night before your big event, take 15 minutes to write about your values. Just before your event, look at the list of values you created for yourself.
- Imagine the support of your loved ones.** Remember the research that taught us that hills seem less steep when we think about times that our loved ones supported us.

I.5 Write about your values (McGonigal, 2016, p. 72)

- Review the list of values below, and choose three that feel most important to you (add ones if you think they are missing).
- Pick one of the values and write about it for 10 minutes. Describe why this value is important to you. You could also write about how you express this value in your everyday life, including what you did today (e.g., after a difficult feedback conversation). If you are facing a difficult decision, you could write about how this value might guide you.
- You may want to repeat this exercise with the other two values at another time, perhaps the next time you feel overwhelmed by stress.
- If this exercise doesn’t initially appeal to you, make sure that you have chosen to focus on a value that really speaks to your heart. Perhaps something you would like to experience more of, or a personal priority, or a personal strength.
- This exercise has been used in a variety of studies; it has been shown to beneficially help how people relate to stress.

| | | | |
|----------------|----------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| Acceptance | Discovery | Health | Patience |
| Accountability | Efficiency | Helping Others | Peace/Nonviolence |
| Adventure | Enthusiasm | Honesty | Personal growth |
| Art or Music | Equality | Honor | Pets/Animals |
| Athletics | Ethical Action | Humor | Politics |
| Celebration | Excellence | Independence | Positive Influence |
| Challenge | Fairness | Innovation | Practicality |
| Collaboration | Faith/Religion | Integrity | Problem-Solving |
| Commitment | Family | Interdependence | Reliability |
| Community | Freedom | Joy | Resourcefulness |
| Compassion | Friendship | Leadership | Self-Compassion |
| Competence | Fun | Lifelong Learning | Self-Reliance |
| Cooperation | Generosity | Love | Simplicity/Thrift |
| Courage | Gratitude | Loyalty | Strength |
| Creativity | Happiness | Mindfulness | Tradition |
| Curiosity | Hard Work | Nature | Trust |
| Discipline | Harmony | Openness | Willingness |
| | | | Wisdom |

I.6 Turn threat into a challenge (McGonigal, 2016, p. 120)

- Viewing the stress response as a resource can transform the physiology of fear into the biology of courage. It can turn a threat into a challenge and can help you do your best under pressure. Even when the stress doesn't feel helpful -- as in the case of anxiety -- welcoming it can transform it into something that is helpful: more energy, more confidence, and a greater willingness to act.
- You can apply this strategy to your own life anytime you notice signs of stress. When you feel your heart pounding or your breath quickening, realize that it is your body's way of trying to give you more energy. If you notice tension in your body, remind yourself that the stress response gives you access to your strength. Sweaty palms? Remember what it felt like to go on your first date -- palms sweat when you're close to something you want. If you have butterflies in your stomach, know that they are a sign of meaning. Your digestive tract is lined with hundreds of millions of nerve cells that respond to your thoughts and emotions. Butterflies are your guts' way of saying, "this matters." Let yourself remember why this moment matters to you.
- Whatever the sensations of stress are, worry less about trying to make them go away, and focus more on what you're going to do with the energy, strength, and drive that stress gives you. Your body is providing you access to all your resources to help you rise to this challenge. Instead of taking a deep breath to calm down, take a deep breath to sense the energy that is available to you. Then put the energy to use, and ask yourself, "What action can I take, or what choice can I make, that is consistent with my goals in this moment?"

I.7 Turn adversity into a resource (McGonigal, 2016, p. 195)

- Think about a stressful experience from your past where you persevered or learned something important. Take a few moments to think about what that experience taught you about your strengths and how to cope with stress. Then, set a timer for fifteen minutes and write about the experience, address all or any of the following questions:
 - What did you do that helped you get through it?
 - What personal resources did you draw on, and what strengths did you use?
 - Did you seek out information, advice, or any other kind of support?
 - What did this experience teach you about how to deal with adversity?
 - How did the experience make you stronger?
- Now think about a current experience you are struggling through.
 - Which of these strengths and resource can you draw on in this situation?
 - Are there any coping skills or strengths that you want to develop? If so, how could you begin to do so using this situation as an opportunity to grow?

I.8 Tell your own story of growth and resilience (McGonigal, 2016, p. 216)

One of the best ways to notice, value and express your own growth is to reflect on a difficult time in your life as if you were a journalist writing a restorative narrative. How would a storyteller describe the challenges you have faced? What would a good observer see as a turning point in your story – a moment when you were able to reengage or find meaning? If a journalist were to follow you for a week, what evidence would the journalist see of your strength and resilience? What do you do that demonstrates your growth or expresses your values? What would your friends, family, coworkers or other who have witnessed your journey say to describe how you have changed or grown? What objects in your home or office would a photojournalist want to photograph as evidence of your growth or resilience?

Consider taking some time to write your own story about any experience that you view as both stressful and source of growth or meaning. OR use any medium that appeals to you, such as a photo collage, drawing or video. This exercise can be very personal or private, and you never need to share it with anyone. But it can also be a wonder exercise to share with others.

I.9 Find an Upside in Adversity (McGonigal, 2016, p. 206)

Choose an ongoing difficult situation in your life or a recent stressful experience. What, if any, benefits have you experienced from this stress? In what ways is your life better because of it? Have you changed in any positive ways because of trying to cope with this experience?

Below is a list of the most commonly reported positive changes experienced in response to hardship, loss, trauma. Consider whether you see any signs of these benefits in yourself:

- *A sense of personal strength.* How has this experience revealed your strength? Has this changed how you think about yourself and what you are capable of? How have you personally grown or changed because of having to cope with this experience? What strengths have you used to help yourself cope?
- *Increased appreciation in life.* Do you feel a greater appreciation for life or a greater enjoyment of everyday experiences? Are you more likely to savor simple moments? Do you feel more willing to take meaningful risks? Have you begun to give more time and energy to the things that bring you joy or matter most to you?
- *Spiritual growth.* In what ways has this experience helped you grow spiritually? Have you experienced a renewal of faith or reconnected with communities that are meaningful to you? Have you deepened your understanding of or willingness to rely on, a religious or spiritual tradition? Do you feel that you have grown in wisdom or perspective?
- *Enhanced social connections and relationships with others.* How has this experience strengthened your relationships with any friends, family, or other members of your community? Has it given you more empathy for other people's struggles? Has it motivated you to make any positive changes in your relationships?
- *Identifying new possibilities and life directions.* What positive changes have you made in your life because of this experience? Have you set any new goals? Have you taken time to do things you might not have considered before? Have you found a new sense of purpose or been able to channel your experience into helping others?

Appendix J Meaning Resources

J.1 Job Crafting: The Center for Positive Organizations at the University of Michigan offers a workbook to help you do your own job crafting: <http://positiveorgs.bus.umich.edu/cpo-tools/job-crafting-exercise/>

J.2 Take the I-COPPE survey: <https://www.funforwellness.com/fun/#video>
The Fun for Wellness website includes suggestions for how to interpret and take action based on the results of the I-COPPE survey: <https://www.funforwellness.com/fun/>

J.3 Simon Sinek Ted Talk. Simon Sinek offers a thought-provoking talk on the power of “Why.” https://www.ted.com/talks/simon_sinek_how_great_leaders_inspire_action

Appendix K HQC, Psychological Safety, Active Constructive Responding

What are High-Quality Connections (HQC)? Connections between people that include positive regard, trust, and engagement on both sides. When engaged in high-quality connections, people feel more engaged, open and competent (Dutton, 2006). Any point of contact with another person can potentially be a high-quality connection.

Benefits of High-Quality Connections:

- HQCs promote individual well-being and support their work performance. People in HQCs experience better physical and psychological health.
- People in HQCs are better able to do their jobs, possibly because increased feelings of psychological safety allow them to concentrate more fully on their work. It also seems to foster an environment where people can express feelings of confusion and uncertainty, so that these can be resolved.
- People learn more easily when they are in HQCs with others; they experience positive emotions, which facilitates learning. It also creates more opportunities for organizations to communicate purpose to employees and employees to feel engaged with that purpose.

K.1 How to Create High-Quality Connections Checklist (Dutton, 2006)

(Use this list to evaluate your organization; identify top two behaviors you think you should improve)

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>1. Respectful engagement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Being physically and emotionally present: giving people attention ○ Convey presence: Paying attention to the other person. Conveying that presence through body language (e.g., turning yourself to them, looking at them), and availability (paying attention); really listening ○ Being genuine or your authentic self • Communication: providing supportive statements, ACR, recognizing effort, displaying interest <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Active listening/ listening carefully <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ paraphrasing ▪ summarizing ▪ clarifying ▪ being empathetic / ACR ▪ acknowledge feelings, ▪ actively try to understand what the person is telling you, ▪ responding to what you hear ○ Soliciting feedback ○ Supportive communication: expressing yourself in a way the other person can hear, communicating respectfully ○ Making requests rather than demands ○ Be specific in communications: be descriptive and avoid evaluation, describe the outcomes associated with behavior, stay focused on solutions | <p>3. Trust:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acting towards others in a way that conveys belief in their integrity, dependability, and benevolence • Trust increases with use: if one person acts towards another in a trusting way the action creates a beneficial cycle • Convey trust by making our vulnerability visible, allow others to see us taking risks • My act of trusting you encourages you to trust me; my act encourages you to see me are more reliable and helpful; you see me as trustworthy <p>Build trust by what we say and do, and what we don't say and don't do:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share valuable information • Self-disclosure: let other know what we value, what we want and what we are willing to do encourages others to reciprocate • Using inclusive language • Don't accuse others of bad intent • Don't demean others <p>Trusting by what we do:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give away control, e.g., delegate decisions and tasks, and trust the right things will happen • Give access to valuable resources • Solicit and act on input • Share resources • Grant access • Seek input • Let others exercise influence • Develop joint goals <p>Trusting by what we don't do:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid micromanaging • Avoiding punishing people for errors • Ignoring input, demeaning, accusing of bad intent, acting inconsistently |
| <p>2. Task enabling:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coach people to help them develop their skills and abilities • Support others by making connections • Be accommodating and flexible • Use role-modeling and encouragement to support desired behaviors around task enabling | <p>4. Playing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaged in positive social activities • Approach work with a sense of joy and excitement |

K.2 High-Quality Connections Audit: (Dutton: 2018)

Use the following questions to help you assess your connections and those in your workplace.

A. Identify people with whom you consistently have HQCs

- What patterns do you notice?
- Who is on your list?
- Who is not on your list?
- Can you draw any conclusions from this?

B. Task enabling audit

| Who do you enable? | How? | What is easiest? | What is most challenging? | |
|---------------------------------|------|------------------|---------------------------|--|
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| Who else do you wish to enable? | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |

| Who is enabling you? | How? | Do they know they are enabling you? |
|---|------|-------------------------------------|
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| What forms of enabling work best for you? | | |

| Biggest hindrances to task enabling? | Most important factors that encourage/improve task enabling? |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |

C. Respectful Engagement Audit:

| Enablers of respectful engagement | Disablers of respectful engagement | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

K.3 Active-Constructive Response Exercise (Reivich & Salzberg, 2018)

- Capitalization is the act of sharing good news with other people (Gable et al., 2006). Capitalization has positive effects on the person sharing the information; it leads to an increase in positive affect, greater life satisfaction, and feelings of belonging.
- The benefits of sharing good news partially depends on the response of the listener.
- When the listener responds by showing interest and positive emotions, the teller feels good, and the relationship between the teller and listener is strengthened.
- This behavior is called Active Constructive Responding (ACR); in studies, when a partner gave an active constructive response, both partners experienced greater satisfaction, improved relationships quality, and fewer conflicts (Gable et al., 2006).

An active-constructive response is one of four styles of response; responding to positive news with one of the other styles results in either neutral or detrimental impact to the relationship. Here’s a diagram that illustrates the 4 response types and what they might sound like:

| | Constructive | Destructive |
|----------------|--|--|
| Active | Authentic Support “That’s great news!” Tell me more about it..” | Negative Focus “New job? Do you think you can handle it?” |
| Passive | Quiet, Understated Support “That’s nice.” | Ignoring the Event “Wait till you hear about my day!” |

Here are some ways to respond in an active-constructive manner to good news from a co-worker:

- Be curious, ask questions; ask for details: “How did it happen?” “What does this mean for you?”
- Ask about facts or emotions: “How do feel?” “What makes you most proud / excited / happy?”
- Ask them to tell you a story (or help them tell the story to themselves): “How did you find out?” “What happened next?” “What was the best part about it?”
- Use active listening skills
- Give them your focus and attention (put down your phone, look at them)
- Don’t make assumptions
- Acknowledge and validate: “You sound really happy” “You must feel really proud”

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>ACR Exercise, with a partner:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find a partner and each share good news • Each practice responding with each of the 4 styles (event the unpleasant ones) • Debrief: how did each of the responses feel? | <p>ACR Exercise, build your skills:</p> <p>Look for opportunities use ACR with family, friends or co-workers and notice if the quality of your interactions change:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Before a meeting starts, ask how someone’s weekend went, then respond with ACR • At dinner with your family, try out ACR |
|---|--|

K.4 Psychological Safety Exercise (K. Wessling & E. Weight, personal communication, May 17, 2018*)

Step 1 - Request: Ask individuals if they would like to engage in a fun group exercise. How you position the exercise will be dependent on the people involved. For example, it may not be effective to promote this exercise as a “bonding” session with a group of chemists at Dow Materials; however, it may be effective to promote it as “offering greater team cohesion.”

Step 2 - Instructions: Each person in a “Round” will answer the questions on the Psychological Safety Cards. A “Round” is each person take turns sharing without discussion from others. It is called a “Round” because usually people take turns in order around a circle (if there are more than 2 people; otherwise, they just take turns).

Psychological safety questions (print on cards) include:

- If I could only eat one food for a year...
- I’m happiest when...
- When I’m new to a group I tend to...
- A situation where I remember feeling excluded was...
- A situation where I remember feeling included was...
- What you probably don’t know about me is...
- That nagging voice inside my head causes me the most suffering by saying...
- What I most want to say to you before the end this activity is...

There is no discussion and each person should only take 30-60 seconds to share. A long drawn out story is not effective as it reduces engagement.

Step 3 - Begin Sharing: With Psychological Safety Question Deck, the organizer or conversation initiator reads out the first question. For example, “If I could only eat one food a year, it would be” Then in a round, each person shares their unique response. Notice that the first question is light, fun, and not intimidating. The questions will gradually become more vulnerable and each person will navigate how they would like to answer it.

Step 4 - Continue Sharing: After the first question has been answered by everyone, the question stack is passed to the next person to read and begin sharing. Again, everyone shares on the question. This process is continued with the subsequent questions. If you run out of time, it is okay. Set a goal of trying to at least share on the first four questions. If you have subsequent interactions with this same group, you can think about continuing your questions at future meetings.

Step 5 - Debrief (optional): Depending on your context, you may choose to debrief your conversation. This is particularly the case if you are training someone how to do this exercise or you would like to continue the conversation on future occasions.

TIP: You can ritualize this experience. For example, meeting check-ins or dinner table conversation can begin with one of these psychological safety questions. Over time, you will get to know each other better (even those in your own family!) and will increase in trust as you share more vulnerable aspects of yourselves.

*Adapted from A. Leonard, UIF Annual Meetup, March 2016, and L. Britos-Cavagnaro, Teaching Learning Studio, 2017.

K.5 Positive Introductions (based on Peterson, 2006).

Teams often don't take the opportunity to introduce themselves. It might be a step when a new team is forming, but some teams change membership over time. There's an opportunity to build stronger relationships simply by making sure people know a little more about each.

This exercise could be done with a new team, or with a team that has been working together, but has new members, or perhaps an existing team that just never took the time for introductions.

Instructions, facilitator should say:

"Although many of us spend a lot of time together we don't actually know all that much about each other. Usually when we do introductions people focus on where you live, how long you have been at the company, what you do with your work and free time. The objective of this exercise is to learn more about each other as people."

"In a minute, I'm going to ask you to find a partner and tell your partner a story of you at your best. A story that you feel shows your strengths or values. Each partner will take turns telling their story, and reflecting for a moment on why that story is important to them, what it shows about them. The other partner should listen. When the first person has finished talking, the other person can take a moment to either ask questions to help the person savor the story, or comment about the strengths and values that they heard."

"For example, I tried this with my wife this morning. I talked about when her mom was declining with dementia, I tried to help the rest of her family deal with their feelings.... I thought this reflected my compassion. Mary Beth asked me what impact I thought I'd had on the rest of her family with my actions. She also said she thought I showed humor and creativity during that time."

"It can be a really big story of something with a dramatic or far-ranging impact, or it can be something that happened today, that was just a typical day, but illustrates you at your best."

"So...

- I'll give you a few minutes to think of a story.
- Find a partner. You'll each have 10 minutes to talk and reflect (or be reflected to); I'll tell you when 10 minutes is up and it's time to switch.
- Then we'll all regroup, and I'll ask each of you to introduce each other.
- Ok... let's take a few minutes and share what we learned about each other. So, introduce your partner by name, tell what town they live in, and then briefly share something you learned about your partner. For example, I'd say, this is Phil, he lives in Wayland, and I learned today that Phil is really compassionate."

Appendix L WOOP

(from “WOOP Playbook, 2017)

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>WISH What is an important wish that you want to accomplish? Your wish should be challenging but feasible.</p> | |
| <p>OUTCOME What will be the best result from accomplishing your wish? How will you feel? Pause and really imagine the outcome (see it as a movie in your head).</p> | |
| <p>OBSTACLE What is the main obstacle inside you that might prevent you from accomplishing your wish? Pause and really imagine the obstacle, then write it in 3-6 words.</p> | |
| <p>PLAN What an effective action to take that obstacle? What’s the first thing you will do to initiate your plan? Write a WHEN-THEN plan.</p> | |

Tips:

- It’s important to really see the outcome and obstacles in your head before writing your plan; this is an important step to engage your brain and motivation in helping you meet your goal.
- The obstacle you identify should be something within you, completely within your control.
- This exercise may help you prioritize your wishes: if it feels unproductive, or you can’t think of a plan, maybe this is the wrong wish right now.
- It may also help you to have someone else ask you the questions, look for a coach, or try this with a partner.
- Keep all your answers short.
- Practice regularly.

Appendix M Mindfulness

Free and low-cost resources are widely available. This is a very short list of places to start looking.

Consortium for Health and Military Performance (CHAMP) provides a variety of free resources related to stress reduction, and mental and emotional fitness:

- <https://www.hprc-online.org/page/mental-fitness/performance-psychology>
- <https://www.hprc-online.org/mp3s/progressive-muscle-relaxation>
- <https://www.hprc-online.org/articles/inhale-exhale-repeat-control-your-feelings-through-breathing>

Apps. Many of these offer free content before you need to pay:

- Headspace
- 10% Happier
- Insight Timer

Here's a list of university websites that offer free mindfulness and relaxation resources

- Brigham Young Counseling and Psychological Services
- Dartmouth College Student Wellness Centre
- University of Wisconsin – Madison University Health Services
- UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center
- University of Iowa: Mind/Body Spa

Appendix N Goal-Setting

S.M.A.R.T. Goals Template

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>Initial Goal <i>Write a draft idea for your goal</i></p> | |
| <p>Specific <i>What do you want to accomplish? Who needs to be included? When do you want to do this? Why is this a goal?</i></p> | |
| <p>Measurable <i>How can you measure progress and know if you've successfully met your goal?</i></p> | |
| <p>Achievable <i>Do you have the skills required to achieve the goal? If not, can you obtain them? What is the motivation for this goal? Is the amount of effort required on par with what the goal will achieve?</i></p> | |
| <p>Relevant <i>Why am I setting this goal now? Is it aligned with overall objectives?</i></p> | |
| <p>Time-bound <i>What's the deadline and is it realistic?</i></p> | |
| <p>SMART GOAL <i>Write the final version of your goal</i></p> | |

(Esposito, 2015)

Appendix O Deliberate Practice

K.1 Expert Practice Playbook: The Character Lab at the University of Pennsylvania has created a helpful tool to learn more about deliberate practice.

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5980a22e9de4bb9ca8bce449/t/5ad7ab34758d464041c2494b/1524083508798/characterlab_expertpractice.pdf

K.2 Create an imagery script. The Human Performance Resource Center, a division of the U.S. military, offers an excellent tool to walk you through the process of creating your own imagery script that you could use to prepare for a feedback conversation.

https://www.hprc-online.org/sites/default/files/HPRC_Impery_Script_120816_508.pdf

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