Critical Feedback Tool for Leaders

Learning to receive and act on critical feedback in a productive manner is an essential skill for leaders on the grow. Without a planned set of coordinated actions and practice, leaders run the risk of being unable to accept critical feedback, shutting down when critical feedback is received, or impacting the way he or she is coached for future development. Leadership maturity involves the ability to accept critical feedback as a tool for growth instead of a judgment of one's value to the organization, future potential, or ability.
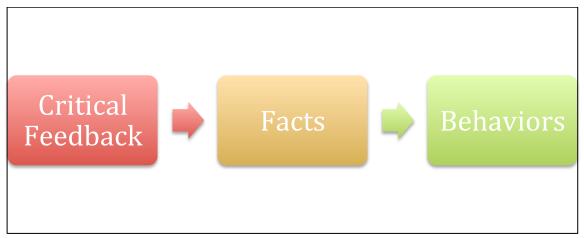
Phase 1: Receiving the Critical Feedback

Fig. 1 The CFB Model

Step 1: As the critical feedback is shared with you, listen in for behaviors, actions, and facts that reflect your work or work that should have been done. If at all possible, review the critical feedback with a thought partner. Write down what was shared with you and allow your thought partner to read it. Provide contextual information as necessary.

Step 2: Identify fact-based information in the critical feedback. That is, note what particular actions where cited as opportunities for improvement. For example, punctuality, timeliness of work, work quality, knowledge or skill deficiencies, soft skill opportunities based on work events. If you find difficulty in identifying fact-based information within the critical feedback, this suggests a gap between the expectations set for your performance and your understanding of your work. Work with your supervisor to clarify expectation.

Step 3: Identify your leadership behaviors that contributed to the critical feedback. For example:
- Submission of late work
- Submission for poor quality work

- Difficulty working with others on a collaborative project
- Lack of knowledge to execute action to meet expectation

Phase 2: Acting On the Feedback for Growth and Improvement

Step 4: Build a plan for improvement by working backwards using the CFB model in reverse. Began by identifying and listing the behaviors you believe to be necessary to improve upon the actions cited in your critical feedback. Explicitly name them and plan for how you will monitor your behavior to ensure alignment between what you are trying to improve and what you are doing to improve.

Step 5: Identify facts related to your anticipated behavior. These may be if-then statements. For example, "If I regularly attend the team meeting and participate by contributing at least three suggestions each time, my contribution to the team can be documented and improved. Decide on a time period for which you will work to implement the newly identified behaviors.

Step 6: Request critical feedbacks after the identified time period for improvement action has ended and ask specifically for feedback on the behaviors, actions, skills or needed improvements you have worked to implement. Based on the information, go back to phase one if improvement is not accomplished or a second cycle of action is needed.
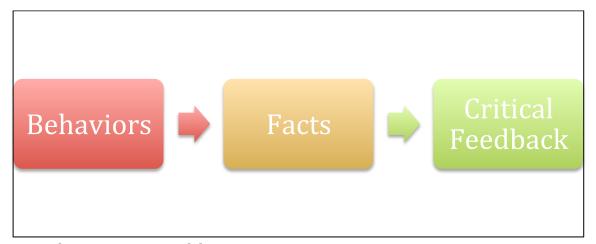

Fig. 2 The Reverse CFB Model