Award-winning leadership coach Marshall Goldsmith explains why feedforward works better than feedback in helping your team achieve positive change.
http://marshallgoldsmithfeedforward.com/

Instead of Feedback, Try Feedforward to Boost Team Performance

Leaders have to give feedback and performance appraisals have to be made. This is a given. Yet, there are many times when feedforward is preferable to feedback in day-to-day interactions. Feedforward is a group exercise, the purpose of which is to provide individuals with suggestions for the future and to help them achieve a positive change in the behaviors they select. Aside from its effectiveness and efficiency, feedforward can make life a lot more enjoyable.

Here are 10 reasons participants in my classes see feedforward as fun and helpful as opposed to painful, embarrassing, or uncomfortable. These descriptions provide a great explanation of why feedforward can often be more useful than feedback as a developmental tool.

1. We can change the future. We can't change the past. Feedforward helps people envision and focus on a positive future, not a failed past. By giving people ideas on how they can be even more successful (as opposed to visualizing a failed past), we can increase their chances of achieving this success in the future.

2. It can be more productive to help people learn to be "right," than prove they were "wrong." Negative feedback often becomes an exercise in "let me prove you were wrong." Feedforward, on the other hand, is almost always seen as positive because it focuses on solutions - not problems.

3. Feedforward is especially suited to successful people. Successful people like getting ideas that are aimed at helping them achieve their goals. They tend to resist negative judgment. I have observed many successful executives respond to (and even enjoy) feedforward. I am not sure that these same people would have had such a positive reaction to feedback.

4. Feedforward can come from anyone who knows how to give it. It does not require personal experience with the individual. One very common positive reaction to the previously described exercise is that participants are amazed by how much they can learn from people that they don't know!

5. People do not take feedforward as personally as feedback. In theory, constructive feedback is supposed to "focus on the performance, not the person." In practice, almost all feedback is taken personally (no matter how it is delivered). Feedforward cannot involve a personal critique, since it is discussing something that has not yet happened!

6. Feedback can reinforce personal stereotyping and negative self-fulfilling prophecies. Feedforward can reinforce the possibility of change. Feedback can reinforce the feeling of failure. Negative feedback can be used to reinforce the message, "this is just the way you are." Feedforward is based on the assumption that the receiver of suggestions can make positive changes in the future.

7. Face it! Most of us hate getting negative feedback, and we don't like to give it. I have reviewed summary 360 feedback reports from many companies. Items like "provides developmental feedback in a timely manner" and "encourages and accepts constructive criticism" always score near the bottom on co-worker satisfaction with leaders. It's clear that leaders are not very good at giving or receiving negative feedback. It is unlikely that this will change in the near future.

8. Feedforward tends to be much faster and more efficient than feedback. An excellent technique for giving ideas to successful people is to say, "Here are four ideas for the future. Please accept these in the positive spirit that they are given and ignore what doesn't make sense for you." With this approach almost no time gets wasted on judging the quality of the ideas or "proving that the ideas are wrong".

9. Feedforward can be a useful tool to apply with managers, peers, and team members. Rightly or wrongly, feedback is associated with judgment. This can lead to very negative - or even career-limiting - unintended consequences when applied to managers or peers. Feedforward does not imply superiority of judgment. As such it can be easier to hear from a person who is not in a position of power or authority.

10. People tend to listen more attentively to feedforward than feedback. One participant in the feedforward exercise noted, "I think that I listened more effectively in this exercise than I ever do at work!" When asked why, he responded, "Normally, when others are speaking, I am so busy composing a reply that will make sure that I sound smart that I am not fully listening to what the other person is saying. I am just composing my response. In feedforward, the only reply that I am allowed to make is 'thank you.' Since I don't have to worry about composing a clever reply, I can focus all of my energy on listening to the other person!"

Quality communication--between and among people at all levels and every department and division--is the glue that holds organizations together. By using feedforward--and by encouraging others to use it--leaders can dramatically improve the quality of communication in their organizations, ensuring that the right message is conveyed, and that those who receive it are receptive to its content. The result is a much more dynamic, much more open organization--one whose employees focus on the promise of the future rather than dwelling on the mistakes of the past. Try it for yourself and see!

Using Feed Forward for Development

Dr. Marshall Goldsmith

One element that I believe is crucial to the coaching process is a simple philosophy Feed Forward. This is a positive, upbeat, focused and fast tool for development that is the centerpiece of successful coaching.

How does Feed Forward work I'll describe an exercise I've done with literally tens of thousands of people around the world. And by the way, try this out with your own teams. Try this out with your own groups. You know what you're going to find out It always works.

How does the exercise work:

- First, stand up in front of the group and say:

  "We're now gonna practice something called Feed Forward.

 Now let's say I'm doing this in front of a group of a hundred people. And by the way, I've done
 this from anywhere from 6 to 6,000. The rules are very simple.

- **Rule number 1, no feedback about the past.**

We spend too much time talking about the past. How many of you have been impressed with your wife, husband or partner's near photographic memory of your previous sins Which have been documented or will be shared in a repetitive and useless way.

- **Rule 2 is the hard rule. You can't judge or critique ideas.**

- In the Feed Forward exercise, everyone is asked to pick one behavior to improve, such as, I want to be a better listener, or I want to give recognition.

- **They're asked to ask as many people as they can for input about how they can improve.**

<u>No feedback about the past, only ideas for the future. They cannot judge or critique ideas</u>.

- At the end, all they can say is, Thank you.

What happens: Let's pretend we're participating in Feed Forward. I come to you and I say, I want to be a better listener. Give me a couple of ideas for the future. You give me a couple of very positive, focused, quick ideas for the future. What do I say Thank you. And then I say, What do you want to get better at You say, I'd like to get better at recognition. I give you a couple of ideas. What do you say Thank you. Shake hands, rush off and talk to somebody else. I make this into kind of a fun, competitive exercise. Whoever talks to the most people wins the prize.

At the end of the exercise, and I've done this with groups of all sizes, I look at the audience and I say:

- Okay, I'm gonna ask you, when I go like this (gesture), to shout out one word loudly and simultaneously. And it's gonna be a word that completes a sentence.
- I'll begin a sentence: You think of the word, I go like this (gesture), you shout out the word.
- So I say, This Feed Forward exercise was (gesture) _____
- People all shout out words like positive, useful, helpful or even fun.
- Then I say, Okay, break up into little groups. Now let's discuss why was this fun

By the way, what's the last word you'd think to describe any feedback exercise Fun. Has everyone ever called you on the phone and said, I have some feedback I'd like to share with you. Come to my office, and you said, Fun Fun Fun Fun is the last word you'd think of. You know, I've done this for thousands of people. Invariably, 95 of the people, no matter what country I'm in, say it's positive, useful, helpful and fun. So I say, Why

- They break up in groups. They talk about it.
    - Here's some classic reasons 1) It's talking about a future I can change. Not a past I can't change anyway. 2) No judging. I felt good about talking about things with people when I knew I wasn't gonna be critiqued and judged all the time. People just said thank you.

By the way, in the exercise, if I'd allowed people to judge or critique comments, we'd spend twice as much time debating the comments as listening to the comments. One gentleman said, I listen better in this exercise than I almost ever have in my life. I asked him why. He said, Normally when others speak, I'm so busy composing my next comment to prove how smart I am, I'm not listening. I'm just composing. He said It is amazing how much better I can listen when I know all I need to say is thank you.

Well I go through and people talk about all kinds of learnings. Another one is this. A common misconception of coaching is I have to have a deep knowledge of you to help you. I've done this with people who've never met each other and said they've learned fantastic things from people they've never met.

A bigger misconception of coaching is they have to be superior to you to help you. At the end of the exercise I ask people, "How many of you near the end of this exercise begin to feel the need to say to other people in this room, I have this problem too. I have this problem too." They all do. And it doesn't matter what country I'm in. Saudi Arabia, Thailand, China, Switzerland. I've done it all around the world. It always works. Even though our cultures may be different, at the human dimension, we're very, very similar.

So how does Feed Forward work It's real simple.

- Get in the habit of figuring out what is the one behavior that's gonna make the biggest positive difference in your life. Get in the habit of asking people for input. Just like I've been talking about.

- <u>Learn how to just sit there, shut up and say thank you. Hear what they have to say.</u>

- And to make the process work even better, have everybody participate. Make it a two way, not one way process. Think how much different this feels.

- You come to me and say, I want to get better at X, give me a couple of ideas. I give you a couple of ideas.. I say, I can get better too. I want to get better at Y, give me a couple of ideas. You see how different that feels than you saying, "you get better, I have nothing to improve."

The final thing about Feed Forward is:

- that people like it and it's positive
- it's simple
- it's focused
- it's fast
- its great for smart, busy people that don't have a lot of time