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Dear Reader,

One of the cornerstones of human interactions is communication, and within it, how we express our thoughts and feelings, how we make meaning of the words and behaviors of others, and how we react to them based on our interpretations.

Much has been said and written about feedback, still one of the most needed, and difficult, skills to acquire.

In this issue our Brazilian colleague, Boris Drizin, shares his recommendations and tips about giving and seeking feedback.

We hope you find them useful and that you enjoy the reading!

Enjoy the reading!

Isabel Rimanoczy
Editor

Quote of the Month
"It is not advisable, James, to venture unsolicited opinions. You should spare yourself the embarrassing discovery of their exact value to your listener. "   *Ayn Rand, Atlas Shrugged, 1957*   *US (Russian-born) novelist (1905 - 1982)*

LIM NEWS

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Giving and Asking For Feedback:
A process to connect with others

By Boris Drizin

The quality of our relationships and the effectiveness of our interpersonal communication depends largely on our ability to seek and receive feedback, as well as on our skills to provide it. Good relationships are strongly dependent on good interpersonal communication, and vice-versa.

Without feedback there is no communication. If we don't get feedback we don't understand others and we cannot be understood by them. We need to know how others perceive us and we need to let them know how we see them. That means that we need to develop the skill and openness to seek and receive feedback in an appropriate manner, as well as give it in an appropriate manner to others. Appropriate means here to have the right attitude, the right words and actions, to balance it and to have the right timing.

Communication is a complex process, difficult to anticipate. We are not always able to transmit what we intend, neither do we always interpret correctly what others are trying to convey, whether through words or non verbal language, such as body language - gestures, smiles -, tone of voice, behavior and actions.

About seeking and giving feedback

When we seek feedback we are trying to learn how our actions, behavior or words are being perceived, what reactions they generate and how they are affecting others. We want to be able to see the world through the eyes of the others.

To provide feedback on the other hand, is to offer information about the impact the other has on us. By doing so we reveal our thoughts and feelings, and expose ourselves to others. Both processes, seeking and providing feedback, generate personal and interpersonal development. When one of them is preferred to the other the imbalance generates tensions, anger or resentment, which negatively impacts our relationships and our performance. Mutual respect and understanding is obtained when we can see each other through each others' eyes. We become aware of our own blind spots, at the same time that we are able to show a part of ourselves (feelings and thoughts) that are not always evident.

The different faces of feedback

Feedback can take one or several of these forms:
- Confirmation of a message that was received or of an action that took place
- Correction of a previous message or of an action
- Addition of information missing in the original message
- Opinions, conclusions or judgments about a message received, about a perceived behavior or

an action that took place

Tips for receiving feedback

To handle the challenges of receiving feedback, consider the following recommendations:

- Before asking for feedback, be sure that you are open to receive information that may alter the way you see yourself
- Be specific on the kind of feedback you are seeking
- Be ready and willing to consider changes in your behavior
- Ask for it when you are not feeling defensive, and seek it from individuals who you trust will be candid
- Learn to listen, refraining from intense emotional or defensive reactions
- Be aware that the person who is giving you the feedback is describing only his/her perception of a situation. But also be aware that the feelings s/he is expressing are very real
- Check your understanding by asking questions, requesting specific examples, details. Specially pay attention to what you don't understand about the feedback, what you don't agree with. Share your reaction while avoiding defensiveness, anger or feeling hurt
- Clarify, explain your actions, correct erroneous perceptions that others may be having about your behavior
- Feel free to reject painful feedback, or when it feels useless, or when it is unsolicited.

Tips for giving feedback

When you are considering giving feedback, review the following suggestions:

- Before giving feedback, review your own motivations and ensure that the other person is prepared and ready to hear you and is open and willing to listen to you.

- Establish a trusting relationship

- Do it with the intent of being supportive

- Make the information useful for the recipient

- Use "I" instead of "you", to indicate that your statements are expressing your own perceptions, thoughts or feelings

- Describe the behavior of the other and how you perceived or interpreted it.

- Avoid judging

- Balance strengths and weaknesses

- Be specific

- Give your rationale, your reasons. Explain why you think the way you do

- Be timely, use recent examples. The impact diminishes over time

- The aim is to provide help: be sensitive to how your words are being received

- After providing your feedback, give time to reply; ask if you are being clear

- Be yourself, share your feelings candidly, but be empathic to the perspective of the other person

- When appropriate, maintain a problem solving attitude

- Feedback should be seen as an opportunity to improve mutual understanding. It should be a dialogue, not a monologue.

- Learn to give friendly, caring feedback, avoiding aggression or emotional stress

Tips for opening a feedback space

Frequently the most difficult part is how to address it. We suggest some opening questions that can help in creating a positive atmosphere, essential for useful feedback.

When seeking feedback:

- Could you share with me your observations (feelings) about...
- Could I get your thoughts about...
- Would you mind sharing with me how...
- Do you mean that...
- From what I understand, it is about....
- Could you help me understand...
- Is there anything else that...
- Do you think it would be better if ....
- Do you have some suggestions about...
- Would it be possible to....
- Do you think this is due to my....
- Do you think this happened because I....
- How are you feeling about....
- How do you think he is feeling...

When giving feedback:

- Are you interested in discussing how...
- Can I share with you some thoughts (feelings) about...
- How are you feeling about...
- Are you interested in hearing how I am feeling about...
- Do you have any questions about...
- Would you be interested in my input about...
- Do you have some time to discuss...
- Is this a good time?

- Would you like to hear my thoughts/comments about...
- Am I making my meaning clear?
- How does this sound?
- Has anyone expressed similar reflections about...
- Do you have some ideas why...
- Have you considered....
- Do you think it could be helpful if...
- Would you like it if I ...
- Would you prefer that I don't....
- Is it possible that...
- Did I say something that made you....
- I am under the impression that ....
- Would you like to take some time to reflect on our conversation?

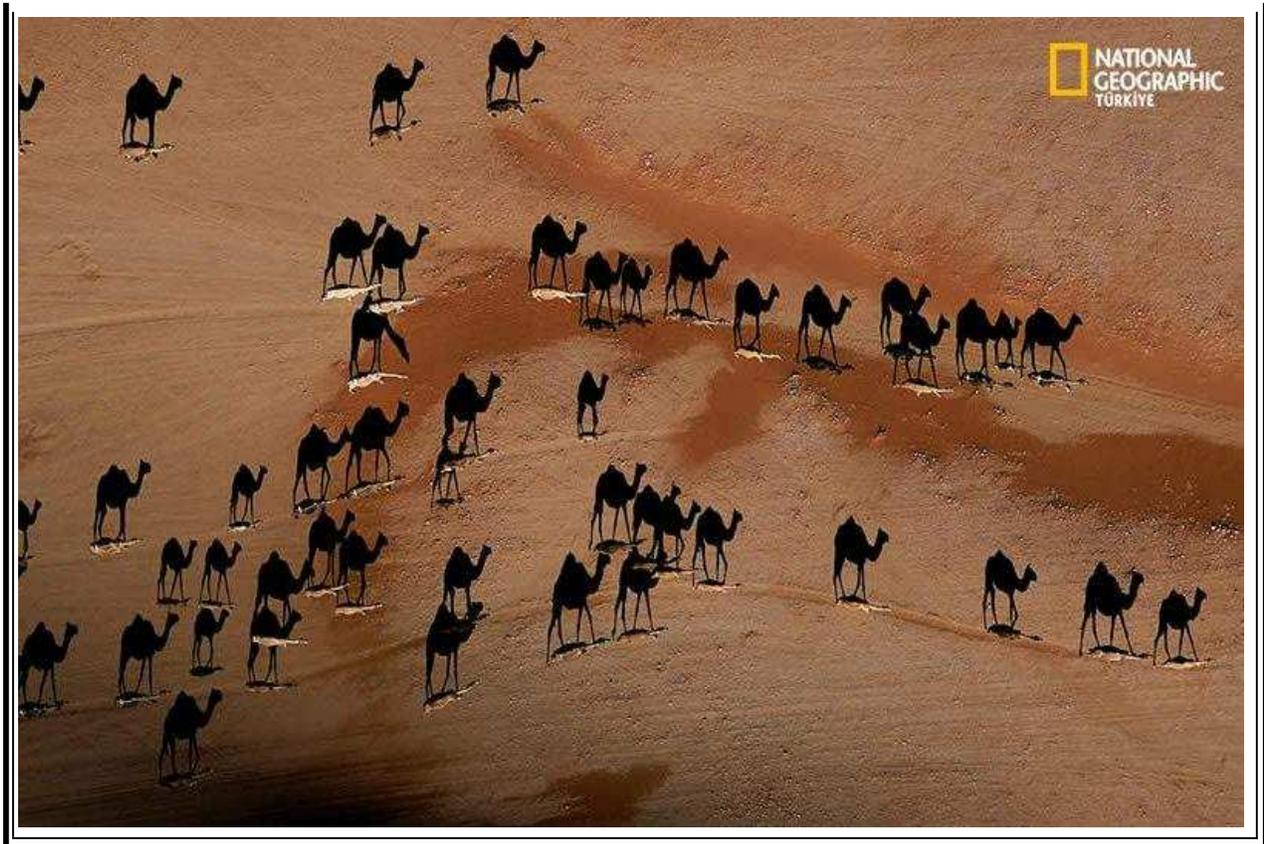*Source: Adapted and translated from the Workbook distributed in the course Emotional Intelligence Interpersonal Relationships and Teamwork, TIMING Consultoria de Gestão e Coaching, São Paulo Brazil.* www.timingconsultoria.com.br

Origins of the term

The term Feedback originates in cybernetics, a discipline that began to connect the fields of control systems, electrical network theory, logic modeling and neuroscience in the 1940s. Cybernetics studies how signals are looped back to control the systems within themselves. This loop is called the *feedback loop*. A control system usually has an input and an output. When the output of the system is fed back into the system as part of its input, it is called the "feedback".

In the domain of human behaviors, feedback not only regulates our behaviors, but it also shapes our interactions. With good feedback we are able to grow and thrive, create synergy and find personal or professional fulfillment. With poorly given feedback we build walls around us and create obstacles for ourselves and for the others. Because of little or no training in how to address difficult conversations, we often avoid giving or asking for critical feedback. The hope or illusion is that by avoiding it, it will disappear or resolve itself. This rarely occurs, and withholding feedback can create staggering problems and situations that become even more difficult to solve.

We found this image as a nice metaphor for feedback. The shadow (the impact) of our behavior can grow bigger than we imagine. Feedback is helpful when someone helps us see just how big our own shadow is. This refers to problematic but also to positive impact.

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