

## Following Up with Your ExPI Raters

**Fact:** Research on multi-rater feedback use indicates that those who follow-up with their feedback providers do better. They are more likely to sustain their development as leaders, and they are more likely to demonstrate improved performance.

But why? What is it about this follow-up that is helpful? And if it is so helpful, why is it that some people do not pursue it? We will address these questions and in the process offer some practical advice for those who have recently received ExPI feedback.

### The Benefits of Follow-up

Multi-rater feedback provides you with a comparison of your self-perceptions versus the perceptions of others, usually your supervisor, your peers, and your direct reports. How they experience your presence and influence will directly affect your effectiveness as a leader and your impact on the business.

When the feedback survey is research-based and well designed, as the ExPI is, you can also assume that the feedback you receive is focused on the “right stuff,” i.e. variables of behavior that affect vital outcome measures like employee engagement, alignment of action, and performance.

Still, there is a need to interpret these data. Perceptions of self versus others often differ. Perceptions of those within rater groups can also vary, as can perceptions between rater groups, i.e. peers versus direct reports). So, your feedback may identify key themes, but it may also raise additional questions.

Usually, in order to answer these questions follow-up conversation with feedback providers is necessary. Pursuing follow-up yields several benefits beyond the aims of clarifying and specifying feedback:



1. When you follow up after significant reflection, it conveys to the feedback providers an attitude of appreciation and sincere interest in taking their message to heart and acting upon it.
2. When you approach these conversations with care, genuine curiosity, and a non-defensive attitude, it lets others know that there is room for constructive feedback in relationships; it can be used to make things better.
3. When others are assured of our positive intentions, they may become more forthcoming and more willing to offer subsequent observations that may help inform our leadership.
4. When our subsequent attitude and actions show that we are trying to adapt our approach based on their feedback and follow-up discussion, it reinforces our credibility.
5. When others attribute sincerity, intentionality, and credibility to our developmental efforts, they are more likely to give us the benefit of the doubt, and to look for our positive intent.
6. As these kinds of changes begin, many discover that they have liberated themselves from a yoke of old assumptions, expectations, and reactions – others' perceptions can change!



## Inhibitions to Pursuing Follow-up

In the present context, we explicitly focus on “inhibitions,” not “obstacles.” For while we may perceive daunting challenges in approaching some persons for this kind of discussion, much of what discourages us from initiating follow-up is “our stuff” and not external constraints on our freedom to act.

**Inhibitions** are often founded upon **flawed logic**. Here are a few examples:

	Inhibition	Truth
1	Explicitly acknowledging and exploring vulnerabilities in the presence of a colleague may cause us to seem weak in their eyes, to lose face, or to suffer embarrassment.	Opening discussion on patterns of behavior that detract from our desired impact on others demonstrates confidence, adaptability, and sincere concern – nothing to be embarrassed about.
2	It’s hard to know how others may react; they may respond defensively, minimize or deny issues, or even seize the opportunity to “rub it in.”	There are ways to broach such discussion that greatly reduce the likelihood of encountering such reactions, and ultimately we reserve the prerogative to choose whom to engage.
3	The conversation may go in a direction we don’t want it to; e.g. it may lead to differences of opinion, tension, or to expectations that I cannot agree to or measure up to.	Follow-up conversation is primarily aimed at validating one’s interpretations, obtaining another person’s point of view, and arriving at deeper mutual understanding.
4	Talk is cheap; if others have an issue with our behavior and have already given us feedback, why would they want follow-up conversation? Isn’t it time for us to just do it?	Ultimately, others will judge us by our actions, but if we “just do it” and our understanding of “it” is not correct, then we will not have accomplished much.



## Five Principles for Follow-up with Raters

Here are five principles to guide you as you discuss Bates ExPI feedback with your raters:

1. **Collect your thoughts.** There are a number of helpful things to do right after you have received your feedback, but rushing into conversation with feedback providers is not one of them. First, seek to understand the feedback data. Second, get help from an objective third party to interpret the data and identify key themes. Third, identify the insights and questions you would like to discuss.
2. **Know your hot buttons.** Explore your feelings about the feedback, especially the aggressive and defensive feelings that lead you to explain or justify why the feedback is faulty or untrue. Do this before talking with raters and with an objective third party (coach). Then set these feelings aside. They will only interfere with constructive communication.
3. **Set the tone.** Thank your feedback providers before you meet. Let them know that you will be taking time to reflect upon the feedback and you will be getting advice as to how best to use it in your ongoing development. Let them know you will be reaching out to talk with them in a week or so to discuss what you have learned and how you intend to use it.
4. **Keep the meeting focused.** Meet in a place where you will be free from distractions. Be positive in your verbal and nonverbal behavior. Get to the point. Don't tell them "I already knew all this." Emphasize what you gained by way of insight, the feedback that was affirming and the themes that suggest opportunities for enhancing your presence and impact. Resist the temptation to ask the rater how he or she actually rated you. For example, you may say, "One theme that arose in my feedback is that I can sometimes shut down discussion. I'm not so interested in how you or any given individual rated me on the assessment, but I'm interested in your perspective: Are there ways in which I'm leading people to see me as shutting down discussion rather than encouraging dialogue?"
5. **Themes and strategies for change.** Validate your understanding of the development themes and how they might be addressed in specific, work-relevant situations and interactions. Frame these understandings as tentative, as working hypotheses. Ask for input: "What do you think? Am I on the right track? Is there something you might add concerning the theme or how to address it?"
6. **Thanks and follow-up.** Remember sustained adaptive change is a process. Keep others involved and engaged as you reshape your style of engagement with them. That's what leaders do!



## Frequently Asked Questions about Follow-up with Raters

While the principles for following up with raters make a great deal of sense, it's not always easy to translate those principles into concrete steps in specific situations. Here are some typical questions that arise about following up with raters along with suggestions on how to handle them.

### 1. *Who should I follow up with first, and how should I structure that conversation?*

We recommend that you have your first conversations with people who you know and trust—where you have a good history. This will give you an opportunity to practice going through our suggested steps with any feedback conversation:

- Thank the individual for taking the time to do your feedback.
- Let them know that you found everyone's feedback to be valuable.
- Consider acknowledging one or two themes that were positive and affirming for you.
- Make clear that you're not looking to find out who said what on the feedback.
- Share a development theme that you're looking to explore further.
- Ask for observations about this theme.
- Feel free to ask clarifying questions:
  - In what situations have you noticed me doing this?
  - What do you think the impact has been on others?
  - What would it look like if I were handling this better in the future?
- Whatever you're told, resist the temptation to explain or justify past behaviors.
- Thank the individual for their candid feedback.
- Explore whether there are ways they can help you with future feedback.

### *What might this sound like?*

"Jill, I want to thank you for taking the time to complete my ExPI assessment. I found it extremely helpful to better understand how everyone on the team appreciates my strengths as offering insight on where I could improve. There was some good news: People generally see me as someone who cares a lot about them and the greater good of our work together.

"That said, there are some areas I'd like to explore to understand more fully. Just to be clear, I really am NOT looking to find out what you or anyone else said on your assessment. My thinking is that you and I are both working toward the same goals, and you get to see me in action pretty often... So I'd really value your perspective.

"One theme that came up in the feedback is that I can be a bit too hard-driving... and that it can come across to people like I'm shutting them down and that I'm not interested in their input. Can you think of a time when I may have come across that way to others? And what ideas do you have about what I might do differently?"



## Frequently Asked Questions about Follow-up with Raters (continued)

### *2. Should I show people my whole ExPI report?*

Sometimes leaders are tempted to share their whole ExPI report with raters, particularly the manager. While you certainly are free to share your report with whomever you like, we generally believe that it's not the most constructive idea. First off, it's an overwhelming amount of information to give to someone, particularly when you also consider that they haven't been through the whole orientation and feedback process as you did. Secondly, it will make it harder to focus a rater's attention on one or two key development themes. At worst, it also could come off as a tactic that you're using to show the rater that he or she or some other group was an outlier and not aligned with the prevailing opinion about you. In short, there is little to gain and some definite drawbacks to sharing your whole report.

### *3. How do I handle the fact that I don't even know if a given person actually completed my assessment?*

Typically, at least a few of the many people nominated to rate you will not get a chance to complete the assessment. This should not keep you from following up with anyone who was nominated—or even from bringing up your feedback with others who were not nominated at all. The main thing is not who did or didn't rate you; it's what you're going to do to take action on the feedback you received. Any individual who interacts with you regularly—including family members!—may have some useful observations about your development themes. You just need to consider how to frame your question, as below.

#### *What might this sound like?*

"As you know, Jill, I recently went through an assessment of my executive presence. I found it extremely helpful to better understand how everyone on the team appreciates my strengths as offering insight on where I could improve. I was not told which people on the team were able to complete the assessment on my behalf, and frankly it's not important to me to find out. The main thing is that a couple of themes came up that I'd like to understand a little better. So even if you didn't have a chance to complete my assessment, I'd love to get your take on these themes. Would you be willing to do that for me?"

### *4. By sharing my development themes, might I be alerting others to one of my weaknesses?*

It's certainly true that most leaders have "flat sides" that some have noticed while others haven't. So it's quite possible that some of your raters may be surprised to learn that others

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see a developmental need where they perceive a strength. Still, it can be helpful to share this information with all of your raters for a few reasons. First, it can help any leader to be transparent about areas that he or she is looking to improve. Remember, one of the 90 items on the ExPI is “Accurately and realistically acknowledges his/her own vulnerabilities.” It humanizes you to make others aware of how you’re trying to improve, and people tend to be sympathetic to that tendency.

Additionally, you’re enlisting more people as trusted advisors who can give you feedback as you continue to work on your development areas. We’ve seen leaders build stronger relationships across their teams by sharing what they’re working on candidly.

#### *5. Is it fair to approach my direct reports for feedback?*

To some degree, this may depend on the nature of your relationship with your direct reports. In many cases, direct reports may worry about the consequences of sharing any information that might be upsetting to the manager. No matter how much you assure a direct report that you really want candid feedback, they may wonder what will happen if they do.

Many leaders we’ve coached have found it helpful to discuss their feedback with their team as a whole rather than approach direct reports individually. People may feel less pressured this way, particularly if you focus more on sharing the themes that you intend to work on rather than pressing them to explain why they rated you as you did. Another helpful idea is to then ask the group to share their ideas for what could be done differently in relation to this theme: In other words, focus on what a positive future could look like rather than asking them to share what they really think of what’s happened in the past.

#### *What might this sound like?*

“I want to thank all of you for taking part in my recent assessment. I found it extremely helpful to better understand how everyone on the team appreciates my strengths as offering insight on where I could improve. “

“I was really pleased to see that almost all of you feel excited about the vision I’ve laid out for the team. But one theme came up that I really want to focus on improving in the coming year. There’s a general sense that sometimes I don’t take enough time to understand what you’re all thinking and feeling about our direction—and that I’m not interested in your input. That certainly has not been my intention, but there’s no question that I’ve left most of you feeling that way. And I’m determined to make changes in these areas. I’m ready to try out some new approaches, but I’d also love to hear ideas all of you have about ways we can change up our way of running meetings, for example.” From here, you could solicit ideas or announce that you’ll be sending out an anonymous survey to get further input about the theme.

