Building Healthy Feedback Environments

How and why to deliver more frequent and productive feedback

David Yee, Executive Director of Engineering, New York Times (he/him/his)

We don't understand **feedback**.

Proprioception

Proprioception helps us

Understand where we are in space

Adjust our position

Proprioception is feedback.

Workplace feedback

Feedback is recipient-oriented.

Feedback helps us

Know how our work relates to our standards

Improve that relationship

Feedback reduces uncertainty.

Ambient feedback

Feedback should be intentional.

We don't give feedback often enough.

"Feedback Environment"

Steelman, L. A., Levy, P. E., & Snell, A. F. (2004). The feedback environment scale: Construct definition, measurement, and validation.

Feedback makes better workplaces.

- Greater sense of control

- Reduced feelings of helplessness

- Improved job satisfaction

- Improved trust in performance systems

- More effective and equitable standards

- Negative effect on team perceptions of org politics

What makes a good Feedback Environment?

1. Source credibility

2. Feedback quality

3. Feedback delivery

4. Frequency of favorable and unfavorable feedback

5. Source availability

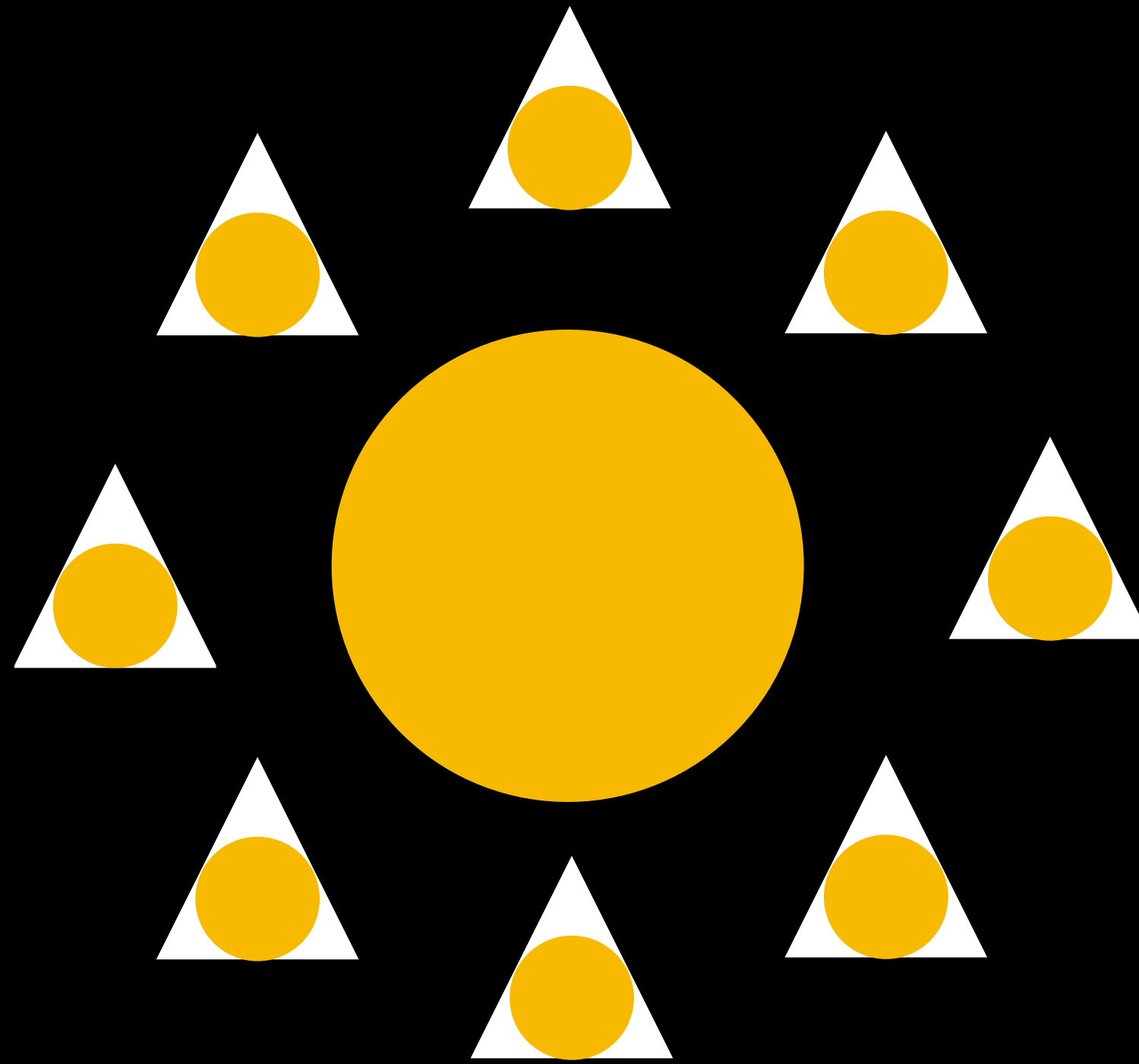6. A culture of feedback-seeking

Source

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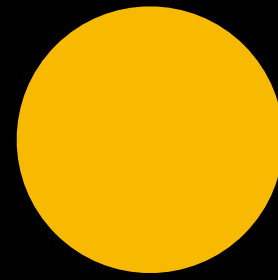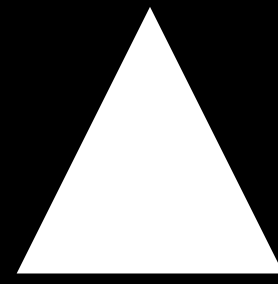
Recipient

Source

Recipient

Source

Recipient

Source Credibility and Trust

Source Credibility

- Do you understand the work?

- Do you understand the standard?

- Do you understand the recipient?

Feedback Quality

Feedback Quality

Feedback should be accurate.

Feedback Quality

Feedback should be achievable.

Feedback **Quality**

"I believe that you can do this."

Feedback Quality

Feedback should be specific and focused on the work, not the person.

Feedback Quality

Self-oriented feedback is harder to process than task-oriented feedback.

Feedback Quality

- Is your feedback accurate?

- Is it meaningfully achievable?

- Is it specific?

Feedback Delivery

Feedback Delivery

Consider the listener.

Feedback Delivery

Feedback shifts a listener's attention.

Feedback Delivery

Feedback orientation measures our individual willingness and capacity to accept feedback.

Feedback environments actually enhance feedback orientation.

Feedback Delivery

Be deliberate.

Feedback Delivery

Be deliberate.

- What information do I need to convey?

- What does my colleague require to process it?

Feedback Delivery

- Are you considering the recipient?

- Is your delivery tactful and clear?

Favorable and Unfavorable Feedback

Favorable and Unfavorable Feedback

(Feedback is recipient-oriented.)

Favorable and Unfavorable Feedback

A balance of favorable and unfavorable feedback builds trust.

Favorable and Unfavorable Feedback

We are afraid to offer unfavorable feedback.

Favorable and Unfavorable Feedback

Unfavorable feedback, when it is accurate and thoughtful, improves feedback orientation.

Favorable and **Unfavorable** Feedback

We underappreciate the importance of favorable feedback.

Favorable and **Unfavorable** Feedback

(Feedback is **proprioception**.)

Favorable and Unfavorable Feedback

Repeated instances of strongly unfavorable feedback can induce a state of learned helplessness.

Favorable and Unfavorable Feedback

Don't leave the good stuff on the table.

Favorable and Unfavorable Feedback

- Are you offering balanced feedback?

- Is it frequent?

- Are there favorable examples?

- Unfavorable?

Source Availability

Source Availability

Frequent and available

Source Availability

(Feedback should be intentional.)

Source Availability

- Are you making time for feedback?

- Are you willing to offer it?

- Do your colleagues know that?

A Culture of Feedback-Seeking

A Culture of Feedback-Seeking

Why don't we seek feedback?

- We are afraid it will draw unfavorable attention

- We are afraid it makes us look incompetent

A Culture of Feedback-Seeking

Strong feedback-seeking behaviors and feedback orientation correspond to improved performance.

A Culture of Feedback-Seeking

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A Culture of Feedback-Seeking

A healthy diversity climate corresponds to more frequent feedback-seeking.

A Culture of Feedback-Seeking

- Do your colleagues actively seek feedback?

- Do they feel safe doing so?

- Do you?

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6. A culture of feedback-seeking

Where does one start?

Practice with a good framework

Find your voice

Observation	→	Impact	→	Request

from Lara Hogan's "Feedback Equation" (https://larahogan.me/blog/feedback-equation/)

Healthy Feedback

- Thoughtful

- Specific and Accurate

- Achievable

- Available

What can you do?

- Build trust

- Write it down

- Focus on the work

- Consider the recipient

- Tell a balanced story with time

- Make it a practice

Make feedback a practice.

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