## WALKS the TALK

Receiving feedback is difficult for anyone, and that is especially true for those of us who are highly self-critical and shame-prone. Because negative feedback can trigger painful feeling of shame, we tend to react by doing one of two things (and sometimes both!): 1. want to defend ourselves and our actions, perhaps jumping quickly to explain or justify, or 2. we accept it wholly as true without a pause to see how it may or may not be helpful. Those types of reactions, while understandable, can prevent new learning and growth from happening. WALKS the TALK is a practice to help you to maximize the chances of benefitting from feedback when it is of value, and deciding to let it go when it is not.

The people around us have a lot to teach us, especially those in our tribe who sometimes know us better than we do. We all have blind spots that we *need others* to help us recognize and learn. We also all have only one experience of the world, and feedback from others with different experiences can enrich our lives in ways we probably don’t even know about.

**W- Watch for feedback**

Ifwe don’t notice feedback when it’s happening, it’s hard for us to respond to it and incorporate it if it’s useful. Especially in close relationships it’s important to be able to listen to the feedback that others give us and be able to modify our behavior when warranted. Feedback can come in the form of the words that people say, or it can be nonverbal, for example a facial expression that a person makes. If you think feedback is occurring, pause and recognize to yourself that it’s occurring. For example, you might say to yourself, “Feedback is happening right now.”

If you are unsure whether feedback is occurring, practice self-inquiry through questions like:

* What do I need to learn from this situation?
* Is it possible that feedback is occurring?

Describe below the situation you were in when the feedback occurred:

**A – Acknowledge your emotions, sensations, thoughts, and urges**

Getting both negative and positive feedback from others can be uncomfortable. This can trigger are our threat system and result in us going into autopilot. Take a few moment to acknowledge the emotions, sensations, thoughts, and action urges that arise when you are getting feedback. Use the mindfulness to facilitate this, for example, by describing each experience in your mind with the label “I’m aware of x” (where x is an emotion, sensation, thought or urge). For example, you might think to yourself, “I’m aware of the feeling of tension in my body. I’m aware of the urge of wanting to argue. I’m aware of the feeling of anger. I’m aware of thinking they are not understanding me. I’m aware of the urge to run away. I’m aware of the feeling of hurt. I’m aware of the feeling of fear.”

Write below the emotions, sensations, thoughts, and images you observed:

**L – Listen with openness**

**If you know that an upcoming conversation is coming,** it can be helpful to use skills to activate your social safety system before the situation (e.g., do lovingkindness meditation toward a friend before you go into a meeting). When our social safety system is activated, we are naturally more open to feedback.

**Practice fully listening.** Let go of justifying, explaining, arguing, or brining up past hurts, even though this can be tempting. Focus on really hearing what the other person has to say.

**I reminded myself to be open and listen by saying to myself:**

* Listening fully to someone else’s point of view does not mean that I need to agree with it.
* There may be some truth in what they are saying.
* There may be something I can learn here if I listen to their feedback.
* Another statement I made up:

**Ways to express openness and be more open:**

* I was free from distractions
* I adopted an open posture
* I practiced slowing my breathing
* I adopted a half smile as a way to express openness
* I did an eyebrow wag to signal receptivity

Describe what you did to stay open and listen:

**I you feel closed to feedback, practice self-inquiry:**

* Am I open to what this feedback? [If not, is it possible I don’t want to listen to the feedback?]
* Is it *possible* they may have a valid point, but I’m not understanding it?
* What do I need to learn from this situation I am in?

**K – Find the Kernel of truth in the feedback**

Encouraged myself to stick with finding the kernel of truth by telling myself:

* + Evaluating whether feedback is accurate or useful comes later, after I have finished the conversation.
* Right now I am just trying to understand the changes that are being suggested.
* It’s probably not easy for them either. They may need my help to give me useful feedback.

Try to find the kernel of truth by following these three steps:

1. If you are unclear about what person is suggesting you do differently, ask for clarification (try to use a gentle and easy manner as you do this e.g.., a calm or friendly tone of voice, do an eyebrow wag)

2. Summarize your understanding of what they are trying to tell you and ask them whether it is correct. Listen openly to any additional information or feedback.

3. Incorporate any additional information into your summary and reflect that back again until you have a sense for what the person wants you to do differently.

Asked myself the following self-inquiry questions to try to guide me in finding the “kernel of truth.”

* What are they suggesting I do differently?
* If I were going to behave differently based on their feedback, what would that look like?

Describe what you thought the person was suggesting you change (i.e., “the kernel of truth”):

**S – Stall and soothe**

**Stall:** After you have identified what is being suggested for change, the next step is stall so that you have time to think about the feedback. Do this before the conversation continues onto other topics or you get caught up in justifying, explaining, or rejecting the feedback. Check which of the following you said to stall (or make up your own):

* This is important to me, and I’d like to take some time to think about it and get back to you.
* I need some space to think about what you’ve said and then I’ll get back to you.
* I will spend some time considering what you’ve said. Thanks for letting me know.
* I gave myself permission to be a broken record and repeat that I need time, if pressured.
* I exited the situation so as to give myself space to consider the feedback.

**Soothe**: It’s hard to get feedback. It’s important to take time afterwards to take care of yourself by activating your social safety system. I used:

* Self-compassion break
* Used lovingkindness or compassion meditation
* If I think I might be feeling shame, went through the handout about learning about your experiences of shame
* Rather than ruminating or worrying, practiced self-inquiry
* If I feel like I’m holding onto a grudge or resentment, considered forgiveness of myself or other the other person
* Used other ways to soothe myself or be self-compassionate:

**T – Time, it’s ok to take time to reflect on the feedback**

It’s important to give yourself time to reflect on the feedback. We all need space to reflect on difficult situations and not be pressured to make decisions immediately. We usually find the feedback we are getting so aversive and painful that we don’t want to revisit it. However, if we don’t revisit the feedback and think about it, then we often won’t benefit from it. The second part of the skill involves taking some time on your own to evaluate the feedback and consider whether and how to act on it.

I set aside time over 2-3 days to practice self-inquiry in relation to the feedback:

* I reviewed handouts related to self-inquiry
* I wrote in my self-inquiry journal
* I restricted my self-inquiry to 5 minutes and resisted urges for further rumination

If the feedback was positive, I used the feedback to try to strengthen my social safety system. I practiced this by:

* 1. Starting with some lovingkindness meditation to activate my social safety system
  2. Then spending some time reflecting on the positive feedback I was given, for example by:
     1. I tried to get the feedback down to one phrase that felt positive to me, for example, “Bob’s day went better because I really listened.”
     2. I wrote down the phrase that summarized the positive feedback
     3. I repeated the phrase to myself several times and tried to allow myself to feel the other person’s appreciation
     4. I tried to imagine what the other person might have been feeling when they told me about the positive feedback or what they appreciated about me.

**A – Accept or not?**

It’s kind to give ourselves the space to evaluate feedback before taking action. Use the questions below to consider whether the feedback you have been given will be most helpful for you to accept or dismiss. Circle yes or no next to each question as you review it:

Y/N - Will accepting and responding to the feedback benefit the relationship with the person who provided it?

Y/N - Is the feedback coming from someone who usually helps me to be my best self?

Y/N - Is this a person I am close to and care about?

Y/N - Is this person likely to be kind to me if I don’t make the change exactly the way they want it to be? Are they likely to try to see my perspective?

Y/N - Would accepting the feedback help me in other areas of my life (e.g., in other relationships or in other domains of life, such as finances or my health)?

Y/N - Have I heard this feedback from others before? (versus is it unique to this person?)

Y/N - Does the person have more experience or knowledge in the area they are providing feedback about?

Y/N - Is the feedback about a specific behavior of mine that is actually changeable?

Y/N - Do I have the resources I need to make the changes suggested at this time?

Y/N - Is the behavior change measurable, meaning, is it obvious when I have made the change this person wants to see? This is the difference between something like, “be nicer,” and something like, “please say hello to me when you see me.”

Y/N - Is the behavior change attainable? That is, is it realistic, or asking for something that is larger than what I can take on? For example, are they asking you to spend 3 more hours per day with them, when you don’t have 3 more hours per day available?

Y/N - Is the feedback relevant to a current situation in my life, rather than about something from the past or a future that has not happened?

Y/N - Does changing my behavior in response to the feedback fit with my values?

Y/N - Am I inclined to accept this feedback out of a desire to grow, rather than out of fear of shame?

Y/N - Would accepting this feedback help me grown as a person? That is, would accepting the feedback be a move toward my edge (my personal unknown)? (Or is my default usually to accept feedback without questioning it?)

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Total number of yes responses (out of 15).

A score of 11-15 or more means it’s likely that the feedback is accurate and worth acting on.

A score of 0-5 suggests that it may not be helpful to act on this feedback.

Scores between 6-10 should probably be evaluated on a case-by-case basis

These scores above are meant as rough guidelines. In general, the more of these questions you say yes to, the more likely that it makes sense for you to accept the feedback and act on it.

After reviewing the questions above, the biggest reason to accept the feedback is: ­

After reviewing the questions above, the biggest reason to dismiss the feedback is: ­

**L – Lean in and take action**

If you decided to decline the feedback, consider whether to tell the person you are declining it. You might use self-inquiry to explore a question like: What do I need to learn in terms of telling others that I am declining their feedback? If you decide to tell them, then consider the steps below. If not, go straight to the last step.

If you have decided to accept the feedback or tell the other person you have declined the feedback, then it’s time to “lean in” and give the new behavior a try.

* I reminded myself that the new behavior may not result in any better outcomes immediately.
* I reminded myself that it’s important to give myself time to try the new behavior repeatedly before I decide whether it’s workable.
* I took time to visualize engaging in the new behavior. Make sure you visualize the behavior all the way through so that you know what it would look like when you do it and that you can imagine what would be involved (e.g., what exactly would you say or do?).
* I tried out the behavior with the person who gave me the feedback (or with someone else if it’s more general).
* I filed away the behavior I plan to try out for the next opportunity to do it when it’s time.

**K – Kindness with the other person and yourself**

It’s important to remember change is often hard for both people involved. Change tends to trigger our threat system, which is difficult for us. Whatever you have decided to do (whether you have accepted or declined the feedback) it’s likely you’re your mind will criticize you in some way.

* Reminded myself that it’s normal to feel lots of difficult feelings after trying something new.
* Reminded myself that’s it’s OK to not do it perfectly.
* Reminded myself that “If something is worth doing, it’s worth doing poorly at first.”
* Practiced one of the self-compassion strategies listed under the Stall and Soothe step. I

practiced: