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Feedback Is Different For Men And Women Leaders, Here's Why

Did you know women are 32% less likely to receive any feedback from male superiors.



By [Joelle K. Jay@JoelleKJay](mailto:JoelleKJay)



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Have you ever been blindsided by feedback, or thrown off course because no one gave you feedback you needed?

Feedback is the ongoing formal and informal input you get from the sources all around you. It includes the explicit messages you get from the people with whom you work, but feedback can also come from your own observations, the way others react to you, and your results. It's helpful in many ways, but it can be troublesome when it's absent, misleading, incomplete, or poorly received.

Many of the women leaders I've worked with over the years have complained to me that the feedback they receive from superiors or peers is frequently contradictory, vague, or secret, so they can't respond to it, and as a result they can't gauge how they're doing or improve.

That happens far more than we'd like, which is why so many organizations are revisiting their performance review processes and trying to get it right. Meanwhile, feedback remains treacherous for women. The Center for Talent Innovation reports:

- Women are 32 percent less likely to receive any feedback from male superiors.
- When they do get feedback, 81 percent of women say they have trouble responding to it, because it's so "distressingly contradictory."
- When women make up less than 25 percent of an applicant pool, they are more likely to be negatively evaluated.

In addition, we have observed at the Leadership Research Institute that, compared to men:

- Women tend to be harder on themselves when receiving feedback from others.
- Women are also hard on themselves when they self-assess, tending to underrate their own abilities.
- Women can feel overwhelmed or crushed by feedback.
- Women tend to get softer feedback from others - despite the fact that rigorous feedback is one of the ways leaders strengthen their capabilities

In other words, more so for women than for men, feedback - meant to be a helpful vehicle to move leaders forward through self-improvement - can hold them back. It's up to you to seek out mentors or peers that can help give you the feedback you're looking for, and don't be afraid to be specific with that you're asking for.

So whether your company has good feedback structures or not, you can take advantage of the wealth of information available through feedback - both positive and negative - that will boost your confidence and the constructive criticism that can save or propel your career. Ask yourself: What

feedback do you need to let go? Where do you need to know more? How will you stay open to the feedback you receive?

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Dr. Joelle Jay is a principal with the Leadership Research Institute, as well as an executive coach, keynote speaker, and the author of *The Inner Edge: The Ten Practices of Personal Leadership*. Joelle specializes in the advancement of executive women, and she is proud to have supported the development of top talent into positions of leadership for many successful companies, including MetLife, Adobe, and Microsoft.