

# How to Successfully Communicate the Results of Your 360-degree Survey

## An interview with Dr. Elizabeth Fried

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Once you've conducted a 360-review process and the results are in, what do you do? How can you deliver the feedback so that your people truly listen? How can you use the 360-review process as a stepping stone to better performance throughout your organization?

After enlightening us last issue on how to design a 360 survey for better buy-in, Dr. Elizabeth Fried continues a lively discussion with *eXplore* on how to create an effective and lasting 360-degree review. In this issue, she takes us past the survey process to the results and how to communicate them so that your employees can start to incorporate the feedback they've received into their daily working lives.

Fried is a renowned expert on workplace behaviour and how to manage it. Aside from running a successful HR consulting firm, she regularly gives speeches and has been quoted in *Business Week*, *Fortune Magazine*, *Ms.*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *USA Today*.

## **What usually happens when people receive the results of their 360 reviews?**

People usually respond to 360 feedback in one of four ways:

### **#1—Recognized Strength**

An employee might think: “That’s cool, I knew that.”

These people know that they are good at a particular skill, and so does everyone else. So, the 360 offers confirmation and it gives them satisfaction that others recognize their efforts.

### **#2—Unrecognized Strength**

Here, the employee may respond: “Wow, I had no idea.”

These people didn’t know they were perceived as being really good at something. It’s a nice gift for them to receive and to learn that they are highly thought of in a particular behavioural area.

### **#3—Developmental Opportunity**

The employee typically agrees and may respond “Hmmm, I know I should really work on that.”

These people aren’t surprised by the fact that others are acknowledging an area in which they need to develop. They may not like it, but they know in their heart of hearts that they need to focus on it.

Perhaps they haven’t been motivated in the past or they may not have had the opportunity to get the resources they need to improve.

### **#4—Blind Spots**

This is the area which brings about the greatest angst and may create such volatile responses as: “What? I’m shocked! How can they say that? I had no idea people thought that! This must be someone else’s 360!”

Here others are acknowledging a blind spot; an area where this person had no idea their behaviour was being viewed negatively.

## **How do you handle situations like this?**

360 reviews often reveal behavioural blind spots. So, it is critical to have a proper debriefing process. In the first two cases I outlined above, it is easy to deliver the results. But, in the last two cases, the results must be framed properly. If they aren’t, the recipient may be shocked about one or two items and this could sour the entire 360-review process, even if 90 percent of the feedback is positive.

### **How does a proper debriefing work?**

First, focus on the strengths. People have a tendency to immediately address the negatives, and may not take a balanced view of what the report is saying. Also, what I’ve seen is that men often have a tendency to brush comments off, and women often have a tendency to take everything personally. So, in either case, you have to bring the person back down to earth.

### **How might you start out de-briefing someone?**

First, I will say, “Listen, these are your strengths. Let’s talk about how you can continue to capitalize on these.”

And then, when I talk about areas for development, I generally say to people, “You’re very fortunate to have people in your organization who care enough to let you know that you need to work on these things. If they held back, you could potentially derail your career. Instead, by telling you, they’re showing you that they want you to be successful.”

### **Can you give me an example of a difficult debriefing session, and how you handled it?**

I remember one that was really tough. I had to emphasize that the negative comments were caring comments.

With that same individual, there was another comment, we hadn’t addressed that was particularly troubling: “He falls asleep at meetings, and we think that is unprofessional.”

The whole time that I was de-briefing him, he never once brought that up. So, after we were done talking about what concerned him, I, as a coach, could not let that go. I said, “I want to address, this statement about your falling asleep at meetings. Is that true?”

He said, “Yeah.” And then he said nothing. There was a pause. Silence.

So, I went a bit out on a limb and said, “Could this have to do with a health issue?”

He said, “Yes.”

And I asked, “Are you comfortable discussing it with me?”

He said, “Yes,” and I continued to ask questions to elicit the situation and make him realize that he had options. He could continue to keep silent on the matter if he wished. But I made it clear to him that if he remained silent, his co-workers would likely continue to think he was unprofessional. He would be risking his career.

This is an example of a situation where if there were no proper de-briefing, this employee could have skirted a very serious issue.

### **Once the de-briefing process is finished, what happens next?**

Typically during a 360-feedback process, people like to think that the information is confidential. Usually, when I work with a client, I say that the report is really owned by the employee and is the employee’s responsibility. They do not have to share the results of the report with their manager. The exception to this occurs when the company has elected to tie the survey questions directly to a specific training program. In that case, the manager, and the training department also become aware of the results. This approach will be discussed in a subsequent article.

In the traditional 360 approach, the report remains confidential, however, the feedback recipients do have to share the areas that they are going to work on with their managers and

create action plans. Often it is not the direct manager who de-briefs them and helps them create a plan, but someone who is either an internal HR, Organizational Development person or an external coach. The ideal outcome of this process is to create a coaching environment in the company so people are more open to sharing their areas for development with each other.

### **What is a “coaching environment?”**

Coaching is not an event that happens once each year. And it doesn’t have to come from the boss. It could come from your peers or the people who work for you.

An important part of the coaching environment is that people must learn how to approach each other. As opposed to saying, “Angie, I saw your presentation the other day and here’s what I think...” you might say, “Angie, I saw your presentation and I have some thoughts about it. Is now a good time for us to talk about it?” So, first of all, I have to get permission from you as to whether the time is good to talk about it.

And then I might say, “I saw some opportunities that could really help you enhance it. Are you interested in hearing about them?”

In this way, I’m giving you an opportunity to be receptive to my response.

Although it is important to give people feedback when they are able to receive it, it is also important to give it in or close to the moment, not six months later in the next 360.

So a coaching environment is one in which people are open to feedback, and others seize the opportunity and take advantage of “coachable” moments.

### **How does an organization move from the 360-degree review process to fostering a coaching environment?**

It is important to keep in mind that this is a gradual process which generally begins with training people how to become good coaches.

There are two courses, specifically designed to help with these skills.

Each is entitled: *Developing and Coaching Others*.

One is designed specifically for senior managers and the other is geared toward supervisors.

You can go to [www.TheLearningEngine.org](http://www.TheLearningEngine.org) for detailed information on the skill points and objectives of these courses.

When people start coaching others, they become models, so those who are being coached come to understand how it is done and they can do it with others. In this way, coaching is passed down from person to person and becomes a part of the environment. This is all part of leadership development in the overall organization.

### **Why is leadership development so important to companies?**

There has been considerable research showing that the leaders in companies have direct impact on employee engagement. And, employee engagement has a direct impact on retention, productivity, cost containment, and customer satisfaction—in essence the overall bottom line. So it is critical your organization is made up of leaders who can effectively engage, and therefore retain, good employees.

The 360-degree review process measures the soft skills that those leaders use to ensure employee engagement. Therefore, it is very important you conduct a proper de-briefing session so that people can really listen and start to digest the feedback they receive from a 360-degree review.

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You can learn more about Dr. Fried, her business, and the resources she has to offer at [www.TheLearningEngine.Org](http://www.TheLearningEngine.Org) and [www.MyExecutiveCoach.net](http://www.MyExecutiveCoach.net). She offers a complimentary one-week pass to a highly interactive, engaging and fun online course entitled *Essential Skills of Communication*.