

# WHEN YOUR TEAM SAYS

*You SUCK!*

Matt McWilliams

## Introduction: The Power of a Leader

**Yikes! I have the power to make someone cry.**

That realization came to me on a long walk with a good friend and colleague of mine. We were discussing our business and he told me the story of how earlier in the week something he said to a team member *made her cry*. That made him realize the magnitude of his position as CEO. He was suddenly aware that he had great power and began to wield that power more carefully.

One of the biggest mistakes a leader can make is to be oblivious to how he/she makes a team member feel.

Let me restate that: One of the biggest mistakes *I* made as a leader was to be completely oblivious to how *my* team members felt.

I was 28 at the time my friend told me his story and the world, I thought, still revolved around me, so I pocketed that little nugget and moved on with life. Thankfully I still remember that lesson.

Around that time I had just about perfected the art of making team members cry. The sad thing is that *I was completely oblivious to it*. Sure, I knew that I sucked as a leader, but I had no concept of the impact I was having on their lives and their emotions.

I assumed that they left their work problems at work and their home problems at home. I assumed that if I was upset and took it out on them, that it was acceptable, because they worked for me!

Guess what? That's not true.

I start with this story to show the power of a leader. As a leader, it is your job to do everything you can to be better at your job.

Inside this short e-book, you will learn how to get, give, and use feedback.

I hope that you learn something from it, but most of all, I hope that you use it.

To your Success!

Matt

Part One  
Getting Feedback

**Leaders must get consistent feedback from their team members and peers...and they must act on it.**

The first time I asked for feedback, it really sucked. I felt like I had been punched in the gut. I thought maybe I should just walk away from the company that I had helped build. I didn't see a way out of the hole I had dug. There was no light at the end of the tunnel for me.

I gave my team and peers an anonymous evaluation form, encouraged them to be honest and then spent two days being hurt, angry, and in denial, Then I put on my big boy pants and decided to take each fault, each area of improvement, and order them based on two things:

1. How bad I was (based on average score of the feedback). The lower my score, the worse I was.
2. How quickly I thought I could improve.

I got a mentor, read voraciously and developed an action plan based on improving these areas of weakness.

I focused on only one area of improvement each month and listed seven core areas of improvement. In seven months, I figured I would be a completely different leader. I also figured that within only a few months I would be a decent enough leader that people would start to notice the changes I had made. Within six months, I thought, I would start to develop trust with my team and peers. Within one year, I would actually be able to lead effectively.

Here were the seven areas I chose to improve upon in order:

1. **Leading by example by arriving to work early and staying until at least 5:00 pm.** This was the easiest change. It required no major life changes or learning. It only required that I show up by 8:15 every day and stay until at least 5:00. That meant I was there 15 minutes before my team arrived and left at the same time or slightly after they did. For one month, I did just that with no exceptions. After a month, I had the flexibility to get a mid-day long lunch if needed or leave early for the dentist, but for one month I did not. *I built momentum for the next change as well.*
2. **Humility.** I truly thought everyone else's ideas sucked and mine were awesome. See #4 in my post on how to make a team member cry.
3. **Active encouragement.** This meant really looking for positive performance and actions and rewarding it.
4. **Controlling emotions, particularly anger.** I was known as a hothead. I had to keep this in check. This was the hardest for me but I fought through it. I took two months to get to the point where I felt like I could move on to the fifth one.
5. **Being positive.** Think of me prior to the feedback as Eeyore with a temper. There wasn't a cloud I couldn't find in someone's silver lining.
6. **Being available and open and being transparent.** I had developed a closed-door policy essentially. I had to actively make myself more available. This was made much easier by actually being there physically (point #1)
7. **Holding people accountable.** This had to come last because I had to be in a positive position to do this.

After 3 months I was working the right hours, I was more humble and open to others opinions, and was actively encouraging my team. The results were already astounding.

By the eight month mark, life had changed. By the end of a year, I read the reviews and realized that I had succeeded in 6/7 areas. I continued to struggle with holding people accountable well into my next leadership position.

If you want to be a better leader, the first step is getting feedback on your strengths and weaknesses. You must ask for it. Then you must make a plan to improve and start improving. Your areas of improvement will differ from mine, but the method of discovering, assessing, and improving is the same if you want to succeed.

Part Two  
Giving Feedback



## Whatever you do, don't do this

I'm going to take a big bite out of the "feedback sandwich." Mmmm.

If you're not familiar with the "feedback sandwich," it's a method popularized by Ken Blanchard and Spencer Johnson in the book, [\*The One Minute Manager\*](#). It basically goes like this"

Praise first, then correct. then praise again.

And I hate it.

Here's what the "feedback sandwich" often sounds like:

**Leader:** "I need to correct a behavior or point out something wrong that someone is doing. What should I do? I know..."

Five minutes later...

**Leader:** "Jim, you are a valuable member of our organization and are doing a bang up job with the new sales reports."

**Jim, thinking to himself and possibly audibly:** "But?"

**Leader:** "What I really need you to work on, though, is your [insert real reason for the meeting, a criticism or correction here]."

**Jim:** "Uh, sure. I can work on that."

**Leader:** "Great. Thanks. And your hair looks phenomenal today. What *are* you using in it?"

OK, that last one probably never happens. Right? Or are leaders supposed to compliment their team members on their hair? Just making sure I didn't miss something.

A lot of people swear by the “feedback sandwich.” People a lot more famous than I am. People I look up to. And don't get me wrong, [\*The One Minute Manager\*](#) is a phenomenal book.

But the “feedback sandwich” has one major flaw, the reason why I hate it so much and eschewed it four years ago.

**It differentiates positive feedback from corrective feedback.**

It comes down to this...the fundamental problem with the feedback sandwich:

*It's used by humans.*

Human leaders with emotions. Human leaders with expressive faces. Human leaders who telegraph the true intention of the meeting or feedback from a mile away.

And human recipients on the other end who also have emotions and can tell the leader's true intentions from a mile away. People know when they are being called to the principal's office.

Thus...the beginning and the end parts are rarely heard. They are fluff. They are ignored.

Or the middle part is missed. The real reason for the meeting is missed. The very thing that a team member needs to work on the most is overlooked. The opportunity for growth is passed up.

## What The “Feedback Sandwich” Really Sounds Like to Your Team



[Share this Graphic on Pinterest](#) | [Share on Facebook](#)

## Summary of feedback sandwich flaws

1. Humans have emotions.
2. Mixing positive and corrective feedback is confusing.
3. Important feedback is missed.

### A better way...no bread, just meat

About four years ago I started using a simple method of giving positive and corrective (notice I didn't say "negative") feedback in the exact same manner. And I told my team what it would look like in advance.

The wrong way (to me at least) was what I did prior to that. Good feedback was delivered with a huge smile and a pat on the back. A big "attaboy" if you will.

Corrective feedback was preceded by an invitation to visit the principal's office and then a long drawn out, beat around the bush, finally get to the point extravaganza.

So I told my team that from now on it would like look like this:

**Positive:** "When you do X, here is what happens. Keep it up!"

**Corrective:** "When you do X, here is what happens. What can you do to change that?"

The format is exactly the same for each of them. Neither was delivered with extreme variance in emotion.

*Listen to the audio version for more examples of my feedback method and further insight into this topic.*

### **Why is this feedback method better?**

1. **Because we're all adults here.** And I made sure my team was all wearing their big boy (and girl) pants before I introduced it to them.
2. **I spent a lot of time giving positive feedback.** I practiced the 90/10 rule.. For every one critique or correction, I gave nine positive pieces of feedback. In other words, I spent a lot of time giving positive feedback. I didn't need to muddle the corrective feedback with fluff. (See the next few pages for how to give positive, encouraging feedback)
3. **They knew I meant it.** Whether it was positive or corrective feedback, my team knew I meant it. When I took out the fluff, they knew it was real. Corrective feedback was acted upon and positive feedback made sure they did more of the same.

Feedback is intended for one reason: to cause the desired future behavior, by either reinforcing a good one or correcting a bad one.

It's best to keep it simple.

## Positive Feedback: What Encouragement Is...and Isn't

“I am proud of you.”

When is the last time you heard that?

When is the last time you told a team member or colleague that?

Every night that I am home, which is most nights, I hold our nearly daughter in my arms and rock her in a chair before putting her in the crib. Every night she hears those exact words from me. She hears them other times as well, but she always hears them then. No matter what happened that day; no matter how she acted or what she did or didn't do, she hears those words: “I am proud of you.”

In James 3 of the Message translation of the Bible, Eugene Peterson writes:

A word out of your mouth may seem of no account, but it can accomplish nearly anything—or destroy it!

As a leader, this is magnified. As a spouse, it is magnified even more. As a parent, your words hold almost unfathomable power.

Telling someone “Great job” doesn't count. “*Great job*” is the *minimum*. It's expected after a project is completed properly.

*Real leadership is telling someone before they even start that you believe in them and that they can do it.*

“Great job” or “Way to go” isn’t encouragement. It’s a reward. Rewards are necessary, but they are not nearly as powerful as encouragement.

**Here are 9 ways to encourage your team:**

1. **Verbal.** Ask to speak to them just to say “thank you” or to encourage them. You’ve heard “Praise in public...” Make sure to praise in private, too.
2. **Written.** Perhaps you have heard me talk about thank you notes and other forms of written encouragement. Do it.
3. **Responsibility.** Trust them with more responsibility in the organization. Being put in charge of an important project is a big boost.
4. **Tell others.** Privately or in their presence, tell others how great your team is. Send notes to family members, talk an individual up to a fellow manager or business owner, and tell other team members about each other. It creates a culture of encouragement.
5. **Share all positive customer comments.** Create a bulletin board or something similar to share great customer feedback.
6. **Help.** Ask how you can help. Jump in and help your team complete an important project. Just be careful not to come across as meddling or micro-managing.
7. **Care.** Learn about them. The best place to do this is in your one-on-one meetings. You can learn more about [one-on-one meetings here](#). Learn about their hobbies, family, pets, successes and challenges. Care about that they care about.

8. **Offer training.** Show them that you care about their self-improvement. Offer to send them to, and pay for, professional training, such as a leadership seminar, public speaking class, or other learning opportunity.
9. **Ask them to share.** When you do send them to training, ask them to share what they learned with the team afterwards. Or to share other things they have learned periodically.

### **What if you don't have a team now?**

The great thing about this list is that you can do most of them with anyone. You can do them with your peers, friends, and family. You can do them with direct reports, superiors, and those in other departments.

THINK: What are some other ways you can offer encouragement? What are you doing to encourage others?



Part Three  
Putting it into Action

## **Leadership Has No Perfect World Scenarios**

So you've learned a little about receiving, giving, and using feedback.

Now what? What are you going to do with this?

Leadership, as in golf, rarely gives you a perfect lie.

**Why, then do leaders train like so many golfers train?**

I know incredibly talented golfers who will stand for hours secluded on a quiet range with the same club, hitting balls from a perfect, flat lie with no wind. The problem is that the tournament next week is on a hilly, windy course in front of 30,000 people.

In other words, they practice in a bubble...a perfect world scenario. But it's far from what they will experience in a tournament.

We often train leaders the same way. We give them instruction on running meetings, compensation, and even how to handle conflict with team members, but always from a perfect lie. Rarely are their feet put to the fire or are they put off balance.

### **Putting in the reps**

When you encounter an imperfect lie or a strong wind or another non-perfect scenario in golf, you don't want the first time to be in a pressure-packed tournament. You have to have hundreds or thousands of reps under your belt of similar shots. You want to be able to call on your memory bank of how you handled it before. You

want to remember all of the pre-shot adjustments you made that worked and then allow muscle memory to take over.

You definitely don't want to try to figure it out on the fly.

The same goes from leadership. You don't want to try to figure out how to handle situations when they really matter. You want to have a lot of practice under your belt.

### **Instruction helps, experience solidifies**

I received a lot of golf instruction from my father and from books. I would get a tip from him or get a tip from a book and then test it.

That testing part was the key. I didn't just read something, store it away in my memory bank, and then hope that:

A. I remembered it

B. That it worked.

No thank you. I first thought about it for a moment. I got a visual of what it looked like. I made sure I was physically capable of doing what he or the book suggested. Then I immediately went out to practice it. And practice, and practice, and practice it.

Sometimes, certain shots would take me tens of thousands of repetitions before I would break it out in competition. There were times I would face a shot in a tournament and think, "I've got this shot, I've been working on it." But my sensible side would remind

me that I've only put in five hundred reps so far and I would stick to the shot I knew I could hit.

If you want to be a leader, you need to put in the reps. Books and mentors help, don't get me wrong. Read, read, and read some more. Meet with a mentor. Get coaching. Attend seminars. Do all of those.

But you must apply that knowledge. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe said,

Knowing is not enough; we must apply. Willing is not enough; we must do.

### **Apply it now**

Don't wait to apply what you learn. Apply it now. The sooner, the better. Test, test, test. Practice, practice, practice.

If you are not a leader at work, practice at home. If you don't have a family, volunteer somewhere.

Get all the leadership *experience* that you can. Because one day you might wake up, like I did, and have thirty-plus people reporting to you and no clue how to handle it. You might wake up realizing you have all the knowledge, but have only practiced in perfect conditions. And, trust me, that does not work out very well.

Find a place to apply your newfound leadership wisdom. Find a place to practice being a leader. Find a place to stretch your abilities, force

you to seek more knowledge, and gain invaluable experience under the gun.

Started getting feedback THIS week. Then use it.

Start giving the right kind of feedback THIS week.

Start being a real world leader...and you will reap the rewards.

## Resources

[My most powerful leadership tool](#)

[One-on-One Coaching](#)

[Business & Marketing Consulting](#)

## About the Author

Hey, I'm Matt and I'm a world changer.

Now before you think I'm an egotistical, too-big-for-my-britches, jerk, I think we are all world changers. If we weren't born to change the world, we're unnecessary.

This is my blog, focused on the lessons I've learned from many sources, mostly my own experiences. You can read more about my story below if you're interested. In a nutshell, I arrived at my world changer philosophy after being fired four times (twice by the same company and once by own dad...just try to top that!), after facing 42 years in prison, after starting two companies that rose and fell like the Roman Empire, and after getting married, having a wonderful wife and then daughter, and finally realizing my true purpose in life.

**I am a world changer. And so are you.**

My goal here is to help you become the world changer that you were born to be. Sometimes that means helping you to shift your mindset. Sometimes it means giving you the tools you need in life, in business, or in relationships to change the world. Sometimes it means some good old fashioned motivation and inspiration.

I write daily from Monday through Friday, with the exception of major holidays. The majority of my posts are about personal development, communication, business, and leadership, all tied back to helping you unleash the world changer inside of you.

To be clear, I will not make you a world changer. You already are. My goal is to help you find that person inside of you.

## My Story

I have worked in small business and online marketing for as long as I can remember. That is mostly because I could never make it in a “real job.”

At the age of 23, I was fired by my dad. The day after my birthday. That was the second time I’d been fired. Thankfully, I had started my own company on the side in online marketing. It only took two years for that company to go under.

At the age of 25, I was arrested and faced up to 42 years in prison. [You can read that full story here.](#)

By the age of 27, I was an executive in thriving start-up. We won the Best in Business Award from the Nashville Business Journal that year and by year’s end, we had 50+ people working for us. I was personally leading a team of 12 people...and had no clue what I was doing. I sucked as a leader and everyone knew it. I was their first employee and helped start the company above the CFO’s garage. I had no business leading a team, but somehow we managed to succeed in spite of me.

I was fired from there (my third firing in case you’re counting) but went on to find success elsewhere. In 2010 I was recognized as the top Affiliate Marketing Manager in the world by the Affiliate Summit



Pinnacle Awards. I've won numerous other awards in that field as well.

I left that company (the first time in my life that I left a job by choice) and went back to the previous company. Yes, the one that fired me. Eight months later, the CEO left and the company laid off more than half the staff. I was one of those people. Firing number four (and it will be my last).

So there I was in November of 2011. Unemployed, brand new house, a six-month daughter and stay-at-home mom to support. That was the moment I decided to change the world.

Just kidding. That was the moment I decided to panic. But, once I calmed down, I resolved to live a life of meaning and purpose. I came to realize that I can and should change the world. I resolved never again to be dependent on an employer for income or others for approval. And I resolved to leave a legacy.

Due to the path I've taken to this point, I have a unique viewpoint on the ever-changing world in which we live. Most importantly, I have failed at mostly everything I have tried the first time.

Thankfully, I usually learned from those mistakes. And that is good news for you. I invite you to learn with me and from me. I invite you to leave your own legacy. I invite you to change the world.

I was born and raised in the south and currently live in Fort Wayne, IN with my lovely wife Tara and daughter Aracelli. My consulting company, [Matt McWilliams Consulting, Inc.](#) (that name took me

forever to come up with), has clients all over the country in various industries ranging from educational courses to consumer goods and the financial industry.

In my free time I enjoy spending time with my wife and daughter, running, reading, and long days of doing yard work listening to various podcasts.

You can find me elsewhere here:

Twitter: [@MattMcWilliams2](https://twitter.com/MattMcWilliams2)

LinkedIn: [Profile](#)

Google Plus: [+Matt McWilliams](#)

## Connect with me

I'd love to connect with you.

Web: [MattMcWilliams.com](http://MattMcWilliams.com)

Twitter: [@MattMcWilliams2](https://twitter.com/MattMcWilliams2)