



SIM WOMEN NEWSLETTER

THE MARCH 2021 ISSUE

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WELCOME TO THE NEW WORLD

ALETA L. JEFFRESS

Change. 2020 expanded the definition of that word on so many fronts; how we work, go to school, and even get dinner or groceries. Some days it seems like we are getting the hang of #WFH, remote learning, and drive through everything, and other days it's a hot mess with empty Amazon boxes piling up in the garage.

As I considered many different topics to share, I decided to reflect and share my 2020 and recognize what started out as a year of intentional change unintentionally became crazy, how resiliency became a requirement, and that nothing is perfect. Best laid plans. In January of 2020 I accepted a new opportunity. This process in and of itself was a culmination of months of self-evaluation. The last 8 years I had been a Chief Information Officer (CIO) managing technology and strategy in public sector; as rewarding as that work can be it was time to take my broad set of skills and apply it differently. As I reflected on my next step I was very intentional in listing what my experience could bring to the table, and even more specific about what was non-negotiable for me in a new role. After hours of conversation with multiple companies I felt I had found a role and organization that checked all the boxes. Great!! In late January I submitted my resignation, giving almost 7 weeks' notice. I selected a start date that allowed my son and I to spend spring break in the mountains, enjoying a week of spring skiing. Life was good, and everything was moving along according to plan.

Needless to say, a lot can happen in 7 weeks.

By the time I started my new role, March 23, 2020, everything was shut down. Skiing had been cancelled. My first day on the job consisted of 4 hours with 2 other people in an empty office, drive through lunch, and by that afternoon I was sitting in my dining room logging into online training. Not at all what I had planned for my intentional job change.

Now what? Although I considered the "pros" of spending the first few weeks of a new role at home, no commute and I could knock out the onboarding training, I soon realized the unintentional outcomes. Not only would I have to remotely learn the ins and outs of a new company, I would have to change "how" I work. Obviously logistically work would be different, but also how I interacted across the organization.

This is where resiliency kicks in.

Google defines resilient as: "(of a person or animal) able to withstand or recover quickly from difficult conditions."

In my experience, resiliency looks different for everyone. I quickly realized that especially in a new role I had to focus on what I had successfully done in person, and pivot to virtual. How I interacted, when I inter-

acted, ensuring my communication was clear. A new role, team members and peers rely on in person interaction to establish relationships and culture. This now required that I be more intentional about asking questions and understanding people where they are "right now" – particularly since the circumstances were changing daily. The person who was willing to meet for lunch last week might not be this week, and that's ok. Meeting people where they are comfortable was key.

I also relied on the networking skills I had developed over the years. Ensuring when I met new people via an internal meeting or external event, I noted their names and followed up with an email or via LinkedIn, offering to talk or network further. As everyone was scrambling for new ideas to keep employees and customers engaged, I made sure to participate in those conversations, ask questions, and see how I could leverage new ideas and resources as they rose to the top. Many people and companies pivoted very quickly to meet different demands, creating new services and experiences that I could also leverage.

As it became evident that the pandemic would last throughout the summer, and then the fall, I painted and redecorated my dining room office. I learned you could buy wall paint by the gallon on Amazon!

I also scheduled time to reflect. I would look back on the previous day, week, or month, and determine what worked well, and what didn't. What should I do again, and what was temporary given the situation. Change is always a constant, but constant change can be exhausting. Take the wins, and cut the losses. Which leads to my nemesis, perfection.

Be imperfect. 2020 presented challenges on so many fronts. For those of us who like our ducks perfectly lined up, it was a bit stormy! The past year was definitely one where the outcome was what mattered, and not necessarily how you got there. Being outcomes focused means walking into my office each morning without picking up the house or doing the laundry.

It means welcoming messy creativity and leniency, as well as everyone's kids, pets, and significant others as they made their way into business zoom calls. What I also came to understand was as much as I gave others a break for school runs or a walk outside, I needed to give myself that break too. A 30 minute walk outside during the day was much needed to reset and keep my brain functioning for the next meeting.

And even though we now all know exactly how much we can get done in the two minutes before our next call, doesn't mean that we should do those things. Listen to your watch when it says to stand up or breathe!

I'm now a year into my new role; still sitting in my dining room. What I have learned, not only from new circumstances, a new company, and new people, is that amidst all the uncertainty we still have the capability and drive to be our best, and to support each other. That's the most important outcome there is.

FEEDBACK IS A GIFT

TIA PAPPAS

I was fresh out of college - in a new city, a new apartment and starting a new career at Habits at Work.

My first day on the job was the worst day of my career.

That first day, Andrew, the CEO, invited me to join him at a keynote he was delivering for a customer in Chicago.

I didn't know much about professional speaking at the time, but I knew enough to know that the keynote was a success.

When we walked out of the building, I was full of adrenaline and excitement, and definitely not expecting what came next.

Before we even made it to the sidewalk in downtown Chicago, Andrew turned to me and said, "Okay, Tia, let's do feedback. What's one thing you thought I did well?"

I started listing the first 20 things that came to mind. Interrupting me, he said, "Just ONE thing, Tia. Thank you! Now, what's one thing you think I could do differently next time?"

For the first time all day, I had nothing to say.

I began to sweat, my mouth went dry, I was so nervous. "How could I give credible and useful feedback to a professional speaker and the CEO of my company in a domain that I knew nothing about?" I thought.

I proceeded to nervous talk the entire 15-minute walk back to the office without ever answering his question.

When we arrived back at the office, I thought I was in the clear until I heard a voice from behind me say, "Tia..." I turned around.

"At Habits at Work, we give, receive and take feedback very seriously. If you're not able to do that, you're not a fit for our company." He wasn't angry, or mean, but he was oh so clear!

OUCH!!!! Am I right?

That night, I went home and I cried a little (okay, a lot), then I gave myself a pep talk and came up with a list of 10 ways I could have answered that question. Because I knew what was coming the next day. Andrew was, again, delivering a session to a customer and I was to attend.

Sure enough, the next day Andrew asked me what he did well and what he could do differently. This time, I had an answer that was at least good enough not to get me fired that second day!

After that, every day we did feedback and every day I got a little better and a little more confident. And although I did not notice it myself, my feedback itself was getting better and more useful.

But I didn't fully realize the cumulative impact of that daily practice until a year later when Andrew was asked about his professional speaking journey during a Q&A and, specifically, about his speaking coach.

He said, "Well my coach is here today. I'd like to introduce her to you."

I looked around for one of his professional (and expensive) speaking coaches but no one was there.

Then, I noticed he was referring to me!

After my initial shock, I realized that I was no longer simply practicing the skill of giving feedback, I was now adding real value to his performance and improvement.

For the last 6 months, I had taken the lead role in his coaching sessions and I had become, in his eyes, one of his most effective speaking coaches.

So, what was MY lesson?

Feedback may be uncomfortable to give and receive (I learned that the hard way my first day), but the power of feedback is



undeniable in its ability to help us get good at getting great AT ANYTHING in record time!

While I watched Andrew's speaking improve, what I missed was that my coaching was improving, too!

How did that result from this simple, daily practice of giving feedback?

At Habits at Work, we suggest a very simple formula for giving and receiving performance feedback called 2x2 feedback. This is how it works:

Immediately following a practice or performance, my coach will say to me, "What's ONE thing you think you Did Well?"

I'll think back on all the things I Did Well, choose the most powerful ONE thing and share that.

My coach will respond with a neutral, "Yes." She won't agree or disagree. She will simply acknowledge my self-reflection.

My coach will then look at her notes, choose the ONE most powerful Did Well from her perspective and share that with me.

I will say, "Thank you," because feedback is a gift!

By starting with what I Did Well, we achieve 3 things:

It allows me to focus on what had me stand out! If you want to be good, work on your weaknesses, if you want to be GREAT work on your strengths.

It builds my confidence.

As a result of being primed with the positive, I become open to hearing the constructive feedback that comes next. In a word, I become more coachable.

Then, my coach will say to me, "Tia, what's ONE thing you think you can Do Differently next time?"

I'll think back on ALL the things I could Do Differently next time, choose the most impactful ONE thing and share that.

My coach will respond with a neutral, "Yes," allowing me to improve my own model of excellence through this self-reflection.

Then, my coach will review her notes, choose the ONE most impactful Do Differently from her perspective and share that.

Again, I will say, "Thank you," because feedback is a gift.

Ending with what I can Do Differently next time builds my competence.

Mastery in ANY skill is the sum of our confidence and competence and the 2x2 feedback model is our access to growing genius-level skills in any domain of our choosing in record time!

Don't believe me?

Answer this: If you were to practice one skill deliberately every day of the year for just 10-20 minutes a day, and you were to get 2x2 feedback on that practice, how much better would you be?

If we're very pessimistic about the value of feedback and assume we only get 0.5% better each day (I'm sure you'll agree that's a very low and unimpressive bar), over a 5-year period we'll become 90X better. Yes, you read that right, NINETY TIMES better at the given skill.

No matter where you start, a 90X improvement over a five-year period will likely put you in the top 1% of performers in that domain. That's genius-level skill right there.

You see, feedback is like compound interest to our talent bank accounts!

Deliberate practice with the intention of getting better, with the right kind of performance feedback from a coach is the genesis of genius!

CROSSING THE GENDER AND GENERATIONAL DIVIDE

WHAT OUR LEADERS TOLD US

Leaders demonstrate a clear gender and generational divide on attitudes to achieving gender parity.

Generational Divide

	MILLENNIAL (34 years and under)		GEN X / BOOMER (35 years and older)	
				
 HOW MANY YEARS UNTIL GENDER PARITY?	22 YRS	20 YRS	18 YRS	14 YRS
 WILL MILLENNIALS ACHIEVE GENDER PARITY?	 100% yes	 93% yes	 84% yes	 88% yes
 WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY IS IT TO SUPPORT WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP?	Everyone should (but 30% say no one is)	Everyone (especially HR)	Senior Leadership (especially CEO)	Senior Leadership & HR
 WHAT CAN LEADERS DO TO SUPPORT WOMEN INTO LEADERSHIP?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentor • Train • Be flexible • Focus on outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put the right gender neutral policies in place 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentor • Communicate commitment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender neutral hiring and promotion
 HOW CAN EMERGING LEADERS ADVANCE THEMSELVES?	Relationships & Networking	Display leadership skills	Show desire, Look for Mentors	Just perform better
 HOW IMPORTANT IS WORKPLACE FLEXIBILITY?	8.5 / 10	8.2 / 10	8.7 / 10	8.6 / 10
 WHAT IS NEEDED TO ACHIEVE ONE LIFE – A BALANCE OF WORK AND HOME?	 Flexible location	 Flexible hours	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible options • Focus on performance not presenteeism 	 Technology for flexible work options

WHO IS HIRING? OUR SPONSORS!



NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

We can't believe it's almost summer already! While most of us were met with more snow than we knew what to do with, March is a big month for SIM Women. This month, we celebrate women's history and give all of you a virtual high-five for continuing to break ceilings.

Looking for something to binge? We recommend listening to Brene Brown's Dare to Lead podcast and watching Genius: Aretha on Hulu.

Happy spring!

Jennifer, Donna, Nina and Anne