

knowledge that you bring to the table, *and* it is about equipping others to recognize and develop their *own* expertise and capacities as a result of your coming together.

In order to serve all students well and to meet the mounting adaptive challenges at our doorstep, we need to help each other grow and improve our practice, and we need to embrace the unique glow and spark that resides within each of us. While we may not all wear our competencies, our leadership, or our know-how in quite the same ways or styles, this diversity is a gift, and a resource to be nourished. As another wise woman, Edith Wharton, mused, "There are two ways of spreading light: to be the candle or the mirror that reflects it." A developmental perspective helps us to see that, to different degrees and in different combinations, each of us can be both the candle and the mirror, with and for one another, as we follow up on feedback with care.

In the next chapter, we come full circle and raise up the critical importance of seeking out feedback as a way to more deeply understand ourselves and our practice, and to grow our feedback and instructional leadership with the support of others. As we will discuss, seeking out and learning from feedback is one vital way we can bring our biggest, best selves to the urgent work ahead.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

Once again, we invite you to consider the following reflective questions, which can be used for independent thinking and/or group conversation. We hope they are helpful to you as you consider ways you might like to apply or extend the ideas in this chapter about following up on feedback to your own leadership, collaborations, and/or instructional practice. You may find it useful to first free-think or free-write privately, and then engage in discussion with a colleague or your team.

- ◆ After reading this chapter, what are two of your biggest takeaways?
- ◆ What are one or two things you would like to do to enhance your approach to following up on feedback?
- ◆ How, if at all, has reading this chapter helped you to better understand—from a developmental perspective—your own and/or other people's experiences of giving and receiving feedback, as well as what may have happened afterward?

CHAPTER 10

Seeking Out and Growing from Feedback

The curious paradox is that when I truly accept myself just as I am, then I can change.

—CARL ROGERS, *On Becoming a Person*

Throughout this book, we have explored the power and promise of a new, developmental approach to feedback that takes into account the different developmental capacities of feedback givers as well as receivers. Before discussing how seeking out feedback can help us grow—and strategies we can employ to do just that—we thought it would be helpful to pause and highlight the terrain presented in this book so far.

We began, in chapter 1, by highlighting the growing need for this approach, which we call *feedback for growth*, in light of increasing accountability and evaluation mandates, as well as the growing number of adaptive challenges that infuse education today.¹ In chapter 2, we further situated this work within the larger feedback literature, and foreshadowed how a developmental understanding of feedback *complements, deepens, and extends* key lessons about effective feedback that we synthesized from scholarship across professional domains.

In chapters 3, 4, and 5, we explored the theoretical underpinnings of feedback for growth, and considered how constructive-developmental theory offers one helpful lens for understanding the qualitatively different ways that adults orient to and experience feedback.² As we've emphasized in these chapters and throughout this book, a working understanding of this theory can help us give and receive feedback that can be even more effectively heard, taken in, and acted upon. More specifically, we stressed the importance of meeting adults *where they are* in the developmental sense when

offering feedback, and of remaining mindful of our *own* preferences, capacities, and orientations as feedback givers. In chapters 6, 7, 8, and 9, we took an up-close look at the practical processes that constitute feedback for growth, and highlighted key strategies for strengthening our developmental communications and collaborations before, during, and after feedback itself.

In this chapter, we come full circle and raise up the critical importance of *seeking out* feedback as a way to grow oneself, one's leadership, and one's instructional practice. This is important to consider whether you are offering feedback to colleagues as a supervisor, a peer, and/or a member of a team or a professional learning community. As Carl Rogers explained in the epigraph, it is only when we accept ourselves as we are—when we recognize and honor our limitations as well as our strengths—that we can open up authentic growing spaces in our hearts and minds for real improvement and change. Indeed, learning to seek out, grow through and from, and embrace feedback of different kinds (e.g., formal, informal) and from different sources (e.g., supervisors, colleagues, supervisees, students, families, and other stakeholders) is one of the most powerful ways to grow as an educator and human being. Put another way, accepting the need for our own continued growth and getting truly comfortable with feedback about our performance can help us gently stretch our growing edges, and thereby expand our cognitive, emotional, intrapersonal, and interpersonal capacities.

GROWING ONESELF THROUGH FEEDBACK: STRATEGIES AND IMPERATIVES

In today's fast-paced, high-stakes educational environment, it is more important than ever that we bring our biggest, best selves to the vital work of teaching, learning, and leading. While current policy mandates and new reforms—such as the Common Core State Standards, high-stakes teacher and principal evaluation systems, and Race to the Top initiatives—place new demands on teachers and educational leaders of all kinds, these pressures (alongside the intrinsic imperatives we feel to best serve those in our care) have also heightened the critical role of effective, actionable feedback in our change and improvement efforts, for others as well as ourselves.

In fact, like leadership itself, effective feedback for growth must emanate from *and* circle back to the selves we bring to this work. It must, in other words, both “begin with and rest on” our own growth and development, so that we can even more effectively give our best to others.³ With this urgent necessity as backdrop, we next present three strategies for seeking out and growing from feedback that you can use to enhance your noble

work, leadership, and collaboration with colleagues. Importantly, each of the strategies can be employed to facilitate self-growth for adults with any of the ways of knowing we have illuminated in this book. We emphasize this here because we contextualize each strategy with an example from a different leader—and, as you will see, these leaders make meaning in qualitatively different ways. We've done this to paint a more on-the-ground picture of these strategies in action, and to help emphasize that seeking out and growing from feedback is important for all leaders and educators, regardless of one's way of knowing. So, as you read the examples that follow, please keep in mind that any of the strategies can be helpful to any leader or educator, just as they can be helpful to all of us.

Strategy 1: Informal Surveys

Sometimes, the most effective way to learn about (and from) others' experiences of your work, leadership, and collaboration is to ask them about it. Especially when you've created a safe and respectful culture of feedback, you may be pleased by how readily people will share their ideas and perspectives to support your growth and professional development. After all, your colleagues have a vested interest in your success. Moreover, asking for feedback is a strategy that can be used in one-on-one settings, or when working with groups of varying sizes. Still, knowing what you know now about development (i.e., that, even under the best conditions, many people may not feel comfortable offering direct, honest feedback out loud and in your presence, especially if you are in a supervisory role), it can be helpful to invite adults to share their feedback in ways that simultaneously honor their ways of knowing and feel safe in light of any organizational, power, or intra- and interpersonal dynamics that may complicate a more direct exchange.

Toward this end, we often find it valuable to invite adults to complete an informal survey when seeking to further improve our work and/or professional initiatives (courses, workshops, seminars, teamwork, professional learning experiences, etc.). While, in some ways, sending out such a survey demands a certain amount of vulnerability (after all, you never quite know what information will come back to you), openly asking for feedback in this form is a great way to learn. It also models an authentic commitment to caring for others' experiences, and an understanding of feedback as something valuable and necessary for everyone, no matter one's role or hierarchical position.

There are two key points about using such a survey (which you could distribute via paper, e-mail, or other online survey administration tool) that we want to underscore here. The first is that including an option for

anonymity is very important. The opportunity to leave one's name off a feedback form, for instance, can in some cases open a safer space for new and different kinds of feedback. Plus, adults always have the option of self-identifying if they choose to do so. Sometimes adults *want* to put their name on these kinds of surveys for a variety of reasons—including but not limited to having something they would like to share on the record or want to address more directly.

The other point is about the power of doing this informally. While a survey can be a valuable part of more formal evaluations, giving people a chance to formatively share in a “just between you and me” manner can similarly help you learn from ideas and feedback that might not otherwise come up. Sticking for a moment with our own example of seeking out feedback from participants when teaching in university settings, you could imagine, for instance, the difference between what professors might learn from informal, mid-semester reflections versus university-issued course evaluations that are shared with school administrators. Just as we noted in our earlier discussions of *giving* feedback, carving out space for ongoing, formative feedback can help us learn from the widest variety of voices and ideas over time, and can even help us better prepare for more summative evaluations.

While we know that surveys can take many shapes and forms, and that you likely know best what kinds of questions would feel most helpful to explore with colleagues in your own contexts, in exhibit 10.1 we offer a sample of general, open-ended questions that we have found to be powerful and enlightening when gathering feedback about our work and teaching. We hope that you find these—and your adaptations of them—helpful in your own leadership, teaching, collaborating, and learning.

Of course, and as you now know well, adults with different ways of knowing may orient differently to the experience of inviting and receiving feedback through surveys. Instrumental knowers, for instance, will likely gravitate toward any concrete suggestions for improvement that arise, while socializing knowers may mine the data with an eye toward understanding how others are feeling about them and their work. Self-authoring knowers will likely appreciate the opportunity to directly solicit feedback on their practice, but may need to make a conscious effort to remain open to ideas or suggestions that fall beyond the bounds of what they were looking for or hoping to learn. Self-transforming knowers, too, may eagerly embrace the opportunity to learn how others are thinking and feeling, but may need gentle encouragement to let go of some of the feedback, especially if it reflects more of an outlying perspective than a common concern. In all cases, however, one of the most promising aspects

EXHIBIT 10.1

Informal Survey Questions for Seeking Out Feedback

- What are some aspects of _____ (e.g., our work together, my coaching, our professional development initiative, my teaching, my leadership, our feedback processes) that are working well for you?
- What, if anything, are some aspects of _____ that feel less helpful to you?
- Is there anything you suggest, wish for, wonder about, or recommend that could make _____ more meaningful for and/or supportive to you?
- Do you have any additional comments or suggestions that you think would be helpful for me to understand?

Thank you so much for sharing your thoughts and feelings with me.

of employing informal surveys to enhance your practice is that they involve *solicited* feedback—and thus presuppose a certain openness to learning and growth on the part of the initiator.

Geoff's example: Seeking out feedback in the transition from an instrumental to socializing way of knowing

While adults with any way of knowing and any professional role can request, benefit, and learn from an informal survey to gather feedback, we next share Geoff's powerful story of seeking out feedback to grow and improve as a curriculum team leader. A mid-career high school social studies teacher, Geoff was passionate about “making a difference,” and volunteered to lead the curriculum team because he felt confident that he had the knowledge and skills to put his money where his mouth was. While Geoff was well aware of the new curriculum mandates coming down the pipeline in his district (e.g., aligning the pace and sequence of history instruction to the Common Core), he held very strong views about the “right” way to meet these objectives, and described himself as a “traditional, old-school teacher” who was good at “getting things done.” Developmentally, Geoff displayed many characteristics of an instrumental knower, as he firmly believed that there were “right” and “best” practices for teaching that required strict fidelity, and had trouble taking in colleagues' perspectives when they offered contrary ideas. He'd found some success with his teaching methods in the classroom, and—since he was generally well regarded by his peers and administrators—he felt empowered to foreground these approaches in

the curriculum planning. As he often said to his colleagues during team discussions and debates, "It works for me, so it can work for you!"

After a few weeks in his lead role, however, Geoff found himself increasingly frustrated by colleagues' "critical feedback." In particular, two teachers on the team were aggressively pushing him to adopt a more "flexible, progressive" approach they felt would better reflect the school's core philosophy. While in truth, Geoff had been cataloguing such challenging experiences for some time (even outside of the team context), things really came to a head one afternoon when Thomas, one of the teachers Geoff considered to be an "ally" on the curriculum team, "accused" Geoff of humiliating him and walked out of the meeting. In the moment just before, Geoff had told Thomas that one of his ideas "wasn't applicable" since he brought it up outside of the agreed-upon agenda. But, seeing the genuine pain and embarrassment in Thomas's expression, he felt unsettled and confused. Needless to say, this was *not* the outcome Geoff had intended.

So while Geoff had genuinely been trying to do the right thing by Thomas, the team, and the students they were working to serve, it suddenly seemed clear to him that the "right" thing wasn't quite working. Admittedly, Geoff was a little worried that Thomas might report him to the assistant principal or that he might lose his title as team leader, but he found himself even more concerned about how to make things right with Thomas—and with all of his team members—so that he could be a better leader with and for them. While he wasn't sure what this would look or feel like, he knew intuitively that something had to change.

For adults like Geoff who are grappling with moments of uncertainty or questioning, gathering more information through an informal survey can be a powerful strategy for crafting a path forward and a plan for growth, regardless of one's way of knowing. In Geoff's case, sharing with his colleagues that he "needed their help," and that he genuinely "wanted to get better" so that he could be even better *for them*, was a powerful framing for the informal survey he then asked them to complete. The survey, which was based on some of the questions in exhibit 10.1, helped Geoff to understand more clearly what he was doing well, as well as what kinds of things might further help his team reach their goals. Perhaps even more importantly, the survey helped him to understand that how others *felt* about his leadership mattered just as much as—if not more than—his sense of what was "right" and "wrong" for the curriculum. As one teacher on the team powerfully (and anonymously) explained, "I know you really care about this work, but it doesn't always feel like you care about *us*—the people on the team. You need to get better at acknowledging our value and contributions."

Seeking out and hearing feedback in this way helped Geoff to more genuinely appreciate and grow from what his colleagues had to say, and to consider next steps toward improving his team leadership. More specifically, Geoff began to recognize the importance of being less "run by" his own needs, and deliberately carved out multiple opportunities during meetings for *everyone* to share. Simultaneously, through his earnest efforts and openness to feedback, he found himself developing new internal capacities to more sensitively orient to others' needs and feelings.

Strategy 2: Mini-Convenings

In our work with educational leaders of all kinds, we strive to help adults learn about and experience the power of collegial inquiry in action. As we have described, collegial inquiry is a form of reflective practice that helps us to push our deep thinking and self-growth by exploring our own and others' ideas, assumptions, beliefs, and values about practice and problems of practice with trusted colleagues.⁴ While collegial inquiry can and does take many different forms, we often facilitate a special kind of case-based discussion that we call *convening*.⁵ This pedagogical strategy—which can be a powerful support to adults with any way of knowing—was designed to create a holding environment for the safe exploration of problematic or puzzling dilemmas of practice.⁶ More specifically, after establishing safe, participatory norms, conveners compose, share, and discuss written descriptions of complex challenges in order to take broader and bigger perspectives on the issues at hand, and to learn and grow together as they see things anew. For more about the developmental process of convening, please see *Leading Adult Learning*.⁷

While the collaborative consultation process inherent in convening is a powerful tool for growth and development, it can sometimes be helpful when seeking out feedback to engage in a more abbreviated form of collegial inquiry, which we introduce and refer to here as a *mini-convening*. Mini-convening—which does not require a written case—can be employed in triads, teams, and professional learning communities, and, like its "big sister" namesake, can help support and challenge adults who make meaning at any place along the developmental continuum.⁸ The big idea behind mini-convenings is that, in growth-oriented teams, PLCs, and other safe contexts, we can actually *ask* our colleagues for feedback about a particular problem, goal, or challenge; and we can "convene" the group to receive feedback that is intentionally normed and structured to help us (and the entire group) gently push our thinking and meaning making. For example, in teams or PLCs, individuals can present something to the group that they would like to get

better at, grow about themselves, or otherwise get help with via focused collegial consultation—including behavior management challenges, leadership conundrums, interpersonal dynamics, and other problems of practice.

Importantly, when you are convening a group in this new “mini” way (just as when full convenings are implemented), the goal is not necessarily to solve a problem or answer a question immediately. Rather, the objective—for the convener—is to carefully consider and open up to alternative perspectives and differing interpretations that may shed new light on actions, assumptions, and sense making (both one’s own and others’).⁹ For this reason, after the convener verbally presents the focus of the mini-convening to the group, he or she *listens* (i.e., does not respond) and quietly processes information (takes notes, jots down questions and insights, etc.) as the other group members discuss the selected topic, problem of practice, or dilemma and refer to the convener in the third person.

While we know it can sometimes be hard to hold back our reflexive responses as others discuss something very important to us, we have learned that this kind of taking in and holding back from speaking can help us listen more deeply and in different ways (i.e., instead of preparing a response). It can also create a more open space for group members to safely introduce their thinking, questions, and insights in relation to our questions and requests. While the time allotted for different adaptations of mini-convenings can vary, we recommend twenty-five minutes at a minimum and forty at a maximum since we have found these timeframes to be most effective. To be of best help and to further illuminate the process, we offer a sample protocol for mini-convening in exhibit 10.2.

Once a group or team agrees that they would like to try this new process as a way of giving and receiving feedback, it will be important for members to agree upon “living norms” and confidentiality agreements, which need to be revisited before the start of each mini-convening.¹⁰ In addition, the group or team will want to:

- agree on how much time will be invested into each mini-convening;
- decide how many mini-convenings will occur in each group or team meeting;
- create a list of who will be the convener during each session and who will serve as facilitator/timekeeper;
- build in at least five minutes between mini-convenings for a “step back” to check in on norms and refocus for the next mini-convening; and¹¹
- build in at least five minutes up front for checking in and five minutes at the end for checking out as a team.

EXHIBIT 10.2

A Protocol for Mini-convening

The following protocol can be used to convene a group of colleagues (e.g., team, PLC, leadership cabinet, or district leadership team) around a self-identified question, dilemma, problem of practice, or goal for professional growth and improvement.

1. **5 minutes:** The convener introduces the context and his or her dilemma, challenge, or way in which he or she hopes to grow, as well as one or two questions that she or he would like to guide the feedback discussion during the mini-convening.
2. **15 minutes:** The rest of the group/team/PLC reflects together on the questions posed by the convener. The group refers to the person being consulted to (e.g., the convener) in the third person. The convener listens but does not participate in this discussion.
3. **1 minute:** During this time, the convener and the group pause silently to reflect on and synthesize feedback. When the convener feels ready, he or she then moves the group to step 4.
4. **4 minutes:** The convener responds to the group, reflects out loud, and generates one next step that she or he will plan to take from that point. Depending upon group norms, conveners can check back in with the group about progress in later sessions.

*Note: Adapted from Drago-Severson, *Leading Adult Learning*, 93.*

As you might imagine, it is also important for individuals who will convene the group to carefully prepare for their mini-convenings. In other words, prior to the designated meeting time, the person being consulted to (i.e., the convener) will want to reflect on what he or she would like help with (i.e., a pressing problem, dilemma, or struggle in terms of how he or she would like to grow from group feedback), as well as the particular question(s) that will be posed to the group. In this way, this new model of small-group consultation can facilitate self-growth and, importantly, can be a powerful support for *all* participants as they work together to explore new ideas and perspectives. After all, we learn so much from one another, whether we are a convener or a participant in any kind of convening group.

Naomi’s example: Seeking out feedback in the transition from a socializing to self-authoring way of knowing

Like the informal surveys we discussed earlier, mini-convenings can be a powerful support for adults with any way of knowing. Nevertheless, to help

ground this promising practice in a real-life example, we next describe the experiences of Naomi, a teacher leader who was working to grow her practice in the transition from socializing to self-authoring.

Naomi, who was the lead teacher in her high school's English department, met regularly with the four other department heads on campus to collectively discuss schoolwide processes (e.g., examining student data, professional development, and their school's new teacher observation and evaluation cycles). As they discussed these important matters, Naomi came to think and feel, based on her observations and conversations, that many of her teacher-leader colleagues felt more comfortable than she did delivering critical feedback to the teachers they were supporting. While recognizing this gap was an early move on Naomi's part toward a more self-authoring way of knowing (i.e., she was beginning to hold this part of her experience and sense making out as "object"), she was eager to learn more about how her colleagues were able to offer constructive feedback so well, and how she could too.

As she explained to her colleagues during one monthly meeting, she really wanted their help because she was coming to see that, too often, she "hid" behind her "sunny and bright" persona when interacting with the teachers in the English department. "I *really* want to be authentic and honest," she shared, "and to stop hiding—but I can see that expressing appreciation feels delicious to me, while using words with a more negative hue makes me feel like a dark cloud is gathering within and outside of me."

In response to Naomi's courageous request for help with getting better at offering more direct feedback and sharing what she was "truly thinking and feeling" (a challenge for many socializing knowers), the group agreed to meet the following week for a mini-convening with Naomi. Importantly, because Naomi was asking for help that implicated her internal capacities (not just particular skills or solutions), the team strove to help Naomi with next steps *while also* providing gentle developmental "wonderings" that could support and challenge her thinking. For example, Naomi's team members helped her to more deeply probe the feelings and anxieties that bubbled up for her when she was tasked with conveying challenging feedback. "I wonder what's *really* at stake for Naomi in these moments?" one colleague asked. "I wonder if there are colleagues with whom she might feel more comfortable testing out authentic feedback?" another chimed in. As Naomi listened to and reflected on these important questions, the group was careful to reassure her that feeling comfortable with offering difficult feedback was actually "a capacity she could grow within herself over time and with practice."

While the team offered many important insights and wonderings during Naomi's mini-convening, she left feeling particularly appreciative of a quote from Rainer Maria Rilke that her colleague Stewart shared with the group: "Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms and like books that are now written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer."¹² As Stewart explained during the mini-convening, "loving the questions" was "sometimes an infuriating part of growing oneself—but it was always a key part of development," as we need time to grow into our bigger, more complex selves. He continued, "The question can actually be your future in camouflage." For Naomi, this felt like a powerful and "peaceful" reminder, because she came to see—with her colleagues' support—that identifying her improvement goal was indeed the first step toward being able to offer the kinds of feedback that she wanted to. Moreover, her mini-convening also helped her to take a greater perspective on the fears and assumptions that kept her "hiding in the sunshine" of a more socializing approach to her leadership.

As we shared in chapter 3's discussion of constructive-developmental theory, the transition from being run by and *subject* to something to being able to hold it out more, be responsible for it, and control it as *object* is the balance on which our very meaning making hinges. For Naomi, recognizing her emerging transition was a powerful "a-ha" moment—and supported a slight and important developmental shift that left her with a bigger view of herself and how she could get better in her work. As she shared with her colleagues after her mini-convening, she now felt it was "okay to feel uncomfortable in those moments" of giving hard feedback since she knew it was something she could and would grow to manage with their continued support.

Strategy 3: Hosting a "Dinner Party"

Finally, we are excited to share a third powerful strategy for self-growth, which we affectionately refer to as the "Dinner Party Exercise." Inspired and informed by Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey's path-finding work on Immunity-to-Change (ITC) Coaching and the developmental underpinnings of constructive-developmental theory, this exercise—like other components of Kegan and Lahey's larger developmental coaching arc—invites us to understand and see more deeply into our own assumptions and

self-systems as pathways to growth.¹³ In the simplest terms, this final strategy—which fortunately (or unfortunately?) does not require the hosting of an actual dinner party—involves picking “one big thing” we’d like to get better at in our work or personal lives, and developing a plan and collegial supports to help us do just that. We use our version of this exercise, which is similar to the version for ITC coaching and adheres to its framing and purposes, in our work with aspiring and practicing teacher leaders, assistant principals, principals, superintendents, district leaders, coaches, and other educators as an invitation to help them grow themselves in general and by purposely and deliberately seeking out feedback.

While this strategy for self-growth and development does *not* require real-life cooking, we refer to it as the Dinner Party Exercise because the first step involves generating a list of people who know you really well, whom you trust, and who care deeply about you, and inviting them to attend an imaginary dinner party at your home. For this dinner party of the mind, guests shouldn’t worry about bringing a dessert or a main course. Instead, they should arrive at the door prepared to share with you the “one big thing” that, from their perspective, would make a substantial difference for you if “you could get significantly better at” it in your work or personal life.¹⁴ In other words, each of your guests tells you what he or she believes is the *single most important thing* you could do to improve in your work or personal life—whether it be your leadership, instructional practice, collaborations, communications, delegations, or any other area for growth.

Now, as we explain when facilitating this exercise with educators of all kinds, your invitees can be people you know personally or professionally, and the guest list can be as long or as short as you see fit (as you don’t have to worry about space limitations, social groupings, or seating arrangements). However, everyone you invite should be someone who cares about you and knows you very well. They should also be people you trust, and who genuinely want you to succeed. They should, in other words, “have your back.” With this in mind, we don’t think it’s a good idea to invite a colleague you think has it out for you (even if he or she might offer a different or valuable perspective). From our view, this just isn’t that kind of dinner party.

Now, since this is usually a hypothetical exercise and people won’t actually be showing up with gift-wrapped copies of their most thoughtfully generated feedback, it can be very helpful, once you’ve finalized your guest list, to make a note next to each person about what *you* think he or she would identify as your “one big thing.” Very often, for instance, we know *just* what those closest to us would say. In some cases, they’ve been saying

it for ages! In other cases, and especially when we facilitate this exercise over a couple of days during institutes and seminars, people move beyond hypothetical lists and actually ask individuals about their one big thing (some people worry, for instance, that they can “only know what they can know”). We’ve recently discovered that some educators even text people on their lists as we are facilitating one-day workshops. While reaching out to others can certainly be a very powerful supplement to this activity, we consider it an optional extension that you can employ at your discretion.¹⁵

Regardless of how they generate their lists, educators in workshops around the world comment on how valuable it is to put these ideas down on paper and to see them next to each other—how they intersect, overlap, and align (or don’t). Moreover, it doesn’t matter if the individuals at your dinner party agree with one another, or even if *you* agree with what they have to say. In fact, *you* should be the very last person on the list, and you should feel free to cast your own vote about the one big thing you need to get better at, regardless of how it aligns with the other suggestions on your list, as Kegan and Lahey suggest in their original version of ITC. Essentially, the intention of the dinner party invitation is just to get it all out there—to get a variety of possibilities and perspectives down on paper—so you can look at the list and think carefully about what would feel most meaningful and important to you as an improvement goal.

Once you’ve created your final list of guests and their caring feedback suggestions (including your own), the hope and challenge is to select *one* area of growth that you would like to focus on as an improvement goal. This can be the same as your initial response to the question, or it can be inspired by something that one of your guests shared (either literally or hypothetically). The most important thing here is that your goal feels deeply meaningful to you, and that it involves a behavior (or nonbehavior) that is in your own control (i.e., it is not about other people’s reactions to or treatment of you).¹⁶ Of course, our ways of knowing have been found to influence both our rationale for picking an improvement goal and the nature of the goal we’ve selected.¹⁷ For example, are you picking a goal that will help with getting a reward? Maintaining or moving away from the need to receive others’ approval? Getting better at expressing or acting on your own values or beliefs? Or more effectively building and growing professional connections? Does the goal you’ve selected prioritize achieving concrete deliverables, empathizing more deeply with others, taking a firmer stand for your own ideas, or expanding some of your more deeply favored ways of thinking and seeing? Regardless of these potentially diverse orientations to what’s essentially a developmentally oriented dinner party, the fact of

influence and control felt very comfortable and reassuring to Magdalena as a self-authoring knower, it also meant incredibly long hours that, increasingly, were coming to feel unsustainable as her school grew in size and complexity. It was also, she began to feel, directly connected to the diminished morale she was beginning to sense around the building.

"I guess I'm something of a micro-manager," she confided when first considering her "one big thing"—and indeed, in addition to being the lone point person for admissions, staff hiring, professional development, teacher evaluations, school culture, and student discipline, Magdalena took it upon herself to lead the data team, and she regularly sat in on extracurricular activities and departmental meetings. So, when she invited some of her most trusted teachers and supervisors to her growth-oriented dinner party and they confirmed her propensity for "over-influencing," she decided that "trusting her teachers, supervisors, and staff more by delegating more" was a meaningful goal for her personal and professional growth. While, on the one hand, Magdalena considered her passion and "presentness" important strengths of her leadership (and key benefits of her self-authoring capacities), she simultaneously recognized that "stretching herself to really empower others" could help her to become a more compassionate, effective leader, and could likewise support her hope of "bringing the school community—teachers, staff, parents, children, all of us—closer together."

In her mid-year self-evaluation, Magdalena courageously documented her new improvement goal, and discussed it at length with her district supervisor, Chrissy (a veteran leader who also made meaning somewhere between a self-authoring and self-transforming way of knowing). Because Magdalena knew that Chrissy's feedback reflected her deep investment in and respect for Magdalena as a principal and professional—as well as Chrissy's own rich experience as an educational leader—she asked Chrissy if she would be willing to meet regularly to engage in conversation about her improvement goal. Meeting once every three weeks or so, Magdalena felt, would be a powerful support and challenge for growth, so she was delighted when Chrissy agreed to help.

While Magdalena really appreciated Chrissy's generosity, time, and thoughtful expertise, Chrissy offered feedback on a few occasions that Magdalena "didn't understand or agree with." Sometimes, Chrissy's questions left her feeling exposed and uncertain, and sometimes her suggestions felt too far afield from what Magdalena wanted to do and be as the principal (e.g., when Chrissy suggested setting up a teacher committee to lead professional development). During these challenging moments, Magdalena (like many self-authoring knowers) had no trouble letting Chrissy know how

she was feeling and what she was thinking. For example, Magdalena said things like, "I'm not saying that your feedback is flawed. I am saying that I need help understanding your feedback. Can you help me better understand where you're coming from on this one?"

Fortunately, Chrissy took Magdalena's questions and inquiries in the spirit of learning in which they were offered, and Magdalena ultimately felt that her ongoing, collaborative meetings with Chrissy were really helping her "let go of the reins" in ways that upheld high standards *and* built human capacity in her teachers and her school. For example, Magdalena invited a few of her most trusted colleagues (yes—those same teachers she invited to her dinner party) into a "gradual release mentoring plan" designed to help them take on increasing leadership in the school. Powerfully, Magdalena connected her emerging confidence to "rely on colleagues as supports and leaders" to her growing trust in and respect for Chrissy as a feedback partner. As Magdalena explained, "Having Chrissy, having her as a mirror to reflect back the best and the worst of me so clearly, is just such a gift. I want to be that person for my teachers—and I want to help more of my teachers be that person for each other." In this way, and representative of the larger developmental shift she was making in her thinking and work, Magdalena's experiences seeking out and learning from feedback helped her to grow and improve her leadership in meaningful and lasting ways.

CHAPTER SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we illuminated the critical importance of *seeking out* feedback as a way to grow our leadership, our instructional practice, and ourselves. Since who we are as leaders, educators, and feedback givers matters so immensely in the many domains of our work and lives—and since, in other words, our capacities, perspectives, personalities, and developmental orientations will influence how well we hold our multiple roles and responsibilities—learning through and from feedback can fuel key parts of our continued growth, development, and effectiveness. It can also model our deep commitment to change and improvement for those in our care.

To be of best help as you seek to enhance your noble work in these important ways, this chapter highlighted three promising strategies for seeking out and growing from feedback—informal surveys, mini-convenings, and the Dinner Party Exercise—that can be employed by and with adults with each and any way of knowing. We truly, truly hope these ideas and practices are useful to you, and we wish you wings as you soar to new heights in all of your endeavors.

Before we invite you once again to consider a series of questions designed to help you extend and apply your learnings from this chapter, we want to preview an action planning opportunity that will follow in the epilogue. A tying together of the ideas and prompts you've considered throughout this book, this activity will help you solidify next steps for growing and authentically engaging in developmentally oriented feedback in your school or professional context.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

One last time, we'd like to invite you to consider a few reflective questions, which can be used for independent thinking and/or group conversation. As always, you may find it helpful to free-think or free-write privately in relation to these questions, and then engage in discussion with one or more colleagues.

- ◆ What are one or two things you would like to do to enhance your practice of growth and self-development?
- ◆ What is one strategy for seeking out feedback that you would like to employ or adapt?
- ◆ After reading this chapter and this book, what do you see as one or two of your more important takeaways?

EPILOGUE

The Promise and Power of Feedback for Growth

That is what learning is. You suddenly understand something you've understood all your life, but in a new way.

—DORIS LESSING

Throughout this book, we have argued that adding a developmental layer to the best of what we know about feedback can help us even more effectively offer supports and challenges for growth that can be heard, taken in, and acted upon by adults who make sense of their work and the world in qualitatively different ways. While deeply effective and actionable feedback is important for its own sake—to help us best serve our students and the adults in our care—current pressures have pushed feedback to the foreground of educational reform efforts and policies, and an understanding of *feedback for growth* has never been more necessary.

Again and again, leaders and educators of all kinds voice a desire to get better at feedback—to learn how to *do* feedback well in light of these imperatives—because they know how important it is and can be. As one school principal recently said, reflecting on the power of good feedback:

I really believe in the power of strong feedback not only to move practice, but to change minds, to change lives. I can name feedback conversations that have literally altered the course of my career: a pizza shop conversation in October 2009, a discussion about templates in the spring of 2010, a formal post-observation conference in September 2011, an e-mail from a friend of mine that same month. These feedback 'experiences' stand out as turning points—peaks and valleys—in my work. Feedback is a very real agent of change.