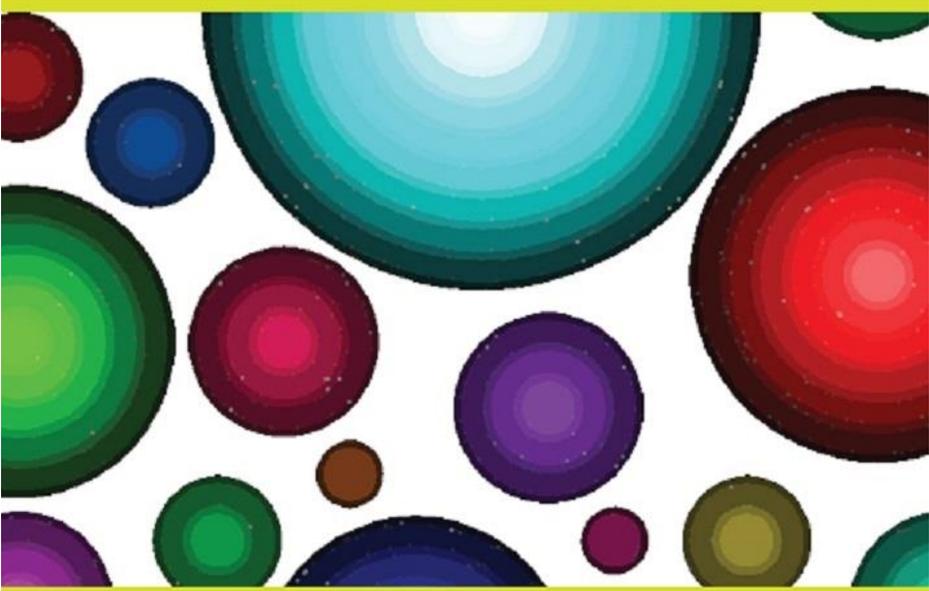


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# How to Discuss 360 Feedback

The essential guide

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Julie Cooper

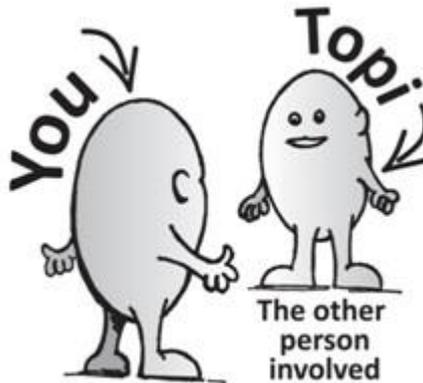
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## TOPI – The Other Person Involved



*Throughout this book, I refer to The Other Person Involved as Topi, which is much easier than saying feedback receiver, employee, coachee or any other not-quite-right word. You are you, the person you are talking to is Topi. Sometimes Topi is male, sometimes female.*

## Introduction

This book is for you if you have been asked to run one to one 360 feedback meetings. You may work in HR, learning and development, or be a coach or trainer. If you are new to the task or want to review your practice, pull up a chair.

Helping another person come to terms with their 360 feedback is a task that needs considerable skill, understanding and experience. Many people approach it with trepidation, and quite rightly so – it's an important job; it can be demanding and has the potential to get pear shaped.

On the other hand, done well, it is incredibly rewarding. You have the opportunity to support a fellow human come to terms with valuable information about themselves and plan how to reach their potential. For me, it doesn't get much better than that. Having said that, I do remember what it is like to dread the feedback meeting. What if Topi (Topi is an acronym, meaning The Other Person Involved) gets angry? What if I can't help? What if they're in denial? What if neither of us can think of one single action point?

If you are new to 360 feedback, you may have a list of fears longer than that. The purpose of this book is to give you the tools and knowledge to approach the job with confidence. Hopefully your concerns will be addressed and you'll feel equipped to handle the discussion – or you might have identified your own skills gaps.

This is a practical guide, not an academic paper. You will need to look elsewhere if you want to study the science behind the tool. Also, this book won't tell you how to plan and implement 360 feedback within your organisation – that is another topic,

## *How to Discuss 360 Feedback*

and approaches vary considerably depending on what else is in place.

If you want a pragmatic approach to discussing 360 feedback that will tell you what good practice looks like with tips, hints and some troubleshooting of common concerns, you are in the right place.

### **3. The Aims of the 360 Feedback Meeting**

The primary aims of a 360 feedback meeting are to:

- Help Topi interpret the report
- Understand and accept the results
- Identify his key strengths and development needs

Usually first steps towards goal setting and action planning also happen, although in one meeting you will be hard pressed to exactly define actions, as methods of addressing training needs have to be researched and agreed. Often a second meeting to firm up action plans takes place. Topi might be tasked to discuss and finalise goals with his line manager, or it may be left to Topi to decide what action to take. Of course, if no change or action takes place, the whole process will have been a waste of everyone's time.

Some organisations have a process for feeding outcomes and goals into existing development plans – you will need to find out if this is the case for you.

Your organisation might have other 'big picture' aims for the data generated. For example, they may intend to use it to analyse employee engagement, identify company wide or team strengths and weaknesses. This should not detract from helping Topi have a valuable personal development experience.

By the end of the feedback meeting:

- Topi has increased self awareness, and has learnt how colleagues perceive him

### *How to Discuss 360 Feedback*

- Topi has had opportunity to reflect on the implications of the report
- Development points and topics for further investigation have been identified
- You will be satisfied that you have offered appropriate support and challenge to help Topi get maximum benefit from both the report and the feedback meeting

In a nutshell, going through 360 feedback should be enlightening, challenging, developmental and positive. Topi should be in a better place because of it.

## **4. What Skills do I Need to Run a Feedback Meeting?**

You probably possess most of the skills you need, or I doubt you would have been asked to get involved. Still, an objective assessment of your own skills is needed, as is a clear understanding of your role. Let's clear up a potential confusion before we begin. We talk about you, the person sitting down with Topi and going through the report with him, as 'giving 360 feedback'. Actually, it's not you giving the feedback is it? It's those people who answered the questionnaire who provide the feedback. Your role is not mainly a 'telling' role. It's much more complex and subtle than that.

Receiving a 360 feedback report can provoke a range of responses, so you will need to be able to handle discussions sensitively and deal with any emotions that emerge. You also will support Topi in making sense of the information, understanding the implications and deciding what actions to take.

Before we take a look at the skills you will need, consider first about the impact you will have on Topi. Your body language (expression, stature, poise), tone of voice and choice of language will all affect how you are perceived. How do you want Topi to view you? What is appropriate? I'm guessing that your first thoughts will be around coming over as professional and approachable. Where you go from there may depend on your role. Do think it through and be honest with yourself; what do you do (consciously or subconsciously) when you don't want to engage with someone? Or you want them to hurry up/shut up/move on? If we understand and recognise

the signs we send, we are in a better position to monitor ourselves and adjust our behaviour when we need to.

Here's a very typical example: let's say that the meeting is looking very likely to run over, you have no flexibility and another meeting booked straight afterwards. Your automatic reaction may be to speed up, talk faster, look at your watch, give shorter answers, and encourage Topi to skip sections. Think for a minute how that will seem to Topi. How would you feel if his shoes were on your feet? A 360 report can seem like a very big deal. Being rushed through the feedback meeting could make Topi feel that it's not important, that he isn't worth the time, that the organisation is only paying lip service to the process. Thinking in advance what you will do – and how you want to be perceived – in potential difficult scenarios will help you position yourself in the right way.

Let's get back to the skills you'll need. They are the type of skills you might learn on a counselling or coaching course such as:

- Contracting
- Active listening
- Questioning
- Explaining
- Challenging
- Exploring
- Goal setting
- Action planning
- Being person centred

A brief overview of these is given below to help you review your current level of skill. Some of them you may have picked up from your experience, others you may need to work on. Do be honest with yourself here, and get impartial feedback from others who understand these skills where you can. Reading this book will not plug your skills gaps, but identifying them is a good place to start. I've included some questions at the end of each skill to help you. I suggest for each one you:

- Rate yourself
- Ask what evidence you have to support the rating
- Think what it would take to improve your score

There are plenty of resources around that will give you greater depth in each area, so I'm not going to reinvent the wheel here. My aim is to make sure you have considered your own skills and encourage you to develop them further.

## **4.1 Contracting**

This means agreeing together what will happen during the meeting. It is always worth checking what the other person expects from you, so that you can correct any misconceptions. It is also your opportunity to set Topi at rest, by explaining briefly what is going to happen. Hopefully, this process will begin before you sit down together – for example in an email inviting Topi to the meeting – so that you do not need to start from scratch every time.

Does this seem unnecessary? Many problems that arise during feedback meetings occur because expectations aren't aligned. What if Topi thinks you will have all the answers? Or have access to the training budget? Or expects you to relay the conversation to his boss? You both need to know what will happen regarding:

- Who will see the report
- What you are there to do
- How long the meeting will last
- What (if any) the next steps are
- Confidentiality
- Impartiality

Is there anything else to be included that is pertinent to your organisation or your role? If you have an agenda, it is best to disclose it.

It doesn't work well if you open the meeting by exchanging pleasantries and then launch into a monologue explaining all the above. You are aiming to encourage Topi to open up to you, so putting her in 'receiving' mode is likely to shut her

down. Instead, give some thought to questions you can ask to establish what she already understands so that you can fill the gaps or put a different slant on things. Here are some examples:

*“Topi, did you see the email that explains why we are meeting?”*

*“What do you expect to happen today, Topi?”*

*“What’s your understanding of what we have to do today?”*

When both sides are happy that they are clear about why they are meeting and what needs to be done, you are ready to move on. More of that later.



## About the Author

### **Julie Cooper**

Hello. I'm a trainer, coach and author specialising in one to one skills. I have a background in advice and guidance, which no doubt has influenced my approach to discussing 360 feedback. I understand that busy people want accessible, practical information. They rarely have time or inclination to read complicated tomes, which is why my books are packed with instantly usable techniques and tips.

Please do check out my company, [Spring Development](#) which offers training and development to organisations and individuals that want to flourish and get the best out of their working lives. I've worked with many companies in different sectors – the only common denominator being that they want their people to succeed. If you are in the UK, I'd be happy to talk to you about developing your people.

I'm based in a village near Banbury in Oxfordshire, so ideally placed for reaching most places easily. Outside of work, I enjoy looking after my newly inherited amazingly beautiful garden, exploring The Cotswolds, and seeking out live music, arts and crafts.

## **Other Books By Julie Cooper:**

**Face to Face in the Workplace: A handbook of Strategies for Effective Discussions** ISBN 978-0955968037

Looking to improve your management skills? This is an accessible guide to every meeting, discussion or difficult conversation you will need to have.

Written for busy people who need quick solutions, Face to Face in the Workplace will equip you with all the tools and strategies you'll need to get it right every time.

Step by step frameworks will guide you in getting the best out of the people you manage, and yourself. You will: have more productive discussions that please everyone involved; save time by knowing how to prepare effectively; never have to worry about what to say in difficult meetings; learn to get your point over more effectively; improve your people management skills – and your career prospects.

Included: Assertive behaviour, Explaining, Listening, Interviewing applicants, Making someone redundant, Saying no, Shutting people up, Introducing change, Self awareness, Dismissing a member of staff, Personality styles, Challenging, Questioning, Credibility, Rapport, Body language, Respect, Appraisals, Return to work interviews, Challenging attitude, Coaching, Feedback, Conflict, The Dark Triad, Negotiating, Delegating, Exit interviews, Instructing, Influencing, Inappropriate behaviour, Managing your boss, Mentoring, Performance gaps, Praising, Supervising, Reprimanding, Supporting through change, 360° feedback.

***“This year’s Must Have book”*** HR Director magazine

**Co-Authored with Ann Reynolds:**

**The One to One Toolkit: Tips and Strategies for Advisers, Coaches and Mentors**

**by Julie Cooper and Ann Reynolds** ISBN 978-0955968051

Does your job involve helping people to move forward in their career, learning, or personal development? If so, this book is for you. It aims to meet the needs of people employed in the field of advice and guidance in a practical, user friendly way.

It explains useful models, suggests strategies for dealing with difficulties, and provides powerful, memorable tools to use with clients.

**Part One** takes you, step by step, through a tried and trusted model for giving advice, including highlighting dangers and difficulties in a 'how to' manner.

**Part Two** provides a more in depth model, focusing on guidance, explaining how to help your client in a professional manner when their needs are more complex.

**Part Three** is The Toolkit – a collection of bite sized theories, tips, exercises and strategies that can be used with clients in a one to one setting. Topics include decision making, changing perception, expanding horizons, positive thinking, learning and coaching. Widely used as a text for organisations training advisers.

*“I love this little book. It gives me new guidance ideas every time I open it.” Amazon review*

## **The Groupwork Toolkit: How To Convert Your One To One Advice Skills To Work With Groups**

**by Ann Reynolds and Julie Cooper ISBN 978-0955968013**

The Groupwork Toolkit makes groupwork easy by showing you how to recognise and transfer the skills you already have.

Advisers, coaches and mentors have a wealth of interpersonal and communication skills, but may lack the experience and confidence to transfer them successfully to running groups. The Groupwork Toolkit can help.

It demystifies groupwork, and gives you the confidence and knowledge you need to facilitate groups, whether your group are learning new skills, or have come for advice or guidance. It explains how you can deliver brilliant groupwork by planning well, setting objectives and using a variety of training techniques.

How people learn is covered, explaining the different ways people learn so you can adapt your style and methods to meet the needs of each group. There is a step by step model for producing a session plan, with plenty of practical tips and activities to use. Sample session plans are also included.

Lastly, sound advice on how to manage a group includes keeping the group involved and interested, and how to handle those difficult situations and individuals. If you need to provide group guidance, deliver career or job search sessions, this is the book for you.

***"The Groupwork Tool Kit saved my life when I was doing my groupwork assessment for the QCG". Francesca Hall***

## **The Job Interview Toolkit: Exercises to get you fit for your interview**

**by Ann Reynolds and Julie Cooper** ISBN 978-0955968020

The Job Interview Toolkit is a practical, easy to follow guide to preparing for interviews, ideal for job seekers of all ages, especially the young and those returning to work after a break.

It contains a selection of activities, organised in the five-step TAPAS programme, designed to get you fit to perform like a star on the day. Its easy to read format make it accessible to job seekers of all ages. Advisers will find ideas for working with their clients too.

This book is:

**Easy to read** – short sections, illustrations and diagrams, examples and danger stories.

**Practical** – with things to do, questions to answer, photos to comment on, things to practise with a friend. Most of us learn best by doing, so you will find a five-step programme of exercises to get you fit and ready for the interview (the really important facts are there too).

**A simple framework** that is easy to learn: T-A-P-A-S. Think – Analyse – Prepare – Adjust – Shine!

This book will make sure you know what to do, perform at your best and sell yourself brilliantly!

***“I re-read it before my last interview – and got the job!”***  
**Micky Waycot**