

External Evaluation CAN Be Helpful

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Since the early 1990's, after Dr. Glasser published The Quality School: Managing Students Without Coercion, self-evaluation has been one of most emphasized and important topics in Institute training. Since no one will change a behavior until they decide (evaluate) what they are doing isn't working, the self-evaluation process is critical to change.

There is a problem using only self-evaluation however. ***If all a person does is self-evaluate, how do they know what they don't know?*** My premise is that external evaluation and information is crucial to our learning and growth. The external evaluation doesn't "make" us do, think or feel anything. We take the external information and use the "self-evaluation" process to determine if we will use the information we are getting.

The term "learner" is used from this point forward to represent anyone receiving feedback or evaluation information because successful external evaluations result in learning.

There are three factors that determine the effectiveness of external evaluation?

1. Does it benefit the learner?
 - a. How will the evaluation be used?
 - b. Does the learner have a chance to improve the rating/grade or score?
2. Is it wanted / asked for?
 - a. Does the learner "respect" the source of the evaluation?
 - b. Does the rating / grade / score mean anything to the learner?
3. Does the evaluation give the learner the information needed to make the necessary improvements?

Phil Mickelson and Tiger Woods, as do all golf professionals, have golf coaches to look for and help them correct flaws in their swing. As with all successful external evaluations, the information from the coach is given in the spirit of "helping" the learner grow and improve. At times, a golfer is unable to determine the specific reason a swing is not producing the desired result. The coach, viewing the swing from a different perspective and angle, can provide the information to correct the swing.

A student that decides that they need to improve their writing skills, does not always have the knowledge and skill to improve on their own. The teacher's critique and feedback is instrumental in the student's growth in the writing process.

In the business world, like in education, a rating, grade or external evaluation in and of itself is not useful. However, when specific feedback is given and accepted, results occur. For example, feedback was given to several supervisors on how to improve their written communication in Lotus Notes (E-mails). The supervisors agreed that there was room for improvement and accepted their manager's feedback. The messages are now more professional, easier to understand and more thoughtful in their tone.

The intent of this article is to challenge the statement and teaching that all external evaluation is harmful. It is also to ensure that *when* external evaluation is used, that it meets the criteria for helpfulness to the learner. The author does not minimize the importance of self-evaluation.

The following questions can help readers test the author's statements.

1. Describe a time that you received a grade, rating or evaluation that was especially important to you. Why was it so significant to you?
2. How or when have grades, ratings or evaluations motivated you?
3. How or when have grades, ratings or evaluations not motivated you?