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Our Philosophy About 360° Surveys Larry Gard, Ph.D.

360's require a significant time commitment, both on the part of the candidate who is receiving the feedback and on the part of that person's colleagues who are filling out the survey instrument. And yet I've seen companies spend a small fortune sending their executives to high-end programs from which they return with 360 results in a very handsome binder that just sits on their credenza. *So much time, all that money, with very little development actually occurring.*

360's can be an enormously powerful developmental tool, but to maximize their utility you have to have a solid 360-survey instrument and you need to provide a thorough feedback process.

With regard to the instrument itself, the questions on the survey must target the specific competencies that are needed to succeed in the role in question. Many 360-degree surveys commercially available appear to be thoughtfully written, but you need to make sure that the items are clearly related to the demands of the job.

No psychological test can think for itself; the results have to be interpreted and feedback has to be provided in a thoughtful, meaningful way that the individual can make use of. The same thing goes for 360's. The 360 might get a person's attention, but it's the feedback that helps move a person from point A to point B. This is an area where too many firms shortchange themselves; they're reluctant to invest in sufficient individual feedback. Unfortunately, by not arranging for at least two or three hours of feedback for each candidate, much of the potential benefit of the 360 is left untapped. The situation is not unlike the company that provides a fully equipped gym on-site for its employees, but doesn't give them time during the workday to use it.

The feedback process does more than just present the results. It should engage the individual in self-examination. As a psychologist, I'm used to helping people take a more honest, genuine look in the mirror and that includes gently challenging them when the feedback differs from their self-perception. I point out that if the 360 only told us what we already know, then it's not very useful, is it? If the individual is highly defensive about certain feedback, I encourage them to suspend their judgment temporarily and see whether we can use the information later on – even if they disagree with it at the moment.