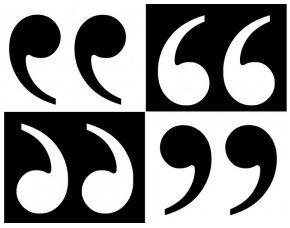

Feedback: information about reactions to a product, a person's performance of a task, etc., used as a basis for improvement.

Sounds practical, right? Accountability's handmaiden. Feedback mechanisms serve an essential purpose in modern life.

Often electronically, we give feedback perpetually. We've institutionalized performance reviews at work, in top 10 type lists, opinion polls, and "likes." One of the benefits of shopping on sites such as Amazon is the wealth of customer ratings.

And talk about 'tweets'… or shrieks. Remember the Canadian brothers, Michael and Neil Fletcher, who recently found a trapped bald eagle and released it? How's that for feedback—bird to man—not to mention the joyous publicity that the brothers received for their great deed.

Writing a regular newspaper column like this one thankfully exposes the author to reader feedback, which I try to use as a tool for continued progress. I've always loved to write and received nice feedback over the years—along with a few dings—and I thought that our readers might like to share in some of it.

First, though, a tribute to the fine (hey, feedback!) Wall Street Journal columnist, Peggy Noonan: "I love columnists. I relate to their desperation and lone-cowboyness." Well I'm glad she loves us, but the rest may be tongue in cheek. In that spirit, and with a 10-gallon hat at hand if not much desperation, here goes.

On the opportunity for improvement side, a self-critique. Future columns will get to the main point(s) with more streamlined introductions. Maybe a tad fewer quotes (though I *love* good ones). Snappier titles might let people better know where I'm heading. Maybe that would have helped with "Men and Women," criticized by one indignant fellow as being appallingly sexist. I had to explain that the piece was a spoof. Man oh man.

Happily, the vast majority of the feedback that's come to my attention has been positive. The following samples illustrate the drift of the comments.

"I love reading Jack Sparacino's columns! It's the first thing I look for when I pick up Lowcountry Weekly! I think it's because they call up my own memories from 'the good old days' -something that's fun to tell your grandkids about."

"No one knows World War II history better than Jack Sparacino, quite possibly the most avid reader I know. I love his columns that focus on our Greatest Generation — and I was especially grateful of his kind review of my book, Target Tokyo."

"Your Veterans' Day salute was extremely well written and interesting. I also enjoyed the low sparks article. Your ability to tie together seemingly disparate subjects and make them meaningful amazes me. I don't know how you do that. I am a very linear thinker, so I really enjoy trains of thought that don't necessarily go in one direction. One of my best friends is our former minister who could do that. It is a unique gift and you do it as well as anybody I have ever seen."

On "Going Off Label": *"This struck a chord with me as I could really relate… I often do repairs and renovations and need to improvise with the tools and supplies I use, especially with custom jobs. I was reminded of a friend who had a problem staying awake until a doctor prescribed a drug for him for something else that allowed him to stay awake as a side effect, he had to keep this situation to himself as his employer would not let him work there while taking any kind of stimulant!"*

"[Per] your "speedy" column, I really enjoyed it. Extremely timely and well written. Life

does seem to have a way of speeding up beyond the point of sustainability. I was thinking about this yesterday, in fact, so your comments are spot on as usual. I was able to get out sailing for the first time on my own this year. Linda and our youngest, Heather, and her partner joined me and we had a great time. But we all remarked on several occasions how quiet and peaceful it is sailing. Only the wind and the gurgle of the water under the bow and our own conversation to interrupt the quiet of the ride.

We remarked about all the folks in the big yachts or speed boats flying by. Most were sitting in air conditioned cabins with glass enclosed decks or bridges and not even enjoying the warm, sultry air and wonderful view of the bluffs and river. What a waste! To me, being in a boat should be an excuse to get closer to nature, not farther from it. A few less creature comforts, but who doesn't enjoy a warm, sunny afternoon on the water?"… Slowing, breathing and taking in the company of family and friends still has to be the best way there is. I really appreciate your perspective."

"Jack, thank you for your article. You have made my dog Jenny a celebrity and she is very grateful! In fact, she is happy to share her duck, squirrel, Homer Simpson and various other prizes with you anytime! I enjoyed the article, and learned a few interesting facts. You do write well. Many thanks."

On "What Is A Prayer?":

"I loved this column. Very thought provoking, especially as I read the comments by the Pope. Here is a guy who I think gets what religion and prayer are really about. Finding a higher power to elevate the human spirit to accomplish good in a world that can often go wrong. His concern for the poor and homeless and his belief in fundamental equality, including income equality, are surprisingly inspirational. Your column reaches a similar conclusion I think."

On "Holes in the Sky":

"Nicely done, Jack -- thoughtful and funny at the same time (and clearly written)."

“This article was great. So serious through the first half and then I loved the part about the sealant. There's a lot to be fixed. I think we (us, government, whatever) do well in identifying the problems, but never at finding solutions, There is always a committee to work on it or a consultant to be paid to tell us what the problem is -again!”

Regarding “Man About Town”:

“I liked this article. So many people only text these days it's amazing. Some don't even use email anymore. Face to face is by far the best but often not convenient, as in I'm emailing you now. The other nice thing about email is you can communicate with many at the same time.”

On “Low Sparks and High Expectations”:

“Nice article. I certainly remember the Spencer Davis Group and of course Traffic. Have albums from both. Speaking of old age, I just read an article about an 87 year old guy who's still mountain climbing. He's completed the top 100 peaks in Washington. I guess the goal is to keep going, even if you do slow down.”

Like I said, these are just a sample but they capture the gist. Thank you, readers, for your comments. I read all those coming to jacksparacino@embarqmail.com , listen *fairly* well, and try to learn. All those years in school and at work? Well, no surprise, they left lots more to discover. Columbus I certainly am not, though I did once live there, love his hats and try to emulate his search for a distant horizon, if only in my head.

Jack Sparacino earned a Ph.D. in psychology from The University of Chicago and later worked as a post-doctoral research fellow at Ohio State University in the business school. He is retired from United Technologies Corporation, Sikorsky Aircraft division and lives with his wife Jane and their two Yorkies on Saint Helena Island. He tries his best to catch a lot of fish, especially when sons Jack and Greg visit, stay off ladders, read only great books and write clearly. Sometimes he succeeds.