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Feedback Loops: E-D-I-T

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►► JUDGES EDIT WHEN THEY REIN IN ATTORNEYS WHO OVERREACH ON DIRECT OR CROSS-EXAMINATION. CLIENTS EDIT WHEN THEY PUSH FOR A HIGHER (OR LOWER) SETTLEMENT PRICE. AND SO DO MENTORS EVERY TIME THEY SUGGEST ALTERATIONS TO THEIR MENTEE’S RÉSUMÉ, COVER LETTER, OR EVEN CURRENT CAREER PATH.



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E-D-I-T

When editing and giving feedback, remember to eliminate, decrease, increase, and try something new.

Strategic creativity can be unlocked systematically.

—W. Chan Kim & Renée Mauborgne

THE KEEP/CUT FRAMEWORK WE

LEARNED about back in the December 2022 Feedback Loops column is, admittedly, a bit of a blunt feedback instrument (see law.isba.org/3kHpVjX). When the only feedback you can give is “Keep” or “Cut,” there’s not a ton of room for nuance or gradation. Your comments are restricted to either endorsing what already exists or pushing for something to be removed. That’s a pretty limited menu.

So in both this column and in the June 2023 column, we’re going to learn about a feedback framework that creates opportunities for a greater range of opinions and recommendations: “E-D-I-T.”

- Find something to **eliminate**.
- Find something to **decrease**.
- Find something to **increase**.
- Find something to **try**.

Blue Ocean

The inspiration for “E-D-I-T” comes from a business strategy tool that uses a similar set of four letters: “E-R-R-C.”

The tool was developed by Renée Mauborgne and W. Chan Kim, influential professors of management whose 2004 book “Blue Ocean Strategy: How to Create Uncontested Market Space and Make Competition Irrelevant” (Harvard Business Review Press, 2004) has sold more than four million copies and been translated into nearly 50 languages. The book tends to find itself on “Best Books of the Decade” lists; in 2011, Fast Company magazine even added “Blue Ocean” to the publication’s Leadership Hall of Fame.

Central to Mauborgne and Kim’s recommendations are four “E-R-R-C” actions: eliminate, reduce, raise, and create. The first

two actions focus on reining in expenses, an objective that can be helpful whether you are operating in a big firm or running a solo shop:

- Find things your competitors are doing that you can *eliminate* from your business.
- Find things your competitors are doing that you can at least *reduce*.

The second two actions focus on offering new features:

- Find things you can *raise* well above what your competitors are doing.
- Find things you can *create* that your competitors haven’t.

Individually, none of these four actions is likely to have a big return on investment. The key, Mauborgne and Kim insist, is to regularly complete them in tandem. Organizations that solely concentrate on reining in expenses tend not to be very innovative. And organizations that solely concentrate on offering new features often overspend their way into oblivion. If you want to reach the profitably peaceful “blue ocean” Mauborgne and Kim refer to in their title, a combined approach is needed. Otherwise, you’ll remain stuck in the crowded red ocean where the rest of the competition battles and bleeds.

E-R-R-C → E-D-I-T

I don’t run anything like the large businesses that Mauborgne and Kim highlight as models of the type of “blue ocean” thinking that the E-R-R-C grid is designed to foster. Among their examples are Southwest Airlines Co., the Canadian entertainment company Cirque du Soleil, and a set of luxury boutique hotels operated by the Dutch hospitality chain citizenM.

Yet I do regularly use the E-R-R-C grid. I use it when giving entrepreneurs feedback on their business models and investor pitches. I use it when giving litigators feedback on their opening statements and closing arguments. And I definitely use it when I want to receive

feedback myself, particularly on my writing.

In fact, I frequently ask the students who work with me as research assistants at both the University of Chicago Law School and the University of Michigan Law School to use the four actions the E-R-R-C grid identifies when they evaluate drafts I send them. They then put their analysis into what is essentially an “E-R-R-C memo.”

Only we don’t call it an “E-R-R-C memo.” We call it an “E-D-I-T memo.”

There are a few reasons for this change in nomenclature. First, the letters “E-R-R-C” don’t spell out a familiar word. The letters “E-D-I-T” do. It’s been an easier acronym for my research assistants to recognize and recall.

Second, the word that “E-D-I-T” spells out comes with a bonus: It thematically aligns with a course I teach called “Editing and Advocacy.” Switching “E-R-R-C” to “E-D-I-T” allowed us to stay helpfully on brand.

More importantly, it highlights the key role that editing plays in many feedback situations. Judges edit when they rein in attorneys who overreach on direct or cross-examination. Clients edit when they push for a higher (or lower) settlement price. And so do mentors every time they suggest alterations to their mentee’s résumé, cover letter, or even current career path.

Think, too, about instances when one of your friends or family members has commented on your outfit. “Tuck in your shirt” is a form of editing. “Put on a jacket” is a form of editing. So are, “Lose the earrings,” “Fix your belt,” and “Don’t you have anything nicer than that?” Or consider the minimalist advice often attributed to famed French fashion designer Coco Chanel: “Before you leave the house, look in the mirror and take one thing off.” That’s a helpful bit of self-editing and self-feedback, all rolled into one tidy admonition.

Preview

We’ll continue to explore the relationship between editing and feedback in the June Feedback Loops column, paying

particular attention to the changes my research assistants and I made to Mauborgne and Kim’s “E-R-R-C” framework to turn it into “E-D-I-T.” In the meantime, keep in mind that either set of letters can add much-needed structure to the feedback you

give and receive. The point is to develop a balanced, multipronged way to evaluate and improve something you or somebody else has created—whether that be a contract, a speech, a meal, a schedule, or perhaps an entire company. 