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# THE ART OF GIVING AND RECEIVING FEEDBACK





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## NAVIGATING TOUGH CONVERSATIONS:

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Difficult conversations are an inevitable part of leadership, yet many leaders struggle with them due to fear of conflict and emotional discomfort. Conflict is a natural element of all relationships. Some people might fear rejection, a tendency to avoid conflicts or a dilemma discussing certain topics due to differing power dynamics. These are common when it comes to difficult conversations.

As a leader, difficult conversations might feel intimidating as you can never foresee what responses or comments you will receive from the other parties. People can always hold an opposite point-of-view or a sudden outburst of emotions throughout the conversation. If you aren't ready for it, or not sure how to handle it, you're more likely to avoid than accept the challenge to navigate through the conversation.

Here are a few strategies to prepare for managing tough conversations:



## Active Listening

Effective conversation always refers to two-way communication. Besides conveying the message clearly, active listening is also an important skill for navigating tough conversations. Nobody is born a good listener, in fact, it requires effort and practice to listen to others' needs, thoughts, and emotions. You can ask questions with non-judgemental curiosity to explore the other person's perspectives. You can also repeat the key summaries you understand from the conversation. It helps to build understanding and validate emotions throughout the conversation.

## Managing Emotions



Be aware of your emotions. You might be triggered strongly by a certain situation, and it's worth finding out the reasons behind it and calming yourself down before proceeding into a conversation. There are techniques to soothe yourself and manage your emotions more effectively. Once you have calmed yourself down, take a few minutes to visualise the ideal outcomes of the upcoming conversation. It not only helps to shape the rational direction but also to foster a calm emotional state for the conversation to grow.

## Navigating Tough Conversations

Communicate facts over opinions. Sometimes, our opinions can be bias, but facts are usually in neutral statements. Communicating facts not only refines your tone but also structures messages more constructively. Keep your message simple, clear, and direct giving no room for misinterpretation. The content of your feedback should focus more on the issue, not the person. People tend to take a conflict personally, and that's partly why the communication ended up ineffective.

## Framing Feedback Constructively

Directness can be challenging to uphold, especially when it's in a situation where we need to keep empathy at the same time. When it comes to self-leadership, transparency is formed when everybody is informed of the current challenges and changes, leading to appropriate decisions. Curating your messages with a sense of empathy to navigate across the conversation. The key point is that the other person feels heard and respected.

## Holding Accountability While Maintaining Trust



Difficult conversations can secure or break a deal, a connection at work, personal effectiveness, or the entire morale and team dynamics. Different leaders have different communication styles, and that's fine. Remember the above skills and use them in your communication, you might find it challenging to practice at first, but eventually, you will lay a foundation to initiate a tough conversation that leads to positive outcomes.

## References:

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# THE FEEDBACK SPECTRUM: ADAPTING CONVERSATIONS FOR HIGH, MID, AND LOW PERFORMERS

Great leadership is about understanding that everyone deserves a personalized approach. We can't expect people to thrive when we give them generic feedback. As leaders, it's our responsibility to invest the time to understand each person's needs and provide tailored guidance. We all have different starting points and learn in different ways. A leader's role is to recognize those differences and adapt their approach.

Here's how to tailor your approach:

High Performers	Average Performers	Low Performers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Goal</b> → Develop them for future leadership roles</li> <li><b>Focus</b> → Discuss future opportunities and strategic challenges</li> <li><b>Accountability</b> → Hold them accountable for innovative solutions and mentoring others</li> <li><b>Key phrases</b> → "What challenges are you looking for?" or "How can you help the team reach the next level?"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Goal</b> → Improve their consistency and skills</li> <li><b>Focus</b> → Discuss current performance and skill development</li> <li><b>Accountability</b> → Hold them accountable for meeting expectations and improving specific skills</li> <li><b>Key phrases</b> → "Let's work together to elevate your performance."</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Goal</b> → Improve their basic skills and meet minimum requirements</li> <li><b>Focus</b> → Discuss immediate tasks and essential skills</li> <li><b>Accountability</b> → Hold them accountable for following instructions and meeting basic expectations</li> <li><b>Key phrases</b> → "Let's get you succeeding at what you are supposed to be doing."</li> </ul>

Imagine the difference we could make if we consistently practiced tailoring our communication to each team member, in every context. By focusing on providing the specific guidance and support they need, we create an environment where everyone can thrive. This dedicated practice transforms our leadership, allowing us to have a meaningful and lasting impact on team performance.



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## BEYOND THE BASICS:

# Why Employees Always Want More Feedback

Employees have a psychological need for recognition, clarity, and meaning in their performance, making feedback an essential element of the workplace. A strong feedback culture isn't just a trend, it's a key driver of organizational success. When done effectively, feedback enhances decision-making, strengthens team dynamics, and provides a competitive advantage.

Great managers are also great feedback providers. When leaders integrate feedback into their daily interactions, they create a culture where employees feel valued, motivated, and empowered to grow. The challenge for leaders is clear - build feedback into your leadership style and watch your team and organization thrive.

## The Feedback Gap

Despite its importance, many employees feel they receive insufficient feedback. Research shows that 65% of employees want more feedback than they currently get. A 2021 Grant Thornton study found that 45% of workers don't feel that their needs are understood by their employers.

Managers often overestimate the amount of feedback they provide, while employees crave more guidance. This discrepancy occurs for several reasons:

- Managers may claim there is not enough time.
- Managers may find giving candid feedback to be stressful and unpleasant.
- Weaknesses in management selection and training contribute to ineffective feedback practices.

## Creating a Feedback- Rich Culture

To bridge this gap and help employees find meaning in their day-to-day work, organizations should focus on building a feedback-rich culture through these key strategies:

**Move beyond annual reviews to provide timely feedback.** Connecting it to specific situations allows employees to make immediate improvements. Regular check-ins help sustain engagement.

**Encourage feedback between managers, peers, and superiors.** Use 360° feedback to get a well-rounded view of employee performance.

**Establish a psychologically safe environment** where employees feel comfortable providing feedback to leaders, promoting the idea that feedback is a two-way process.

**Help employees see the value of their contributions.** Research by Adam Grant found that call center employees who understood their impact were more productive and satisfied.



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# MANAGING EMOTIONAL REACTIONS TO FEEDBACK

When I think of the topic of feedback, I'm reminded of an HR leader who approached me for coaching about ten years ago. The leader came to me quite upset after receiving feedback from her manager, who suggested she needed to develop her communication skills. She was frustrated because she had coached numerous employees and leaders on effective communication, so she couldn't accept being advised on something she considered herself an expert in. However, after several coaching sessions, she began to see things differently and noticed areas where her own communication had been unclear or overly authoritative.

Like this leader, most of us react negatively when receiving critical feedback, regardless of our work experience or maturity. It naturally triggers emotional discomfort and defensiveness.

From a psychological perspective, strong emotional reactions to feedback occur because it can trigger deep-seated insecurities, past negative experiences, or fears of failure. Cognitive distortions, such as personalization and negativity bias, can also cause individuals to interpret feedback as personal criticism rather than objective advice. As a result, people may become defensive or overly critical of themselves, hindering their ability to fully understand and apply feedback constructively.



To effectively manage these emotional responses, it is important to cultivate self-awareness by clearly identifying and acknowledging one's feelings. Simple breathing exercises or brief meditation can help calm emotions and centre the mind, allowing for a more objective processing of feedback.

When providing feedback, it is equally important to manage one's own emotions. Feedback givers should clearly define their purpose and desired outcomes, emphasizing that feedback should address specific behaviours and their impacts rather than personal attributes. Using the SBI (Situation, Behaviour, Impact) model can help structure the conversation effectively. For example, you might say, "During yesterday's meeting, I noticed you were quite reserved on certain topics. If you contribute more actively next time, I believe the team can arrive at better decisions."

Additionally, fostering a growth mindset among employees helps them receive feedback more positively. Regularly emphasizing that feedback is not criticism but an opportunity for learning and development can make a significant difference.

Lastly, feedback should be viewed not as a one-time event but as an ongoing process. Regular check-ins to review progress, offering continuous support and resources, and acknowledging improvements through recognition and encouragement can greatly enhance the effectiveness of feedback.

Ultimately, feedback is a vital tool for growth rather than criticism or blame. Approaching feedback with empathy, clarity, and intentionality ensures that both the giver and the receiver can effectively use it to facilitate continuous improvement and mutual development.



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