

Courageous Conversations


3rd June 2026, 3-5pm

Richard Hester ChMC

1

OUTLINE

- What is feedback? What issues need feedback?
- Different approaches for different situations
- Fostering professional dialogue
- Rapport, empathy, common ground
- Better questioning and prompts
- Framework for difficult conversations



2



What is feedback?


3

What is feedback?

The difference between feedback and appreciation?

"Feedback is not advice, praise or evaluation. Feedback is information about how we are doing in our efforts to reach a goal."

Grant Wiggins




4

Why do we give feedback?

To protect standards?
(not standardisation)

Many problems need intervention; most things do not spontaneously improve.



5



"When courageous conversations are avoided, situations fester, misunderstandings deepen, and relationships fray. Left unattended, issues grow out of hand, and everyone suffers. Courage prevents that drift. It keeps relationships healthy and resilient, ensuring colleagues are capable of sustained excellence. Good leaders have the courage to make difficult conversations easy."

(McKinsey, 2026)





6

What issues need feedback?
What do you give feedback on?
Can you put these items into categories?

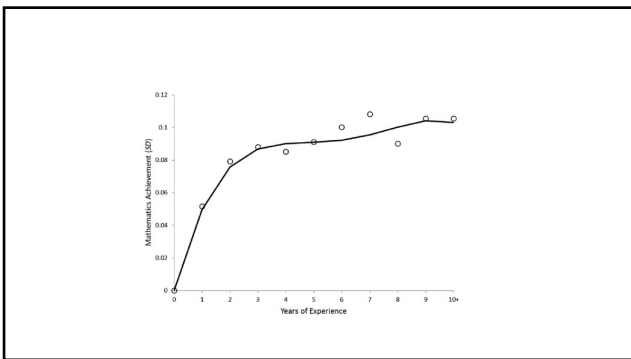


7

What issues need feedback?
Some activities are easier to give feedback on to teachers than others.
Rank from 1 – 5 (1 easiest)
(A) Safeguarding issue, (B) staff punctuality, (C) teaching and learning, (D) professional standards of behaviour, (E) not marking books.




8



9

Context – why?

Research by Aaronson, Barrow and Sander (2007) found that students taught by a more effective teacher would on average make 40% more progress than those taught by an average teacher. Those taught by a less effective teacher would make 30% less progress. In other words students taught by a more effective teacher (140%) make twice as much progress as those by a less effective teacher (70%).



10

What makes a difference?

Framework for Teaching (Danielson)

- Planning and preparation
- The classroom environment
- Instruction
- Professional responsibilities

Sartain et al (2011)




11

Giving feedback from a lesson visit

How do you start?


“If you were to repeat this lesson, what would you definitely keep?”



12

Problems to contend with include:

- Positive illusion;
- Dunning-Kruger effect;
- Negativity bias.





13

Just because we identify that something could be better, does not mean that it will get better:

knowledge does not change behaviour

Why do many attempts to change behaviour or implement any type of change not work?



14

Elements of effective and less effective feedback?

Think of a time(s) when you received particularly good feedback.

Contrast this with when you received less useful feedback.

What are the key factors?

Effective:

Less effective:




15

Contextual factors that may be important when giving feedback

Experience of teacher, background, types of school worked in etc.

Anything else?



16

How do you build rapport?



17

“Psychotherapy research shows that when individuals feel listened to, they tend to listen to themselves more carefully and to openly evaluate and clarify their own thoughts and feelings. In addition, they tend to become less defensive and oppositional and more willing to listen to other points of view.”

Chris Voss: Never split the difference

18

“When people believe you understand them, they give you permission to influence them.”

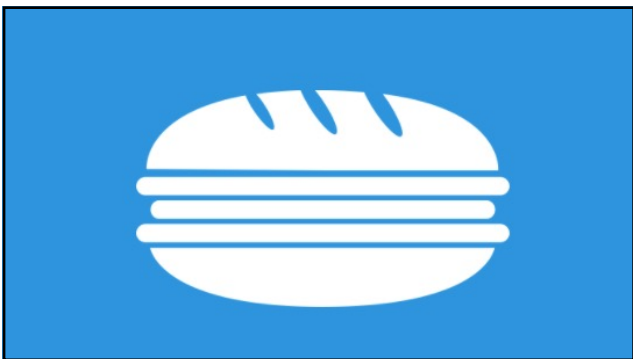
Richard Mullender

19

Questioning

Start with listening (listening does not mean waiting to speak).

20




21

What are any problems with the s*** sandwich or Oreo method?

“The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.”

George Bernard Shaw



22

“The challenge is to reconcile being real and doing no harm.”

Susan Scott


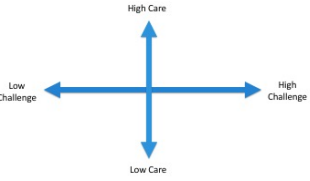


23

Add the 4 phrases:

- Manipulative insincerity
- Radical candor
- Ruinous empathy
- Obnoxious aggression


Kim Scott:
Radical Candor



24

7 step (Susan Scott) NEFIART


1. **Name** the issue;
2. Describe an **Example**;
3. Describe your **Feelings**;
4. Clarify why this is **Important** and what is at stake;
5. **Accept** your part in contributing to the issue;
6. Indicate the desire to **Resolve**;
7. Invite **Them** to Respond



25

What could come next?


- Crying;
- Anger;
- Blaming others;
- Silence.



26

Final Tips:

- Listen
- Avoid laying blame (we not you)
- Substitute 'but' for 'and'
- Eye contact
- Focus and listen intently
- The power of questions
- Be prepared for deflections
- Be patient
- Don't use absolutes (always, never etc)
- Value silence (but not non-participation)
- Stay calm
- 'How' rather than 'Why'



27

Structuring an Opening Statement



(from Susan Scott: Fierce Conversations)



N (Name the issue)	
E (Example)	
F (your Feelings)	
I (Important; what's <i>at stake</i>)	
A (Accept your part)	
R (Resolve)	
T (They respond)	

Notes:

Scenario 1

Ms B is a very experienced teacher with lots of years of service at the school and has a good reputation among parents. Her classes get good exam results. The problem is that she does not follow school or department policy. You have been promoted to be head of department as your first leadership role.

What do you do?





28

Scenario 2

You are undertaking a lesson observation of a colleague. Mr C is teaching maths. The problem is that what he is teaching is not correct. He is teaching Venn Diagrams, but what he is saying is not just slightly inaccurate, but mathematically incorrect.

What do you do? What are the pros and cons of different forms of action?





29

Scenario 3

You are having a feedback meeting with Mr A and he does not accept what you are saying.

What do you do?




30

Summary

Courage and respect are key (for the profession, the individual, their background, experience etc)

Next session: Wednesday 1st July



31



Humility

Professional pride

32
