

Facilitating Effective Team Feedback:

5 key strategies to empower real team conversations

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Welcome

You deliver a 'whole-staff' update and ask for feedback. No response. Silence. What next?

My wish for you is to facilitate dynamic conversations that provide you with valuable feedback and help you lead to an engaged team. That is the reason behind this *Facilitating effective team feedback* white paper.

In this paper, I will share with you **5 key strategies to empower real team conversations**. Adopting these strategies will assist you to:

- remove barriers to communication
- prepare people for real conversations
- elicit feedback on your proposals
- engage groups of people in dialogue
- get people moving.

These are practical strategies you can implement today.



Introduction

I have always been interested in leadership. Through almost 20 years of leadership roles in the corporate sector, I have witnessed the impact of good (and bad) leadership on engagement and outcomes.

I now focus my energy and attention on developing leadership in others - helping individuals and teams fulfill their own potential.

I consider myself a leadership trainer. I am passionate about helping leaders and teams overcome the various obstacles they face when achieving goals—lack of engagement in real conversation can be one of those obstacles.

What separates me from other trainers is my mix of real world, commercial experience and access to cutting-edge tools. I have lived in your world, and I tell it like it is; not as you might want to believe it is.

My clients often comment on my results focus. I have been successful in empowering executive teams to maximise their effectiveness, supporting the development of strong **teams**, and helping **individual** leaders to influence powerfully.

You can think of me like a cryptologist, helping you crack the code for performance.

The way I see it, empowering real team conversations can be challenging. Consider the following:

1. People complain there's not enough communication and you hear things like, "no-one tells me anything and they don't care what I think anyway".
2. Staff satisfaction surveys give disappointing engagement results.
3. You got out of your way to create opportunities for people to ask questions and give feedback, yet they don't act on those opportunities.
4. You might even start questioning your own ability to build engagement and wonder if you are part of the problem.

These may not be true for you, but they are true for many of my clients. These challenges are the reason I wrote this paper.

The Empowering Engaging Conversations Pathway

Your ability to build engagement is not the issue; you just need some new strategies. Some of these strategies are outlined here and the good news is you can learn them.

The ability to facilitate effective team feedback and empower real team conversations is a critical leadership skill.

Here is my pathway empowering engaging conversations. Engagement is one way to track your progress up the Empowering Engaging Conversations Pathway.



Figure 1: Empowering Engaging Conversations Pathway

You have probably attended a 'regrettable' staff meeting. Questions may have been openly discouraged, and by the end of the meeting you have a sense that engagement has been reduced or maybe even destroyed. Let's hope you're not at this level—if you are, this paper will help you move up the pathway.

During a 'forgettable' meeting, engagement is virtually neglected. There is no opportunity for people to engage, and most people will forget the key messages as soon as they walk out the door.

By the time you have reached 'transactional', you are beginning to establish engagement. Tentative conversations are beginning, and you will be eliciting some feedback from the group. While connecting, at this level, is increasing, the audience will still have a sense they are being 'spoken to' and not 'spoken with'.

There is a tipping point where engagement kicks in and *real* conversations happen.

By 'developmental', you are engaging people and **facilitating effective team feedback**. People will report having had *real team conversations* in your briefings and presentations. They will feel consulted, and you will be 'in the know'.

'Developmental' is the aspirational goal of most leaders, and yet there is final stage on the pathway—a stage where engagement is buzzing.

At 'inspirational', there are so many ways people *can* and *do* become engaged. Real team conversations happen daily, and eliciting open and constructive feedback is a 'way of being' that seems almost effortless.

Where are you now on the Empowering Engaging Conversations Pathway? Where would you like to be? Do you have a plan to get there?

The 5 Key Strategies to Empower Real Team Conversations

Strategy Number 1 – Ask: befriend the question

“Judge a man by his questions rather than his answers.”
Voltaire

Questions are an art form, and well-asked open questions have the potential to unleash amazing conversations.

Johnson leads a division of a large corporation, with a staff of around 60. New to the role and very keen, Johnson was determined to turn around the feedback that, “No-one tells us anything around here”. He instigated an all staff meeting that brought everyone together in a big room for 90 minutes.

After his MD's update, Johnson (all keen and ready for feedback, if somewhat nervous) asked, “Does anyone have any questions?” and then stood anxiously moving from one foot to the other. When there were no questions, in 45 seconds, he closed the meeting with, “Right back to work then. Thanks for coming”.

Johnson expressed frustration to me after the meeting that no one was interested. Staff later complained that Johnson wasn't genuine in wanting dialogue.

So what did he do wrong? Firstly he asked a closed question, “Does anyone have any questions?” A closed question has a yes or no answer, and doesn't involve the brain in a creative search for answers. An open question—which requires more than one word answers—would be more effective.



Here are three examples of open questions he could have asked:

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. What questions do you have? | An open question that leads to more expansive thinking within the audience. |
| 2. What benefits do you see in XYZ strategy? | Still an open question, this time more concentrated to help people focus their response. |
| 3. What challenges do you see with XYZ strategy? | 'Management' is often criticised for having fixed views and not being open to new ideas or potential problems seen by people on the ground. A question on challenges indicates a real interest in their views. |

You will have the idea now about the value of open questions, and be able to create your own open questions to suit your circumstances.

Another way to befriend the question is to give people a short overview of your presentation and request them to submit questions in advance. This strategy is best used in conjunction with providing people with the opportunity to ask questions in the moment.

The first key strategy to empower real team conversations is to befriend the question.

Tip: Ask open questions and give people the opportunity to submit questions in advance.

Strategy Number 2 – Silence: make space for people to respond

What's the second thing Johnson did wrong? He moved on too quickly after asking for questions. People may have had questions for him, and he didn't allow them time to think through their questions, or gather the courage to ask them.

His haste to move on (driven mostly by his nervousness) was interpreted by his people, as lack of interest in what they thought.



'Let the silence do the heavy lifting,' is great advice that comes from Susan Scott in her book *Fierce conversations: achieving success at work and in life, one conversation at a time*.

Let the silence do the heavy lifting because:

- Silence conveys confidence:
 - in yourself that you are not nervous and flighty
 - in the audience that they have the capacity to digest the information and respond.
- People need time to process what you have said and think through their questions.
- No one wants to ask the first question or make the first comment. Silence allows that to happen and then other questions and comments are guaranteed to follow.

The second key strategy to empower real team conversations is to allow silence that provides space for people to respond.

Tip: Get comfortable with silence

Strategy Number 3 – Create safety: give people a chance

Johnson is the managing director, and yet even he felt nervous standing up in front of 60 people. So why was he surprised that others might have felt reluctant to speak out in front of their peers?

Engagement in real conversation doesn't just happen. As a leader, you need to create the conditions for engagement.

Recently I was facilitating a workshop with a very reflective and quite introverted group. When I asked a question of the group, I got polite smiles and nodding heads—not mind blowing on the engagement scale.... And yet when I asked them to discuss the concepts we had just covered with the person next to them, it was hard to wind up their conversations. Having *paired* conversations allowed them to process their reflections safely, and then we were able to have valuable *team* conversations.

Small is safe – get small group conversations started first—pairs, trios—before you open up a whole-floor dialogue. This builds audience confidence and better quality questions, and observations will result.

Lead small group conversations into a whole-team conversation by inviting input or requesting one insight from each small group.

Writing is a solo activity that works – this is useful for more introverted people and groups. People can feel threatened speaking out in groups. Hand out sticky notes (or small coloured cards) and ask people to write a question or insight per sticky note. Draw these insights out from the group in themes ("Who had a question about ABC?"), and stick them on the wall in groupings. Get people discussing the themes.



The third key strategy to empower real team conversations is to create safe ways for people to engage.

Tip: Create safe ways for people to engage by encouraging small group conversations or by giving people time to write down insights and questions.

Strategy Number 4 – Take the temperature: simple techniques work

“It doesn't matter what temperature the room is, it's always room temperature.”
Steven Wright

Feedback does not have to be 'spoken'. I learnt this technique years ago from my line manager at the time, and I have used it ever since – both as a leader and now as a facilitator. It is ideal for eliciting feedback in situations where people may not be comfortable speaking out.

Create simple 'temperature gauges' on butcher's paper. Give people coloured sticky dots and ask them to place the dots where they sit on the spectrum. I like to use deliberately provocative language.

Here are some ideas of **how you could use temperature gauges?**

Question	At either end of the spectrum ...
1. At the end of this team briefing I ...	a. Wish I had been at the dentist b. Am inspired to be here ready to get stuck into it
2. At the end of this team briefing the new corporate direction is ...	a. Unclear to me and others b. Crystal clear to me and others
3. Communication from my manager ...	a. Leaves me guessing—aghhh! b. Is open, clear and concise—awesome
4. Communication within our team	a. We withhold uncomfortable truths b. We surface and resolve conflict creatively
5. Motivation: I feel ...	a. Tired working here b. Energised working here
6. I would recommend working here to a friend	a. You have to be kidding b. Without hesitation

If you are ready for a challenge, here's an advanced technique:

- Provide people with two coloured stickers: one colour represents their own location on the spectrum, and the other colour reflects their interpretation of the team location.
- Use differences in 'scores' to generate conversation.
- Provide golden tickets (aka yellow sticky notes) on which people can write possible solutions to move up the spectrum.

Using temperature gauges is an activity I would encourage Johnson to try once he becomes comfortable with the first three strategies outlined here.

The fourth key strategy to empower real team conversations is to use temperature gauges – a simple technique that works.

Tip: Take the team temperature to assess the response to your ideas and generate discussion.

Strategy Number 5 – Create energy: get people moving

Getting people moving creates a shift that energises the body and the mind. That's something else I like about temperature gauges: they get people out of their seats and moving around.

Boring presentations create boring (or no) responses. When you make your meetings interesting, people will respond.

Circles is a simple activity to generate short bursts of conversation and insight, and for when you have multiple ideas you want people to consider. Ideas can then be brought into a whole-team dialogue through a debriefing conversation.



Right, let's get people moving ...

- Split the whole team into two equal groups.
- Form two circles, one inside the other:
 - those in the inner circle face out
 - those in the outer circles face in.
- Form a pair with someone from the other circle.
- Conduct a 60-second paired conversation on the topic you call out.
- After 60 seconds, the inner circle stays where it is and the outer circle moves around two places so everyone has new partner.
- Repeat conversations and then move again.
- Debrief to share questions and insights after every three discussion rounds.

The fifth key strategy to empower real team conversations is to get people moving. This will energise the body and the mind.

Tip: Use *Circles* to create a series of energised conversations to generate responses to your ideas and build engagement.

Over to you: time to take responsibility for empowering real team conversations

"The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place."
George Bernard Shaw

Real team conversations are two way. It's often said that, "communication is the response you get". So if you are not getting the response you want, try a different way of communicating.

So where are you *now* on the **Empowering Engaging Conversations Pathway**? (See page 4)

To move up the pathway, what strategy will you try first?

- Ask open questions?
- Let the silence do the heavy lifting?
- Try a temperature gauge?
- Create safety?
- Introduce movement and energy?

This *Facilitating effective team feedback* paper has focused on strategies for creating engagement through real team conversations. It focuses on '**doing differently**'. There is also a lot to learn about '**being differently**', but that's a subject for another paper.

I started out by sharing my wish and will conclude with it also. **My wish for you is to facilitate dynamic conversations that provide you with valuable feedback and lead to an engaged team.**

Go do it!

Tip: Knowing is good. Doing is better! So honour the time you have invested to reading this paper by trying out a strategy at your next team meeting.

About Corrinne Armour

Waging a war on wasted potential, Corrinne's mission is to empower leaders and teams step up to Fearless Leadership. She helps leaders overcome the sense that they and their people can do better.

Corrinne is a highly regarded leadership speaker, mentor and coach. She is co-author of 'Developing Direct Reports: Taking the guesswork out of leading leaders' and 'Cracking the Code for Workshop Performance'. She is author of the forthcoming 'Stop Messing Around; Releasing the potential in your career, your team and your organisation'.

Known for her energy, courage, positivity, innovative approach, and strong results focus, Corrinne is seen as a provoker of change and growth. She works with leaders and teams from a diverse range of industries, such as finance, government, construction, arts and aged care.

Passionate about social justice, Corrinne is on the Board of Wintringham, a Victorian company delivering aged care to homeless elderly. She has also spent two years teaching English in a refugee camp on the edge of a war-zone.

At home, she is a wife and mother to two gorgeous young girls.



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Follow Corrinne

Find Corrinne on Twitter at @corrinnearmour. She tweets leadership insights that she shares with her clients, as well as useful concepts and articles relating to leadership and communication.

PS. I welcome feedback and success stories, so feel free to email me at corrinne@corrinnearmour.com.

How can Corrinne help you?

Facilitate to your outcome: team planning

Teams often get in their own way! They sometimes need help to get the outcome they need, and that's where Corrinne comes in. She can facilitate your next team workshop.

Executives who engage Corrinne are often surprised at how quickly she develops a high level of trust and engagement with the group, resulting in open discussion and high levels of personal disclosure.

Don't be fooled by her warmth and empathy – working with Corrinne is not taking the easy way out! Her high concern for people is balanced with a strong results focus. She will empower the team to tackle the hard issues and ensure they have the skills to do that.

Corrinne can work with you to gain clarity on the objectives of your program; design the agenda; facilitate the workshop; graphically record the discussion and outcomes; and provide an accountability framework to ensure follow-up action is taken.

"Corrinne facilitates the Leadership Great South Coast opening and closing retreats. With energy and passion, she takes a group of diverse young leaders and transforms them into a committed team. She opens their eyes to their personal leadership styles and supports them through this journey of discovery. Her flexible style and ability to adapt on the run adds depth to the course content. Participant feedback complements her genuine commitment, depth of knowledge and her ability to adapt to the group's needs. If you want energy and passion in a highly organised and flexible package, I recommend Corrinne."

Amanda Hennessy, Executive Officer, Leadership Great South Coast

Leading Change That Sticks

“70% of organisational change initiatives fail”. This is according to research conducted by The Ken Blanchard Companies (Training Journal, January 2010) and is a big cost you want to avoid.

Leading change that sticks will get your leaders and teams *change ready* so that this *change project* is successfully implemented and the anticipated business benefits are secured.

Perhaps surprisingly, it's possible that your biggest advocates for the change could be part of the reason why the change might fail. This program helps people understand their own change profile—their unconscious relationship to change—and how to speak the three different languages of change.

This program is designed to deliver self-awareness, team understanding, and practical outcomes, and is delivered over two experiential workshops. Learning between and after the workshops is enhanced by eResources that encourage exploration and reinforce key concepts.

Leading change that sticks will get your leaders and teams *change ready* in situations where:

- there seems to be so much change – within the organisation and the external environment
- people are likely to resist the change, threatening the planned business benefits
- the leaders aren't skilled to lead the change and bring their teams with them on the journey.

“This program has given me another way to look at my team and myself. I have strategies to understand where people are at on the Change Capability Ladder, and how I can move them from terrorist to passenger or above.”

Lee van der Werf, Unit Manager, Margriet Manor

“One of the main things I have gained from this program is self-awareness, including insights into how others might interpret me, which might not be how I intended. I have been reminded how we all operate from different manuals, and how I need to take this into account to effectively lead change.”

Robert VanDuuren, Manager Residential Services South, DutchCare

Leadership coaching: crack the leadership code

Are you a leader who is ready to:

- deliver results in a new leadership role? You know the game has changed and you are ready to learn the new rules
- get out of your own way and fulfill the potential that's clear to others?
- bust through old beliefs that no longer serve you and lead confidently?
- develop flexibility and choice in your leadership?
- crack the code for your own performance and the team you lead?

Corrinne's leadership coaching program provides tailored leadership development that delivers results—guaranteed.

Contact Corrinne today and arrange a consultation and you will:

- clarify your needs (or the needs of a leader you lead)
- understand the pathway confidence, productivity and exceeding your objectives
- determine if working with Corrinne can help you crack the code for performance.

Warning: Working with Corrinne isn't for the faint hearted. One of Corrinne's objectives during a consultation is to assess if the new leader is willing to do the work to get the results.

"I didn't expect leadership coaching to be so powerful. I arrived thinking I would gain some tools and training. I didn't anticipate the personal growth and that the answers would be where I found them. Corrinne's ability to assist me on this journey has been an amazing gift."

Kate Millar, General Manager, Planning and Support Services, Parks Victoria