

FEEDBACK *Fitness*

**Three Simple Steps
for leaders to have
Courageous
Conversations
that drive
performance**

Sue Anderson^{*}

The Future of Feedback

As we navigate the evolving landscapes of workplaces worldwide, it is clear that a fresh and innovative approach to feedback is needed. We are all aware that workplaces are constantly changing, necessitating a shift in how we engage in future feedback conversations. Let's look at some trends shaping the workplace landscape of 2024 and beyond.

Employee recruitment and retention: A key challenge

Have you recently struggled to fill vacancies in your team? If you have, you are not alone. Many leaders are finding it increasingly difficult to recruit good team members and keep them.¹ You can use feedback conversations as part of the interview process and, also, to keep your team members engaged by linking feedback to progress towards goals that are meaningful to them. 'Employee engagement is an essential part of employee retention.'²

Studies show that 'employees who perceive purpose and significance in their work are three times more likely to stay with their companies'.³ Understanding the importance of their work fosters the employees' sense of investment, leading to higher retention rates.

Feedback can be used to demonstrate your respect for each team member. Taking the time to offer thoughtful, meaningful feedback shows that you are respectful of a team member and support the individual's development in the role. Research indicates employees who feel respected are 110% more likely to stay in their jobs.⁴

Tip:

The future of feedback will involve utilising feedback conversations to help recruit team members and to allow team members to see they are making progress in meaningful work.

Clarifying expectations in multigenerational workplaces

Hopefully your team is made up of a delicious mix of individuals, making a unique melting pot of work and communication styles. For the first time in history, we have five generations working together.⁵ This kind of diversity within your team brings a unique blend of work and communication styles, resulting in both benefits and challenges. While advantage does lie in a diversity of ideas and perspectives, challenges also arise from differing expectations regarding communication, leadership, teamwork and feedback.

Tip:

The future of feedback will involve clarifying expectations about feedback with every member of the team, while respecting their differences.

Navigating the shift to remote and hybrid work

As you may have experienced in your organisation, the traditional workplace has undergone a transformative shift, with a substantial portion of the workforce operating remotely or in hybrid arrangements.⁶ Many leaders continue to find it difficult to arrange face-to-face meetings, with online interactions becoming the norm. Rather than not offering feedback, or delaying it until the next time both you and an employee are in the office together, you may need to offer feedback online or over the phone, rather than face-to-face.

Tip:

The future of feedback will involve adapting to remote and hybrid work scenarios by leveraging various communication methods for feedback, including in-person, online, and by phone.

Addressing employee engagement challenges

In 2024, employee engagement remains a persistent challenge for leaders globally, with a significant percentage of employees

disengaged at work.⁷ Recognising the importance of feedback in this context is crucial, because a lack of feedback contributes to increased disengagement. It is essential that you offer regular feedback to encourage the growth and development of team members, because this helps to keep them engaged.

Tip:

The future of feedback will involve using feedback conversations to drive engagement by encouraging growth and development in your team members.

The evolving landscape of feedback: Listening skills for leaders

In a changing work environment, feedback mechanisms are also evolving. A global study of 3875 employees (by Zenger Folkman)⁸ highlighted the importance of leaders' abilities to listen when providing effective feedback. Leaders who carefully listen to employees' perspectives *before* offering feedback have been rated as providing the most honest, useful and effective feedback. This emphasises the need for leaders to develop advanced listening skills as more employees demand leaders who actively engage in the feedback process.

I found the Zenger Folkman research fascinating! The research found the ability of leaders to provide effective feedback was closely tied to their capacity to *listen*. The feedback we offer will be more effective if we listen *before* we offer it. Listening is intricately linked to communication and trust, which further emphasises its importance in feedback conversations.

The research indicates leaders who found it hard to listen, and who offered advice *before* asking the team members' perspective, were rated poorly as feedback givers.⁹

Tip:

The future of feedback will involve leaders developing advanced listening skills to enhance the quality and impact of the feedback they offer.

Building trust through feedback

Trust between leaders and team members is a cornerstone of effective leadership and employee engagement. Building and maintaining trust requires leaders to embody such qualities as empathy, openness, transparency, fairness, consideration of the opinions of others, and the ability to handle tough conversations. Ensuring that feedback conversations take place in a psychologically safe manner is a powerful tool for building and reinforcing trust within an organisation.

Tip:

The future of feedback will involve using feedback as a means to build and strengthen trust between leaders and team members.

Increased emphasis on psychological safety in the workplace

Leaders need to navigate the delicate balance between psychological safety, providing feedback, and holding team members to account.¹⁰ This is especially important when the feedback is evaluative in nature—particularly when the recipient of the feedback is not meeting expectations. Professor Amy Edmondson, a world leading authority on psychological safety and the Novartis Professor of Leadership and Management at the Harvard Business School, emphasises the importance of teaching behaviours associated with psychological safety. She believes creating a safe team culture for feedback conversations is crucial and says that:

*Giving and receiving feedback happens best in a psychologically safe environment.*¹¹

... What Dr Libby Brook says ...

Libby Brook is an organisational psychologist and expert in psychological health and safety. She has said the following on the topic:

Psychological health and safety is really about reducing the risk to people's psychological health and creating an

environment where people feel healthy and able to work to their best, get satisfaction from work and all the good things that people want, like achievement and growth. I think there's a fear about hurting people, which may be exacerbated by a fear of the feedback conversation causing psychological injury.¹²

Tip:

The future of feedback will involve an increased focus on providing feedback in a psychologically safe manner.

A certainty: The need to navigate courageous feedback conversations

I've researched the work of several workplace futurists who have predicted the qualities leaders will need in 2024 and beyond. Common trends indicate leaders will need to be (even) more emotionally intelligent, humble, inclusive, vulnerable, and empowered. Some futurists predict leaders will need to excel at empathy, be excellent at communicating and be skilful at decision-making. Leaders need to be visionary, flexible, authentic, courageous and collaborative. The list sounds exhausting!

While it can be useful to make predictions, only one thing is guaranteed—there will be tough conversations; and I'm 100% certain that a high number of those tough conversations will involve feedback. While it's important to develop the skills required to have tough feedback conversations, it is also necessary to create a culture in your team and within your organisation in which feedback conversations are approached with confidence and courage.

... What Simon Sinek says ...

Speaker and best-selling author Simon Sinek has said the following about feedback conversations:

Some of the human skills that are underappreciated and undertrained in this day and age are: how to have difficult

*conversations, how to have an effective confrontation, and how to give and receive feedback.*¹³

Tip:

The future of feedback will involve having increased skills and courage to engage in tough conversations.

... What Zoë Routh says ...

To gain further insights into the future of feedback, I interviewed leadership futurist Zoë Routh.¹⁴ She outlined the following points.

- **Intent is key:** Leaders must be clear about the intent behind their feedback—and clear about it being constructive or positive. The purpose should focus on helping individuals grow into better leaders.
- **The three Cs of leadership:** Future leadership requires a focus on creativity, collaboration and compassion. Compassion in feedback needs to be especially emphasised, given the potential for increased volatility and uncertainty in the future.
- **Inclusion and belonging:** Creating a sense of place and community is crucial for psychological safety and effective feedback. Leaders must work on fostering inclusion and belonging, to provide a foundation for constructive feedback.

According to Routh:

The future of feedback involves leaders embracing the three Cs—creativity, collaboration and compassion—and cultivating a sense of inclusion and belonging within their teams.

Are you ready to embrace the future of feedback? In the remainder of this book, we will be exploring strategies and skills to prepare you for the evolving dynamics of workplace communication and leadership.

Let's prepare you for the future of feedback, now.

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Do you want a team culture in which quality feedback conversations are expected, effective and embraced?

Leaders who feel confident and courageous in their feedback conversations lead teams characterised by increased performance, retention and growth. When leaders offer useful, effective feedback with courage and confidence, the impact of that feedback increases tenfold. The feedback fitness of all key players is vital if leaders want to have real impact on performance within their organisations.

It's time to increase the impact of your feedback conversations.

Sue Anderson has created a new feedback framework – one that provides leaders with a clear formula for successful feedback conversations. This book shows you the three simple steps you can take to enhance the quality of the feedback you are offering and, at the same time, nurture your relationships and build trust. The second half of the book focuses on the (often-forgotten) skill of being open and resilient when offered feedback. In other words, it outlines how you can create a feedback-fit culture for both offering and receiving feedback within your team.



About Sue:

Sue Anderson understands that feedback drives performance. She has been working as a coach, mediator, trainer, facilitator and speaker since 2007 and has helped thousands of leaders improve and enhance their confidence and their skills in communication and connection. She works individually with leaders and high conflict teams, as well as high performing teams, across many different industries.

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