

# **FEEDBACK** *Fitness*

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

*Sue Anderson*<sup>\*</sup>

# 3

## Feedback Fitness Framework

### Overview of the Feedback Fitness framework

#### Moving on from the ‘sh\*t sandwich’

When I ask people to name feedback frameworks, the most common answer I am given is ‘the sh\*t sandwich’. Basically, this is a framework involving the offering of feedback in the following format:

- ▶ start with offering ‘positive’ feedback
- ▶ offer the ‘negative’ feedback
- ▶ then finish with offering more ‘positive’ feedback.

This is not a useful way to offer feedback because everyone’s brain tends to remember the start and the end of a conversation, more than it does the middle. If you are taking the time to offer someone feedback, you want them to remember the middle!

#### ... What Dr Adam Grant says ...

Here is what popular organisational psychologist Dr Adam Grant says about the ‘sh\*t sandwich’:

*It doesn't help to bury criticism between two compliments:  
The feedback sandwich doesn't taste as good as it looks.  
Beginnings and ends are more likely to stick in our memories  
than middles . . .<sup>17</sup>*

When delivered poorly, the ‘sandwich’ approach can sound fake and scripted. It’s in danger of being confusing instead of clear, and it certainly doesn’t feel like a two-way conversation. It feels like a cop-out—trying to ‘hide’ the feedback between two ‘nice’ comments and seeming like the person offering the feedback is fearful of how that feedback will be received. I’m guilty in this regard—I’ve offered

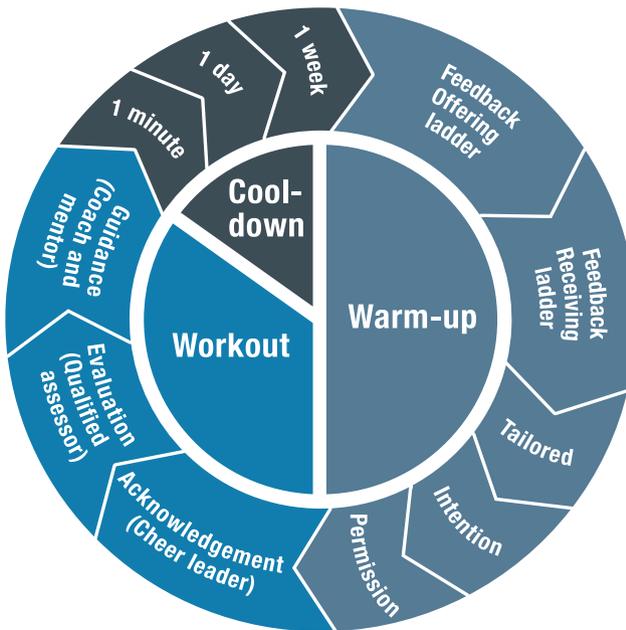
this type of sandwich in the past to people I have led, and it was an unpleasant experience for all involved!

## Welcome to the next version of feedback!

The Feedback Fitness framework provides a structure to be used in feedback conversations. It is not a script. It is a process that allows you to know where you are in a conversation without sounding fake or forced.

The Feedback Fitness framework consists of three steps:

- 1 the warm-up
- 2 the workout
- 3 the cool-down



### 1 The warm-up conversation

Just as you wouldn't go straight into running a 100-metre sprint, in running spikes and using starting blocks, without first doing an

extensive complete warm-up, don't offer feedback without first doing a full warm-up—especially if you want to have an ongoing relationship with the other person.

For world-class athletes, a 100-metre sprint usually takes around 9.5–11 seconds. Athletes spend years training to develop the skills necessary for achieving that. On the day of a competition, some of them can spend about 90 minutes warming up, getting their minds and bodies ready to perform at their best. That 90-minute warm-up can be referred to as a 'full' warm-up.

The same applies to feedback conversations. You can spend years developing your communication and leadership skills, but you still need to do a full warm-up, preparing both you and the other person, before commencing a feedback conversation. But you don't have to do an extensive, full 90-minute warm up conversation every time you want to offer feedback! In the case of feedback conversations, the full warm-up is a one-off conversation that sets the foundations for all the other, in-the-moment, regular feedback conversations that will happen for the rest of the year.

## 2 The workout conversations

The workout is the part of the Feedback Fitness framework in which the feedback offering and feedback receiving conversations take place. It is made up of three subsections, which allow you to be very clear on the type of feedback you are offering, the purpose for that feedback, and the role into which you are stepping.

It helps you to be prepared and deliberate. The approach is super easy to remember and you don't need to offer all three types of feedback in *every* feedback conversation—you probably won't have time for that!

The workout phase helps you to feel confident in offering deliberate, clear and actionable feedback.

## 3 The cool-down conversations

As for sprinters, it is important to recover well so you can perform again and are not sore the next day. The cool-down for athletes is usually a slow jog, stretching, rehydration, nutrition, and maybe

even a massage. The cool-down is all about wellbeing—recovery, reducing any soreness and avoiding risk of injury.

A cool-down is also important for feedback conversations. It is about reducing the likelihood of damaging relationships and ensuring continuous improvement in performance. The cool-down is led by the person who offers the feedback. It has three stages which are, again, super easy to remember.

As was the case for the warm-up and the workout, you don't need to have a cool-down conversation *every* time you offer feedback.

## Sounds like a lot of work, and I'm already flat out

Have you ever turned up late for an exercise class and thought, 'I don't need to do a warm-up; I'll just jump straight in—it'll be all right'? Or, at the conclusion of a workout, when you know you should do a cool-down, have you ever skipped it because you are busy? You might even have promised yourself you would do it when you got home (but you didn't)!

I understand you are busy—let's set up your feedback conversations so they can be frequent and flowing. You don't have time for friction and f\*ck-ups!

Is it possible to sprint 100 metres without doing a full warm-up or cool-down? Sure it is. But the risks are that you are more likely to injure yourself; you won't perform at your best; and your recovery will be compromised. You will be at an increased risk of tearing your hamstring and being out of action for 6–8 weeks. It is also likely that you will spend time and money trying to repair the damage that could have been avoided.

The same applies to feedback conversations. The temptation is to jump right in and offer the feedback (get it over with), without really knowing how it's going to go—just crossing your fingers and hoping for the best. After all, we are all super busy! Who has time for full warm-up and cool-down conversations . . . right? The more useful question is, if a feedback conversation goes pear-shaped, who has time for damage control, replacing someone who has resigned, or dealing with a complaint to HR or a bullying claim?

▶▶ *One person's story: An anonymous workshop participant.....*

I was delivering the Feedback Fitness workshop to a team of thirty government engineers. When I started explaining the metaphor, 'You wouldn't sprint 100 metres without warming up first.' One participant replied:

*You are right, I wouldn't sprint 100 metres! I haven't exercised since 1997!*

The exercise metaphor hadn't worked for him.

What did work for him was to replace 'warm-up' with 'preparation and planning', 'workout' with 'implementation', and 'cool-down' with 'review.'

Whatever works for you!

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# FEEDBACK *Fitness*

## **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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