*mind**set***
WITH **RACHEL SETTI**

THE FEEDBACK LOOP

Giving feedback can be tricky, but clear and considerate language sparks a two-way conversation, writes **RACHEL SETTI.**

A manager (let's call her Anita) experienced mounting concern over her associates' inability to learn from mistakes. Her ongoing feedback did not achieve traction. Instead she found herself in a vicious, repetitive cycle; handholding her team who were, by all accounts, capable and driven associates. The problem she presented was multi-faceted. Not only was she fatigued with the tedium of her repetition, but the impact on her team was stark: poor time-management, reduced billing, and negligible progress. Clearly a circuit breaker was required, and it came in the shape of a multi-focused approach, addressing both team culture and feedback proficiency.

Let's first turn to culture. Often overlooked and underestimated, trust is an essential ingredient required for effective feedback. Trusting relationships tend to flourish in environments where mistakes are considered learning opportunities, rather than failure. Anita's team, though eager to overcome their challenges, experienced an overwhelming desire to "do the right thing", stripping them of their preparedness to risk trial and error. Instead, everyone stuck to their corner and refused to reach out of their comfort zone, thus stunting their professional growth. The team appeared to be in a state of professional paralysis.

Cultural change cascades from the top and Anita was tasked with considering

DEVELOPING A COLLABORATIVE FEEDBACK APPROACH:

Replace...	With...
Well done, good job	Job well done, what I particularly appreciated/liked/found valuable was...
This can't continue...	The current situation is unsustainable because (state specific impact). What are alternative options? What help do you need? Who can help you?
You should do it (the task) this way...	Think of someone who does this (task) well. How do they go about it? What have you observed?
You need to improve the way you do this...	What are a couple of important areas for you to focus in order to shift and improve?
There are some significant issues with the last case you worked on...	Can you identify what worked well, and what you need to work on further?
Clients are not happy when...	Put yourself in the clients' shoes, what would you expect?
I have many concerns relating to your work...	There are three areas that I would like to focus on initially with you, these are....

her own motivation when giving feedback. Prior to each feedback meeting she considered her personal biases, context, and relationship with the associate. This reflection enabled her to conduct the meeting with a clear intention of empathy and support. Easier than it sounds, this approach required digging deep, being honest with herself and, in some cases, considering whether she was the most appropriate person to provide the feedback, or whether the conversation could be better delivered by another partner.

Anita also redefined her feedback approach by adapting best practice to suit her personal style. She incorporated weekly individual check-ins with her associates which gave her the opportunity to connect interpersonally, discuss a breadth of issues, and provide timely feedback in an integrated and seamless manner. She focussed on transitioning the feedback loop into a two-way, transparent process which shifted the team's attitude to feedback, from admonishment to collaboration. Salient points included:

Discussing specific matters rather than taking a broad-brush approach. If there were several concerning issues, she prioritised the most important ones and referred only to those, rather than overwhelming the associate with an extensive list of problems. She could come back to others another time.

Explaining the impact of the issues on the team, and the wider firm, so as to establish the importance of the matter at hand. In doing so she honed her broader message that feedback is not a personal attack, but a focus on career and business improvement.

Collaborating on improvement opportunities and encouraging her associates to take considered risks. She noticed the more the associate engaged with the solution, the higher their ownership of the problem.

Finally, we worked with the team to develop their openness to feedback: reminding them that as uncomfortable as it may feel, feedback is a gift and an opportunity to uncover one's blind spots.

The team, who opted to incorporate peer, as well as managerial, feedback into their processes shifted their approach. They recognised that constructive feedback requires preparation and courage (on behalf of the person providing feedback). They explored their own responses and developed more effective reactions.

For instance, rather than avoiding feedback, they sought it out by asking for specific examples, paraphrasing to confirm their understanding, and collaboratively identifying opportunities which would benefit their career and the firm. **LSJ**

careercoach
WITH **ANNA HINDER**

This lockdown seems like it is so much harder than previous ones. What can I do to keep it together during these uncertain times?

Let me start by saying keeping it together isn't holding it in or bottling it up. Connect with people who can help you find what will work for you. The minute you ask for help you have already taken a big step to keep it together.

The uncertainly of a public health emergency this time around is coming on the back of fires, floods and the usual personal disasters life can throw at us. All of that resulted in many people starting lockdown with less personal resources to draw on than last time - financial, social and physical. That's the first reason I think this one is harder for many. Take small steps, ideally in a daily pattern to slowly rebuild your resources - going to bed at the same time, making a cup of tea at the same time and listening to music at the same time. I know I sound like your Grannie. If yours was anything like mine, she is a force of nature and good advice. I can't control daily case numbers or who follows the rules, but I can control the combination of milk, eggs and flour that makes my Grandmothers' Madeira Cake. I can control when I choose to make it, what I listen to as I make it and I can think back to fond memories of making it together.

Moving on from cakes and tea, the amount of uncertainty about how we will work and where we will work appears to have increased for many. Uncertainty in the form of work expectations, requirements to return to the office, vaccination decisions and how we will live our lives in the next "new normal" can be overwhelming. For professionals who think for a living, uncertainty is the kryptonite to superhero powers. It can impact our behaviour in the form of triggering, intensity, duration and directness and our cognition in learning, memory and decision making - collectively they make up uncertainty processing theory by Patrick Anselme. The more uncertainty our brains have to deal with, the more we will find it difficult to control our emotions, be subtle and empathetic in our communication with others, and the more we can find it difficult to learn new things, remember things and decide things. The bandwidth that is our mind hasn't had time to increase, compared to the uncertainty we need to cope with.

My suggestion is to focus on creating certainty. For yourself in your daily activities, and for your team members by giving plenty of notice if your plans change. Your change in plans or forgetting a commitment creates more uncertainly for your team and add to the uncertainty they need to manage. For your colleagues, hold conversations about what can be done as a group to give predictability and order to the whole practice, firm or team. Next time you watch an 11.00am press conference you are watching uncertainty management in action. I leave you with a gem found in the randomness of the playlist in the kitchen and the wisdom of John Lennon from Borrowed Time; "The more I see, the less I know for sure". Keep safe everyone. **Regards, Anna**

Anna Hinder works with professionals to improve the performance of firms, teams and individuals. Anna looks for practical solutions to tricky people problems that are informed by the best available research. **linkedin.com./in/annahinder searlstreet.com.au**