

The Manager's Guide to Better Feedback

ALIGN Feedback Model

#1 Guide for
Conversations
That Count



We Lead Through Trust

This content is licensed to you to support meaningful, structured, and relational practice. It is offered in trust, to be used with care, and with respect for the integrity of the model and its intended impact.

If you'd like to expand access, we're always open to conversation. Let's protect what makes this work.

Table of CONTENTS

Welcome to the ALIGN Feedback Model.....	05
Why ALIGN Matters?.....	08
Closing the Feedback Gap	09
The Mindset of a Feedback Leader	10
Embedding a Feedback Culture	15
Preparation Can't be Missed	17
ALIGN Step by Step Guide.....	23
Acknowledge	
Lay Out	
Impact	
Gain Agreement	
Next Steps	
What to do in Tough Conversations.....	40
Inclusive & Neurodiversity-Aware Feedback..	41
ALIGN in Action	46
Final Thoughts on ALIGN	49
ALIGN Feedback Tools.....	50





HI, I'M BROOKE

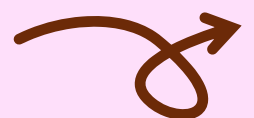
Founder of collabbWAY. I've spent my career in the real world of leadership, where the pressure is high, relationships matter, and the conversations that most need to happen are often the hardest to have.

I developed the **Manager's Guide to Better Feedback - ALIGN Feedback Model** after observing, time and again, that leaders at every level struggle to give feedback that is both clear, thoughtful and constructive. Not because they didn't care, but because the process felt complicated, uncomfortable, or too easy to get wrong.

My deep belief is that relationships and connections are what create real change. **ALIGN** makes feedback simpler, safer, and more effective so leaders can step into these conversations with clarity, courage, and respect.

Brooke

LET'S DO IT!



Welcome to the Manager's Guide to Better Feedback

Leading with Feedback the ALIGN Way

Leading with feedback is more than a skill – it is the foundation of effective and transformational leadership. collabbWAY designed and developed the evidence-informed ALIGN Feedback Model to make feedback both practical, repeatable and people-centred. Feedback is not just a message you deliver; it is a mindset you embed.

When you treat feedback as a lever for growth, it stops being a dreaded event and becomes part of everyday conversation and leadership. It is not about perfect phrasing; it is about authentic connection, clarity, courage, and consistency. Done well, feedback strengthens performance, deepens trust, and makes work more human.

Creating a Feedback Culture

In a healthy feedback culture:

- Leaders at all levels are open to both giving and receiving feedback, regardless of hierarchy.
- Feedback conversations are not rare, high-stakes events; they are part of the daily rhythm.
- Constructive conversations are welcomed, trusted, and handled with respect.

At the organisational level, feedback is woven into everyday operations. It is part of:

- Rhythms and alignment meetings (weekly check-ins, supervision, 1:1s, debriefs, or project debriefs).
- Core processes (recruitment, onboarding, performance reviews, succession planning).
- Leadership behaviours (recognising effort, calling out misalignment, reinforcing standards).
-

Reflection and learning are not 'add-ons' to the work. They are embedded into how work happens.



ALIGN and the Relational Leadership Method

The ALIGN Feedback Model is one of the core practical tools within collabbWAY's Relational Leadership Method (RLM) – a six-lens framework that develops the full range of capabilities leaders need to lead people well in the real world.

The RLM is built around a foundational belief: that lasting leadership is relational before it is technical. It develops leaders across six lenses:

- Understanding People and Behaviour
- Addressing Behaviour and Expectations
- Leading Conversations
- Leading Without Carrying
- Staying Clear Under Pressure
- Leading People Through Change.

ALIGN sits at the heart of **Lens 2: Addressing Behaviour and Expectations** and **Lens 3: Leading Conversations**. It is the structured expression of several of the RLM's most important leadership capabilities:

- **Name It Clearly** – ALIGN's Lay Out step teaches leaders to describe behaviour objectively, without softening or avoiding
- **Address It Early** – ALIGN normalises feedback as part of everyday leadership, not a last resort
- **Connect Then Clarify** – the principle of Connection Before Correction is the backbone of the Acknowledge step
- **Stay in It** – ALIGN gives leaders the language and confidence to remain in conversations when they become uncomfortable
- **Build Accountability** – the Next Steps process embeds shared responsibility and follow-through into every feedback conversation.

If you are working through the RLM, ALIGN is your practical companion for the moments when leadership requires both courage and care. If ALIGN is your starting point, know that it sits within a broader method designed to develop the whole leader – not just the conversation.



**SAY
WHAT
MATTERS.**

**BUILD
WHAT
LASTS.**



WHY ALIGN MATTERS

Traditional models often asked leaders to ‘just focus on the facts’ and strip out the person and the emotion. The result? Conversations that shut people down instead of drawing them in. ALIGN takes a different path. It is practical, repeatable, and relational. It begins with Acknowledgement – framing the conversation around the relationship, the situation, and the emotions at play and then moves step by step through a process that builds clarity, invites dialogue, and leads to meaningful co-created action.

When feedback is normalised and prioritised:

- Issues are addressed early, not left to fester.
- Leaders approach tough conversations with confidence.
- Relationships strengthen because honesty is perceived as a sign of respect.

The hard truth: Many leaders avoid feedback because of fear. Fear of conflict, fear of complaints, of damaging relationships, of not knowing how to phrase things in a way that is ‘helpful’ or ‘constructive’. Some leaders and employees have integrated into team cultures where being ‘nice’ is valued over honesty. Others have seen feedback weaponised and don’t feel comfortable giving or receiving it. These challenges are not personal flaws. They are the result of lacking the proper framework, mindset, and skillset. ALIGN gives you all three.

The Reality of Employee Feedback in Today’s Context

Research highlights the gap between the need for feedback and how it is delivered:

- 44 % of managers say giving feedback and criticism is stressful or difficult; 21 % avoid it entirely (Zenger & Folkman, 2017).
- 69 % feel uncomfortable communicating about performance issues (Workleap, 2023).
- While 86% of middle managers say clear communication from senior leaders is vital, only 54% receive it (Blanchard, 2022).
- Only 26 % of employees “strongly agree” that feedback helps them improve (Gallup, 2022).
- 72 % value critical feedback for career growth, but only 5 % say they receive it (Harvard Business School, 2020).

THE FEEDBACK GAP AND HOW ALIGN CLOSES IT

The research paints a clear picture:

Leaders want to communicate clearly and provide feedback, but often do not feel equipped to do it well. Employees want feedback to improve their roles, but usually do not receive it, or when they do, it is delivered in unhelpful ways.

This gap is not just about missed conversations; it is also about missed opportunities. It often represents a missed opportunity to build trust, foster connection, enhance performance, and promote engagement.

1 **44% of managers find giving criticism stressful; 21% avoid it entirely** (Zenger & Folkman, 2017)

What this tells us:

- Leaders' discomfort with feedback is not about unwillingness; it is about not having the right tools, structure, or confidence.
- Avoidance leads to performance drift, unresolved issues, and a culture where silence is the norm.

How ALIGN helps:

- Provides a transparent, repeatable process that aims to take the emotional sting out of feedback.
- Starts with Acknowledge, and building relational safety before addressing performance issues or concerns.
- Gives leaders language and structure so conversations feel purposeful, not personal attacks.



2 69% feel uncomfortable discussing performance issues (Workleap, 2023)

What this tells us:

- The discomfort often comes from fear of damaging relationships or creating conflict.
- Without skill in feedback delivery, leaders see performance conversations as risky rather than constructive.

How ALIGN helps:

- Emphasises relational connection as the foundation of feedback.
- Teaches leaders to focus on specific behaviours and shared goals instead of personal judgment.
- Turns difficult conversations into growth-focused collaborations.

3 86% of middle managers want clear communication from senior leaders, but only 54% get it (Blanchard, 2022)

What this tells us:

- Feedback is not just a top-down skill; leaders also need to receive it in a two-way dialogue.
- Without strong role modelling from senior leaders, middle managers struggle to embed feedback within their teams.

How ALIGN helps:

- Works both ways as leaders can use it to give and receive feedback, creating consistency across the team or organisation.
- Creates a shared language that aligns feedback culture from executives to frontline leaders.

4 Only 26% of employees strongly agree that feedback helps them improve (Gallup, 2022)

What this tells us:

- Many employees receive feedback that is vague, untimely, or purely critical.
- Without clarity or actionable next steps, feedback feels like criticism rather than support.

How ALIGN helps:

- Ensures feedback is specific, timely, and actionable.
- Ends with co-created Next Steps to develop a plan together, making feedback immediately relevant to improvement.

5 72% value critical feedback for career growth, but only 5% say they receive it (Harvard Business School, 2020)

What this tells us:

- There is a massive appetite for constructive, growth-focused feedback.
- Employees are not only open to it, but they also want it to advance their careers.

How ALIGN helps:

- Normalises feedback as part of everyday work, removing the 'once-a-year' performance review trap.
- Positions feedback as a development tool rather than a corrective measure.

What is ALIGN's Impact?

ALIGN creates impact at every level – from individual leadership practice to organisation-wide culture – helping to close these research gaps by:

01

REDUCING LEADER DISCOMFORT

through a repeatable, relationship-centred structure.

02

NORMALISING FEEDBACK

so it is part of daily leadership, not a rare event.

03

INCREASING EMPLOYEE TRUST

by making feedback respectful, clear, specific, and actionable.

04

BOOSTING ENGAGEMENT

by meeting the demand for growth-focused conversations.

05

ALIGNING COMMUNICATION

across all leadership levels through a shared framework.

06

IMPROVED CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT

and the foundations of a culture that is open and transparent.

THE OPPORTUNITY

When feedback is done well, it accelerates performance:

- Strengths-based feedback can reduce turnover by **14.9%** – in a Gallup study of 65,672 employees, those who received strengths-based feedback had significantly lower turnover rates than those who received no feedback (Gallup, 2011).
- Employees whose managers focus on their strengths are dramatically more engaged – **67%** are engaged compared to just **2%** when managers ignore strengths entirely (Gallup, 2016).
- Employees who strongly agree they receive valuable feedback are **5x** more likely to be engaged at work than those who do not (Gallup & Workhuman, 2024).

The **ALIGN Feedback model** helps leaders:

- Hold courageous conversations without defensiveness.
- Make feedback a regular part of work life.
- Improve performance while preserving trust.
- Create shared ownership instead of blame.



D WITH CONNECTION NOT CORRECTION

CONNECTION
LEAD WITH CONNEC

D WITH CONNECTION NOT CORRECTION



THE MINDSET OF A FEEDBACK LEADER

From Feedback Avoidance to Feedback Leadership

Even capable leaders can find feedback uncomfortable from time to time. Avoidance is common. This comes from fear of conflict, complaints, or not ‘doing it right.’

However, avoidance has a cost: performance drifts, opportunities are missed, and trust erodes.

Effective feedback leadership flips that script:

- Feedback is a gift that shows you care.
- It is regular and expected, not rare or dramatic.
- It is a dialogue, not a verdict.

A Developmental Stance in Feedback

Leaders who shift from avoiding feedback to embracing it as an opportunity for growth take what we call a developmental stance. This approach sees feedback not as correction, but as collaboration and a chance to learn, reflect, and strengthen capability.

Leaders who take a developmental stance:

- Build trust and partnership before addressing issues.
- Stay reflective and curious, remaining open to other perspectives.
- Focus on capability, not just gaps, recognising potential alongside areas for growth.
- Balance accountability with respect, holding people to standards while taking their individual needs and circumstances into account.
- Adapt their approach to the individual, the context, and the moment.

Mindset Reframe Statement:

"It is important that you know, I am not here to catch mistakes. I am here to help you and the people in my team succeed. I see feedback as one of my most effective tools for achieving this goal. When I lead with trust, curiosity, respect and clarity, even hard feedback becomes a pathway to growth. My commitment to our working relationship is that these conversations will be held with care and respect".

The Relational Advantage

When feedback is approached through the ALIGN lens, just like collabbWAY's other model, **RLM** or **ARCA+ Professional 1:1**, it:

- Protects and strengthens relationships, rather than straining them.
- Creates psychological safety so people can hear and see the message's process.
- Turns challenging moments into opportunities for deeper connection.
- Builds a culture where open, respectful challenge is a sign of trust, not tension.
- Stays flexible in adapting their approach based on the individual's needs, context, and readiness.





feedback

EMBEDDING A FEEDBACK CULTURE

Creating a feedback culture is not about introducing a new policy or running a one-off training session. It is about shifting the way people think, speak, and work together every single day.

THE WAY YOU SHOW UP MATTERS

In an authentic feedback culture:

- Feedback flows in all directions, leader to team, team to leader, and peer to peer.
- Conversations about performance and growth are regular, not rare.
- Feedback is viewed not as a threat, but as a sign of trust and respect.

This cultural shift does not happen by accident; it is modelled and reinforced through everyday leadership habits.

Leader Habits That Shift Culture

- Leaders do not just give feedback; they model openness: Ask and invite feedback yourself.
- Make it routine: Short, frequent check-ins reduce fear.
- Share your learning moments: Vulnerability builds credibility.
- Use growth-oriented language: Replace “*You must stop...*” with “*How might we...*”
- Recognise in the moment: Immediate acknowledgement builds momentum.
- Set feedback agreements: Ask upfront how people prefer to receive feedback.

Why This Matters

Every interaction you have as a leader either reinforces or erodes your culture of feedback. When you lead with openness, regularity, vulnerability, growth-oriented language, and timely recognition, you do not just manage performance; you create an environment where people want to improve, together.

EMBEDDING A FEEDBACK CULTURE

Share Your Learning Moments

If you want your team to embrace feedback, show them how you do it. Share moments when you have been challenged, adjusted, and grown. This is where authentic leadership is built, and genuine relationships are formed.

- Relational impact: Vulnerability builds credibility, and your team sees you as a person, not just a position.
- Culture impact: You model the growth mindset you want to see in others.

Choose Growth-Oriented Language

Your words shape how feedback lands. Phrases like *“Let us explore how we can...”* or *“How might we...”* invite curiosity and problem-solving.

Phrases like *“You must stop...”* or *“This is not working”* can shut people down.

- Relational impact: The language of exploration keeps the door open to collaboration.
- Culture impact: Conversations stay solution-focused rather than fault-focused.

Recognise in the Moment

Avoid saving praise for an annual event; recognise effort and wins as they happen, but in an authentic and meaningful way. Immediate acknowledgement reinforces positive behaviours and builds momentum.

- Relational impact: People feel seen and valued in real time.
- Culture impact: Recognition fuels engagement and makes feedback (positive or constructive) easier to receive.

Setting Up a ‘How We Work Together’ Agreement

One of the simplest ways to establish a feedback culture is to define expectations clearly from the outset. A concise ‘How We Work Together’ agreement establishes shared ground rules and fosters trust. I encourage every leader to set an agreement like this to shape and define how your one-to-one meetings are run and how you will work together, particularly in challenging moments.

In this agreement, asking a question like, *“How do you prefer to receive feedback?”* shows respect for each person’s individuality and gives them a voice in shaping the relationship early on. Some people prefer direct, in-the-moment feedback; others need time to reflect and process. By surfacing these preferences early, you reduce anxiety, avoid misunderstandings, and set the tone that feedback is both safe and expected. This agreement also covers how you might resolve challenges from feedback conversations or repair the relationship when things don’t go as planned.

This agreement reframes feedback from something to fear into something to value. It communicates that feedback is not about criticism, it is about growth. Most importantly, it positions the leader and the employee as partners, with both responsible for fostering a culture that values learning and progress in everyday work.

Preparation Can't be Missed

The most common mistake in feedback and tough conversations is going in unprepared. When feedback is rushed or improvised, it often causes more harm than good. Preparation is not optional; it is essential.

Before you step in, pause and reflect:

- What is my core concern?
- What examples show this behaviour clearly?
- What improvements am I asking for?
- Am I bringing in any assumptions or bias? If so, what are they and where are they coming from?
- How does this person prefer to receive feedback?
- What support can I offer to help them succeed?
- What outcome would make this conversation worthwhile?



Preparation is not only about knowing your key points. It is also about setting the tone from the start. Feedback should never feel like an ambush. If people feel blindsided, defensiveness rises and listening shuts down.

If time permits, give clarity and choice about the feedback conversation:

“Aaron, I would like to spend some time with you today to share some feedback with you about your client work. I have checked your diary, and you are free late this afternoon. Can I pop that in now, or do you have a preferred time?”

This initial heads-up signals that a feedback conversation is required and is also respectful, giving them space to prepare, with the hope of reducing defensiveness. I often use this phrase by Brené Brown in my leadership coaching, “Clear is kind.

Unclear is unkind”. This quote is particularly relevant to the ALIGN Feedback Model. It is essential that you be clear, direct, specific, and concise in your feedback. Avoid sugarcoating, jargon, or vagueness, as these can confuse the message or put people on the defensive. You can do this in a considered, thoughtful, and respectful way.

Connection, clear, kind, but direct, is the foundation of ALIGN.



When You Don't Have Time to Prepare

Preparation is always best; however, workplaces are busy, and leadership is real. Sometimes, the right moment to give feedback is now. If you wait, the lesson may be lost. When that happens, you can still use ALIGN in the moment.

- Acknowledge first: Always start with the acknowledgment. *“Jamie, we usually save feedback for our scheduled meetings, but we’ve agreed that timely feedback matters. There are a couple of moments from just now that could really support your collaboration skills. Would it be okay if we shift focus and talk through them briefly? Alternatively, we can have a small break and meet in 10 minutes”.*
- Please just keep it small: Focus on one clear behaviour or example rather than trying to tackle everything at once.
- Anchor in observation: Share only what you saw or heard, not interpretations. For example: *“In the client call, we missed summarising the action points before closing”.*
- Name your intent. Be transparent: *“I want to share this straight away so it’s fresh, and we can adjust quickly”.*
- Invite a response: Even brief feedback should end with curiosity: *“How did you see it?”* or *“What would make this smoother next time?”*

On-the-spot feedback is most effective when your tone is calm, specific, and concise. You don't need a perfect script; however, you do need to enter the conversation with composure, clarity and care. Think of it as a snapshot of feedback, rather than a complete conversation.

If the issue is bigger or emotionally charged, acknowledge it in the moment and then schedule a fuller discussion for later that day or first thing the next day:

“This is important, and I’d like us to unpack it properly and give us both time to explore this issue. Let’s set aside time tomorrow to go deeper”.

That way, you don't lose the immediacy, but you still create space so you both can collect your thoughts and prepare to guide the conversation effectively.

PREPARATION ESSENTIALS



Purpose – Clarity Creates Confidence

Ask yourself: What do I want this conversation to achieve? What is the desired outcome?

- Define the desired outcome. Is it to raise awareness, solve a specific problem, reset expectations, or build capability?
- Keep it future-focused: where do we need to go from here?
- Avoid vague purposes like *“to address performance”*. It is essential to be specific: *“To explore how meeting deadlines can be improved to reduce impact on the team goals”*.

Relational Note: When your purpose is clear, you are less likely to drift into personal judgment. This helps the other person feel the conversation is about improvement, not criticism.



Check Your Presence to Shape the Space

Ask yourself: Am I calm, clear, and ready to listen?

- Check your emotional temperature, as frustration, impatience, or anxiety can leak into your tone and body language.
- Adopt a developmental stance: you are here to help them succeed, not to ‘win’ the conversation.
- If you are not in the right headspace, it is okay to pause and reschedule. A feedback conversation delivered in the wrong emotional state can cause more harm than good. Note this with the individual and commit to a follow-up as soon as possible.

Relational Note: Your calm presence signals psychological safety. People listen and respond better when they feel respected and not under attack.

PREPARATION ESSENTIALS



Evidence – Facts Build Trust

Ask yourself: What facts support my feedback?

- Use observable behaviours, not assumptions or interpretations.
- Anchor your feedback to clear examples: what you saw, heard, or measured.
- Avoid hearsay or vague impressions as they erode credibility and invite defensiveness.

Relational Note: Sharing clear evidence shows you've been listening and observing carefully. It helps the other person see the feedback as grounded in facts and reality, not personal opinion.



Timing – The Moment Matters

Ask yourself: Is this the right moment for them to hear it?

- Choose a time when they can process the conversation without distraction or public pressure.
- Where possible, set up the meeting with its intended purpose – i.e., a feedback conversation regarding the project implementation plan.
- Avoid delivering feedback in the heat of the moment unless it is urgent and safe to do so.
- Consider their workload, stress levels, and current challenges, and sometimes waiting 24 hours improves receptivity.

Relational Note: Well-timed feedback feels respectful. Poorly timed feedback can feel like an ambush.



Be prepared!

Leader Self-Check Before You Begin:

- Can I genuinely hold this conversation as a dialogue, not a download?
- Am I ready to listen as much as I speak?
- Can I balance support and accountability in the same sentence?
- Do I feel confident in setting up the first 2-3 minutes of this conversation? This confidence often determines how well you start the conversation and how well you provide feedback.

OTHER IMPORTANT POINTS

Presence: How You Show Up Matters

You can prepare the perfect words, but if you deliver them with unsafe body language—folded arms, a sigh, or an eye roll — the message will be lost. In feedback, your body speaks louder than your words.

Open posture, steady tone, and reflective presence signal safety and respect. Defensive or hostile body language, on the other hand, is contagious as it fuels tension and escalates conflict.

You do not need a poker face. Blank expressions make you harder to read and harder to trust. Instead, you should aim to show up calm, open, and consistent with your intent. Presence is not about performance. It is about aligning what you say with how you say it.

Resist the Righting Reflex and Listen

In feedback conversations, it's natural to want to jump in and correct, explain, or convince. This urge has a name: **the righting reflex**. Coined in Motivational Interviewing (1983) research, it describes humans' instinct to fix someone else's problem. It usually comes from a place of care — wanting to help things get better quickly, but when leaders move too fast to 'set things right', people often shut down or push back.

Why? Because the righting reflex creates a subtle power struggle. Instead of exploring the issue together, the leader talks and the other person defends. Research shows that when people articulate their own reasons for change, they are far more likely to take action. When leaders do all the talking, employees are left to justify their actions.

That's why ALIGN emphasises dialogue over download. Once you've shared your perspective, **pause, stop talking, and start listening.**

As Daniel Pink reminds us: "Argue like you're right, listen like you're wrong". Clearly raise your concerns, then activate your curiosity. Give the other person space to respond in their own words. It is essential to avoid preparing rebuttals while the employee is explaining their part of the feedback. Stay present and open.

Listening is not a soft skill — it is an essential leadership skill. When people feel heard, they are more willing to reflect, take ownership, and commit to change. By resisting the righting reflex, you shift feedback away from compliance and towards genuine growth.



USING ALIGN IN A 1:1 MEETING

The Step-by- Step Flow

THE IMPORTANT SET UP OF THE CONVERSATION

Before You Begin – Setting Up the Conversation

How you start a feedback conversation matters as much as what you say once it begins. Too often, people are caught off guard by phrases like “*Do you have a minute?*” or “*We need to talk*”. These openers trigger defensiveness before the real conversation even starts.

Instead, set the tone early. Give context, offer choice, and show intent. That slight shift builds trust and helps the other person enter the conversation prepared and not blindsided. Also, when you are giving the person the heads-up, do it privately by asking them to come by your office or by sending the request via email.

Here’s the difference:

Example 1: Closed Opener (Creates Stress and/or Anxiety)

“Hey, we need to talk about the project plan. Do you have time for a quick chat in 5?”

Example 2: Clear, Collaborative Opener (Builds Safety)

“Hey, I’d like to chat about the timelines and agreed actions in the (x) project plan. I’ve noticed we’re not on schedule, and I have some ideas to help get us back on track. I’m keen to hear your thoughts. When would be a good time to catch up?”

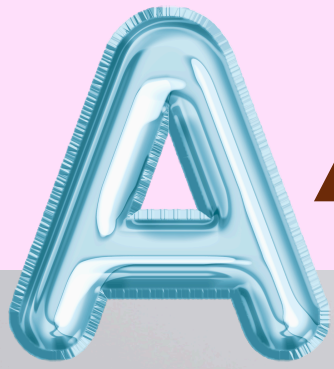
Why example 2 works better:

1. Context creates calm. Giving a short preview of what you want to discuss helps people understand what they’re walking into. It replaces anxiety with increased clarity.
2. Choice builds safety. Inviting them to choose the time gives them some control over the situation, with the hope of reducing defensiveness.
3. Intent signals respect. Framing your goal – collaboration, problem-solving, or support – shows the conversation is about improvement, not blame.

Practical Tip:

If you can, send a short message ahead of time or mention the topic briefly in person: *“I’d like to catch up this afternoon to talk through the project timelines and see what support you might need. Would that work for you?”*

This small step sets up the Acknowledge phase beautifully, as it communicates thoughtfulness, reduces surprise, and prepares both of you for an open, constructive dialogue.



ACKNOWLEDGE



A – Acknowledge

Purpose: sets the tone, purpose and focus. Creates psychological safety by acknowledging relationships and feelings, signalling thought, respect, care, partnership, and shared intent.

Leader stance: calm, curious, people-centred.

Body cues: open posture, soft tone, steady pace, generous pauses.

Skills & Micro-Techniques

- Name–Normalise–Navigate: Name the moment, normalise discomfort, navigate to purpose.
- Affect labelling: briefly name the emotion you are noticing, *“I can sense this is frustrating”*.
- Ask for permission: ask to proceed; gives autonomy and lowers threat.
- PACE check: Pause → Acknowledge → Curiosity → Empathy.
- Neuroinclusive setup: share agenda and expected time upfront; invite note-taking or written reflection options.

Conversation Starters

- *“This conversation about (x) might feel uncomfortable, and it matters to me that we talk about it because I care deeply about your success here and want us to be able to move forward with clarity”*.
- *“I sense these last few weeks have been tense between us. I value what we have built in our working relationship, and I would like us to take a moment to explore (x) and what has been happening so we can find our way through it together”*.
- *“Before we dive in, is now a good time for a focused and honest conversation about (x)? I want to make sure you feel able to be present for it”*.
- *“I value our working relationship. My intent today is growth and clarity, not blame or judgment. I want us to leave this conversation with a shared path forward”*.

Additional Options for Different Emotional Contexts

If you want to acknowledge vulnerability:

- *“I know (x) is not an easy topic, and I will raise this feedback sensitively. I believe having this conversation is important for both of us”.*
- *“I am aware (x) might touch on some sensitive areas, and I want you to know I am here to listen as much as I am to speak”.*

If you sense frustration or disconnect:

- *“I have been feeling a bit of disconnect in how we have been working together recently, and I would like us to explore that so we can realign and get back to working at our best”.*
- *“I can see we have both been under pressure, and I do not want that to get in the way of us understanding each other”.*

If you want to emphasise partnership:

- *“We have always done our best work when we have been honest and upfront with each other. I want this conversation to be part of keeping that trust strong”.*
- *“We are in this together, and that is why it matters to me that we talk this through openly”.*

If you want to signal safety:

- *“This is a safe space for us to explore what has been happening. My goal is to understand your perspective as much as share mine”.*
- *“I am not here to catch you out or criticise you. I am here because I want to make sure we both have what we need to succeed”.*

When Emotions May Be High, Start with Curiosity

Curiosity lowers defensiveness and signals that this will be a conversation, not a confrontation. If you find your emotions rise, tune in to this and pause. Shift gears and move into curiosity. It gives you vital insight before you share your perspective.

Another effective strategy is to wait for 5-8 seconds to collect your thoughts and calm the emotions in the room. Sometimes, saying what you want to say in your head before responding gives you space and pause.

Additional Curious Questions

- *“What has been the biggest challenge for you in this area recently?”*
- *“How are you feeling about your work and our team at the moment?”*
- *“What is felt most energising for you lately, and what has been draining?”*
- *“What is the one thing you most want me to understand before we get into details?”*
- *“Where do you feel most stuck right now, and what do you think might be contributing?”*
- *“If you were in my shoes, how would you approach this?”*

Relational Tip:

Open questions and genuine listening can foster psychological safety, enabling the other person to transition from an emotional state to a reflective one.

Pitfalls to Avoid (and Reframes) - Acknowledge

Some phrases can unintentionally escalate tension, even when intended to be well-meaning. Reframing them keeps the conversation anchored in respect and shared purpose.

Pitfall	Why is it Risky?	Reframe	Why it Works?
"This will not take long".	Minimises the importance of the conversation.	<i>"We will take the time this deserves".</i>	Signals respect for the topic and the person.
"Do not take this the wrong way".	Suggests an adverse reaction is inevitable.	<i>"I aim to support your growth".</i>	Frames intent positively
"You always..." / "You never..."	Feels accusatory and absolute.	<i>"I have noticed a pattern over the last two weeks where..."</i>	Focuses on specific, observable behaviour.
"You need to understand..."	It can sound authoritarian.	<i>"Can I share what I have been seeing, and hear your perspective?"</i>	Invites dialogue rather than demands compliance.
"It is just feedback".	Can dismiss the person's feelings.	<i>"I know feedback can feel challenging, and I intend to make it constructive".</i>	Validates emotion while stating purpose.
<i>"This is for your own good".</i>	This statement can sound patronising.	<i>"I want to give you feedback that will help you succeed in your goals".</i>	Links feedback to their benefit in concrete terms.



LAY OUT



L - Lay Out The Facts

Purpose: ground the conversation in what happened. Not just the facts, without assumptions. This step involves removing emotional loading from your language, allowing the other person to hear the feedback rather than defend against it.

Leader stance: factual, non-judgmental, concise.

Body cues: neutral tone, slow enough to be transcribed.

Skills & Micro-Techniques

- Camera Test: describe only what a camera would capture (no mind-reading).
- SBI mini-structure (Situation–Behaviour–Impact placeholder): use here for clarity, save full impact for next step.
- Zero-Adjectives Rule: strip evaluative words (unprofessional or careless).
- Time-boxing: keep the description to 1–2 minutes.

Conversation Starters

- *“During Tuesday’s project handover, the budget figures in your presentation did not match the finance team’s report”.*
- *“Last Thursday, in the leadership meeting, you left after the first 15 minutes without sharing an update or letting the group know why you were leaving”*
- *“On three occasions this month, the team reflective session started without you present”.*
- *“In last week’s client call, the agreed action points were not summarised before we closed”.*
- *“The safety checklist for Site B was signed off without the final inspection being completed”.*
- *“When we discussed the new workflow yesterday, you did not respond to three direct questions from the team”.*
- *“In the last fortnight, two case notes for high-priority clients were entered more than 36 hours after the client interaction”.*

How to evidence the feedback but build trust:

- Bring two concrete examples (pattern without piling on).
- Share practical evidence (email, timestamp, document).
- Invite correction: *“If I have misread any of this, please tell me”*.

Pitfalls to Avoid (and Reframes) - Lay Out

The words you choose in the **Lay Out** step can either open the door to dialogue or slam it shut. Pitfalls often occur when leaders speak from assumptions, exaggeration, or judgment rather than specific observation.

By reframing, you shift from language that triggers defensiveness to language that invites collaboration and cooperation.

Pitfall	Why is it Risky?	Reframe	Why it Works?
“You always...” / “You never...”	Feels exaggerated and personal, invites the other person to argue the exception.	<i>“In the last two instances...”</i>	Narrow focus to recent, observable behaviour; keeps the discussion grounded in facts.
“You did not care”.	Assumes intent; risks damaging trust.	<i>“The handover document was missing sections 3–5”.</i>	Describes the behaviour without judgement, leaving space for explanation.
“You were unprofessional”.	Broad, subjective, and likely to cause defensiveness.	<i>“During the meeting, you checked your phone mobile four times while the client was speaking”.</i>	Stays factual and observable, linking later to its impact on perception.
“You dropped the ball”	Uses slang and judgment; undermines respect.	<i>“The report was not submitted by the 3pm deadline, which meant the funding application could not be lodged”.</i>	Connects behaviour to a tangible consequence.
“You ignored me”.	Implies intent; can feel accusatory.	<i>“When I asked for the risk update in the meeting, there was no response”.</i>	Keeps it behavioural, not interpretive.

Leader Tip – Catching Yourself in the Moment

When you're about to say something global, such as “always”, “never”, or interpretive “you did not care”, pause and ask: “Can I describe this in a way that a neutral observer could verify?”



IMPACT

I - Impact

Purpose: Connect the observed behaviour to its effects on people, outcomes, values, and culture. Help the person understand why it matters without slipping into blame.

Leader stance: Use “I” statements to own your perspective. Keep the tone constructive. Link to shared values, agreed goals, or organisational priorities.

Body cues: Lean slightly in to show engagement, soften your tone, and slow your pace to allow the message to land without overwhelming the employee.

Skills & Micro-Techniques

- Impact Ladder: Start with the effect on you, then the team, then clients/stakeholders, and finally organisational values or risk.
- SCARF scan: Notice whether the feedback might trigger concerns around Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relatedness, or Fairness, and address them directly.
- Ripple Mapping: Show both the immediate and downstream effects of the behaviour.
- Values Anchor: Tie the impact to a shared commitment “Because safety is a top value for us...”
- Balance the lens: Where appropriate, please note the positive impact alongside the concern to keep the conversation balanced.

Conversation Starters

- *“Because collaboration is one of our values, speaking over Priya reduced her contribution and signalled to others that their input might not be heard”.*
- *“When the reports are late, the ops team cannot finalise allocations, and we miss the service window”.*
- *“When demos are not ready, stakeholders lose confidence and we delay decisions”.*
- *“When the case notes are not completed within 24 hours, we lose important client details and risk missing critical follow-up actions”.*
- *“When consent forms are not on file before a referral, it delays services and can cause clients to disengage”.*

If disengagement is present

- *“I am noticing a drop in energy and fewer updates from you. I am concerned about the impact on your workload and the team’s contribution to planning. What is getting in the way?”*
- *“You have been quieter in meetings recently, and I am curious how you are feeling about the work we are doing right now”.*

Pitfalls to Avoid (and Reframes) - Impact

The language you use during the Impact step can either open space for dialogue or shut it down. This is the point where many leaders unintentionally lose connection.

Instead of staying grounded in specific observations, they slip into:

- Assumptions
- Exaggerations
- Judgments.

These habits quickly trigger defensiveness and shift the focus away from learning.

By choosing grounded, specific language, you move the conversation from blame to understanding, from *“You always...”* to *“When this happened, here’s the impact I noticed”.*

Pitfall	Why is it Risky?	Reframe	Why it Works?
“You made us look bad”.	Feels like blame; damages trust.	<i>“I felt concerned about trust with stakeholders, which matters to both of us”.</i>	Owens the feeling and ties it to shared value.
“You caused a problem”.	Shifts focus to blame rather than learning.	<i>“When X happened, it created Y consequences for the team”.</i>	Keeps the lens on behaviour and outcomes.
“You do not care about the process”.	Assumes motive.	<i>The agreed steps were not followed, which affected the quality of the service”.</i>	Stays factual and observable, linking later to its impact on perception.

Leader Tip – Impact Step

When explaining impact, be clear and specific about what you observed and what it caused, and speak from your perspective. **Instead of saying:** *“You’re always unprepared”.*

Try: *“When the report wasn’t ready by the deadline, the team had to delay their presentation”.*

The key is to describe the behaviour and its effect, rather than making assumptions or using labels. This way, you keep the conversation open for dialogue rather than triggering defensiveness.



GAIN AGREEMENT



G - GAIN AGREEMENT

Purpose: Create a shared understanding of what happened and what is needed. An agreement does not mean total alignment on every detail. It means both parties are aware of the facts, the impact, and the desired direction forward.

Leader stance: Listen to understand, not to respond. Your goal is clarity, not “winning” the conversation.

Body cues: Use open hand gestures, nod to show understanding, make eye contact, and use short summaries to check mutual understanding.

Skills & Micro-Techniques

- Looping: Listen → summarise → check for understanding (“*I heard.....Did I get that right?*”).
- Deep listening: This is a state you need to get into where you create a deep level of curiosity. You want to understand the other person's position. For deep listening, use the 80/20 rule – 20% asking questions or talking and 80% listening to the other person.
- Strengths-based language: State their strongest point back to them to show you have heard it.
- Two-column view: Write “What we agree on” / “What we see differently” to separate facts from interpretations visually.

Conversation Starters

- “*What part of what I have shared resonates? What does not?*”
- “*What am I missing from your perspective?*”
- “*If we replay that moment, what options did you feel you had?*”
- “*How does this align with your understanding of the situation?*”

If they disagree or get defensive:

- Explore, do not escalate: “It sounds like intent and impact did not match. Let us map both!”
- Partition the problem: “Can we agree on the facts first, then discuss the reasons?”
- Autonomy support: “Given your goals, what approach would you prefer to try?”

Pitfalls to Avoid (and Reframes) - Gain Agreement

In the Gain Agreement step, the most significant pitfalls arise when leaders slip into telling instead of asking, assume agreement without verifying, or use language that closes the door to input.

The goal isn’t to impose solutions but to co-create understanding, and that’s where trust, ownership, and real agreement are built.

Pitfall	Why is it Risky?	Reframe	Why it Works?
Debating facts endlessly	Consumes time, erodes trust.	<i>“Let us anchor to the shared evidence we both accept”.</i>	Moves the conversation to a mutually agreed-upon ground.
Leader monologue	Shuts down input; reduces ownership.	<i>“Let me pause – what do you need me to hear right now?”</i>	Signals willingness to listen and adapt.

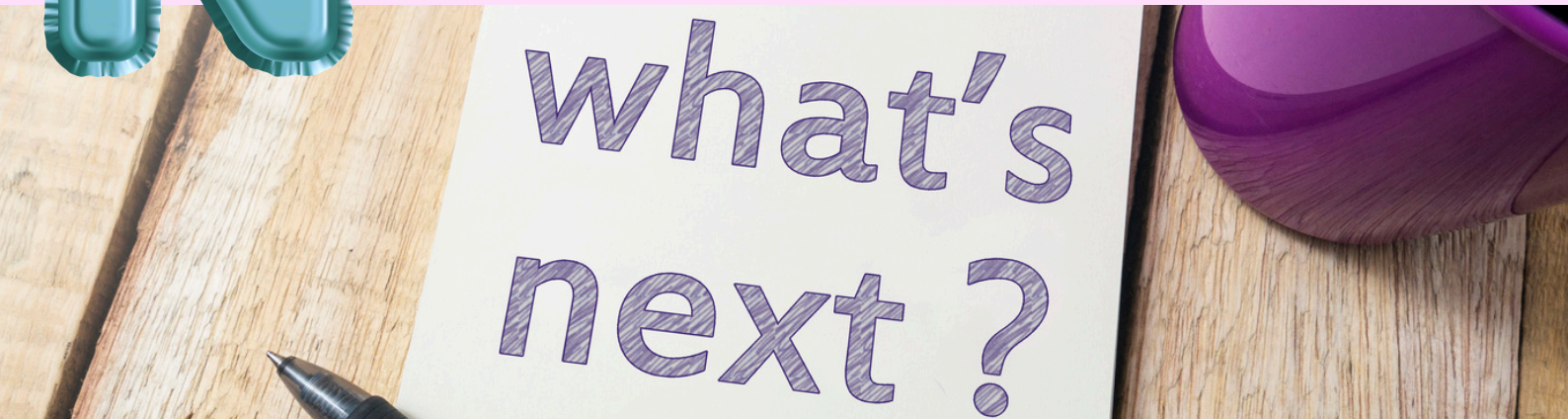


Leader Tip – Gain Agreement

When you reach the **Gain Agreement** step, resist the urge to jump straight into solutions or assume the other person is already on board. Instead, pause and invite their perspective. A simple question like “How does this land for you?” or “*What do you think would work best here?*” opens the door to dialogue and ensures they feel heard. This step is less about convincing and more about co-creating clarity. By checking alignment, you move from giving instructions to building shared ownership, and that’s what turns feedback into a genuine growth conversation.



NEXT STEPS



N - Next Steps

Purpose: Turn insight into clear, actionable commitments while protecting the relationship. Balance accountability with support.

Leader stance: Co-create solutions, be specific, offer help, and follow through. Accountability is shared, not one-sided.

Body cues: Forward-leaning energy, a confident and clear voice, and an approachable tone.

Skills & Micro-Techniques

- SMART-E commitments: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound + Enabled (supported with resources).
- If-Then planning: *"If X happens, then I will!"*
- Obstacle rehearsal: Identify potential roadblocks and co-design responses.
- Check-back cadence: Agree on how and when to review progress, ensuring consistency without being micro-managing.

Conversation Starters

- *"What will you try first, and by when?"*
- *"What support from me would make success more likely?"*
- *"Let us define 'done': what will we both see or hear when this is working?"*
- *"If you hit the same constraint again, what is your first move?"*
- *"Which two clients will you trial this new engagement approach with first, and by what date?"*
- *"What follow-up process will you put in place to ensure consent forms are ready before referrals?"*

Leader Tip — Next Steps

When you reach the **Next Steps** stage, avoid letting the conversation fizzle out with vague promises. This is the moment to translate discussion into action. Invite the other person into the process by asking what steps they see as realistic and how you can support them. Phrasing like *"What can we agree on together?"* or *"How can I help you feel confident moving forward?"* turns the feedback into a shared commitment rather than a directive. Clear, co-created next steps not only set expectations, they build accountability and strengthen trust.

Encouraging closers (relationship first, accountability intact)

- “I am confident you can make this shift, and I will support you to get there”.
- “Thank you for leaning into a tough conversation. This is what growth looks like”.
- “I appreciate your willingness to try a new approach; I am looking forward to hearing how it goes”.

Accountability without threat

- Document the commitment (one-page, shared).
- Agree on the first review point: “We will check in at next Tuesday’s 1:1 for five minutes”.
- Define signals and safeguards – what early signs to watch for and how to adjust quickly.

Pitfalls to Avoid (and Reframes) - Next Steps

In the **Next Steps** stage, a common pitfall is leaving the conversation vague, ending with “Let’s do better next time” or “I’ll keep an eye on it”. Without clarity, expectations drift, accountability is lost, and the same issues often resurface.

Another trap is making it one-sided, where the leader prescribes the action without involving the other person. By reframing, you turn this step into a co-created plan. Instead of issuing vague instructions, invite specificity and collaboration. This shift in focus from vague promises to shared responsibility gives the conversation momentum, ensuring both parties walk away with clarity, commitment, and alignment.

Pitfall	Why is it Risky?	Reframe	Why it Works?
Ending vaguely (“Let’s do better next time”)	Creates uncertainty, no clear follow-through, and often leads to repeated issues.	<i>“What specific steps can we take to avoid this happening again?”</i>	Turns general talk into concrete actions with accountability.
Leader prescribes all the actions	Feels one-sided, can reduce ownership and motivation from the other person.	<i>“What do you think would work best here, and how can I support you?”</i>	Builds shared responsibility and increases buy-in.
Overloading with too many changes at once	Can feel overwhelming, leading to inaction or discouragement.	<i>“What’s the first step you feel confident starting with?”</i>	Keeps momentum realistic and achievable, boosting confidence.
Failing to check alignment	Risks assumptions, leaving misunderstandings unspoken	<i>“Does this plan make sense to you? Anything you’d adjust?”</i>	Confirms clarity and ensures both sides are truly aligned.

What to do in Tough Conversations

What to do in these moments?

These techniques can be applied at any step of ALIGN process when the conversation hits a tricky point.

Emotion Spike (Anger / Tears)

Leader stance: Stay calm, grounded, and compassionate in your role to hold the space, allowing the other person to feel safe enough to process their reaction.

Body cues: Open posture, gentle eye contact, relaxed tone, and slower pace.

Key moves:

- Pause the content, attend to the emotion first.
- Offer choice and give them agency in how to proceed.
- Avoid rushing back into problem-solving; emotion needs a moment to settle.

Conversation prompts:

- *“Let us pause for a minute – would a glass of water or a short break help?”*
- *“I can see this has brought up a strong reaction. Would you like to take a moment, or keep going slowly?”*
- *“I am with you; we will go at your pace”.*
- *“When you are ready, let us focus on just the next small step”.*

Pitfalls to avoid:

- Minimising emotion (“Do not be upset”.) → Reframe: acknowledge and normalise (“It is okay to feel strongly about this; it shows you care”.)
- Powering through without pause as this risks them shutting down or escalating.

Stonewalling - “I don’t know”

Leader stance: Stay curious, not frustrated. Treat “I do not know” as a signal to adjust your approach, not a refusal to engage.

Body cues: Lean forward slightly, nod gently, patient pacing.

Key moves:

- Offer clear, simple options to help them engage.
- Use gentle scaffolding to move from “I do not know” to something they can answer.
- Break big questions into smaller, more approachable pieces.

Conversation prompts:

- *“Would examples help, or shall we start with what you are unsure about?”*
- *“If you had to take a guess, what would you say?”*
- *“On a scale of 0–10, how clear are you on what is needed?”*
- *“What is the smallest part of this we could start talking about?”*

Pitfalls to avoid:

- Interpreting stonewalling as disrespect is often a sign of overwhelm, fear of making a mistake, or a need for more time to think.

What to do in Tough Conversations

Deflection

Leader stance: Acknowledge the broader concern without letting it derail the focus. Keep the conversation anchored to the person's role in the situation.

Body cues: Calm tone, open palm gesture, subtle hand-down motion to bring it back to the topic.

Key moves:

- Validate their point to avoid triggering defensiveness.
- Clearly separate *'today's focus'* from *'other issues we can address later'*.

Conversation prompts:

- *"I hear the concerns about the team, and I am happy to schedule a time to explore those. For now, let us focus on your part in this situation"*.
- *"Yes, both points matter and today, we are addressing this specific commitment"*.
- *"I understand that is frustrating. Let us first resolve this piece so it does not hold us back"*.

Pitfalls to avoid:

- Ignoring the deflection entirely – this can feel dismissive. Always acknowledge before re-focusing.



Blaming External Factors Only

Leader stance: Balance empathy with accountability, acknowledge legitimate challenges, but keep the focus on what can be done.

Body cues: Steady and grounded, with a slight forward lean to indicate engagement.

Key moves:

- Use the "Both/And" frame to hold truth on both sides.
- Ask for the smallest viable step forward.

Conversation prompts:

- *"Yes, capacity is tight, and we still need this safeguard in place. What is one thing we can do this week to move closer?"*
- *"Given those challenges, what is within your control right now?"*
- *"If resources stay the same, what is the most important change we can still make?"*

Pitfalls to avoid:

- Getting into a 'yes, but' pattern can feel dismissive. Replace with 'yes, and' to keep both perspectives valid.

What to do in Tough Conversations

Repeated Commitments, Little Follow-Through

Leader stance: Stay factual, avoid judgment, and focus on practical barriers and solutions.

Body cues: Clear tone, forward energy, warm but firm.

Key moves:

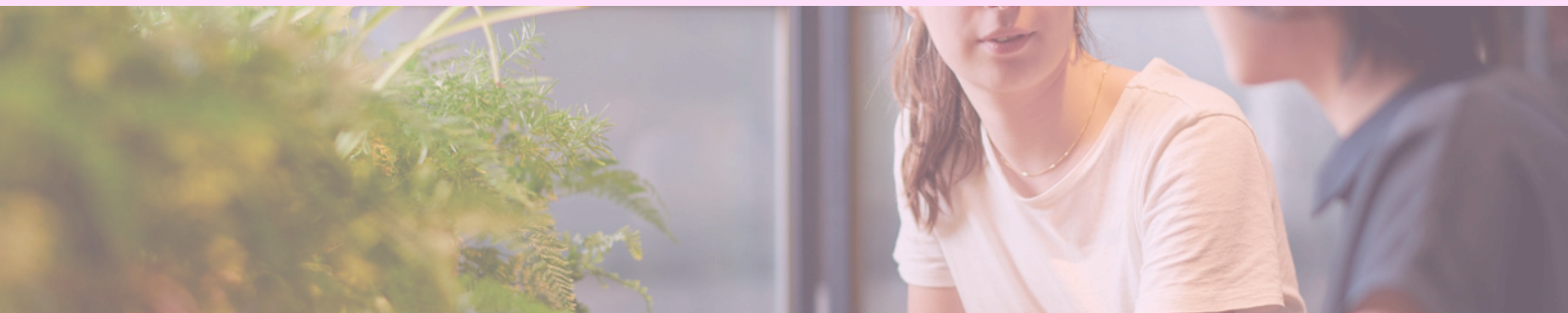
- Shorten the loop by setting smaller goals, having closer review dates, and tracking visible progress.
- You can explore the why behind non-delivery without blame.

Conversation prompts:

- *“We have talked about this before, and the follow-through has not happened. What is making it hard to keep the commitment?”*
- *“Let us design for reality. For example, what would make this achievable in your week?”*
- *“How can I support you differently so this sticks?”*

Pitfalls to avoid:

- Shaming language (*“We have been over this a hundred times”*). → Reframe to *“We have revisited this, and it is not shifting yet. Let us unpack what is getting in the way”*.



Inclusive & Remote-Friendly Action

Leader stance: Be intentional about accessibility, processing time, and reducing unnecessary stress in the conversation.

Body cues: Friendly tone, visible patience, space for silences.

Techniques:

- Pre-read: Send agenda, purpose, questions, and any documents in advance.
- Write-first options: Let people respond in writing before verbal discussion (notes, chat, shared doc).
- Post-meeting summary: Send bullets after the meeting that cover what we saw, what it means, and what we will do.
- Sensory load check: Keep visual backgrounds simple, reduce noise, and maintain a slow pace to allow for processing time.
- Time awareness: Build in breaks for longer or emotionally charged sessions.

INCLUSIVE & NEURODIVERSITY-AWARE FEEDBACK

When giving feedback, it's essential to recognise that people don't all process information in the same way. Inclusive leaders consider neurodiversity, cultural differences, and individual communication needs before stepping into a feedback conversation.

For some, direct language feels supportive; for others, it can feel confronting. Certain team members may need extra processing time, a written summary, or a clear structure to fully absorb the conversation. By asking upfront, *"What helps you best when receiving feedback?"* and adapting your approach, you create equity in the process. This strategy not only reduces stress but also signals respect, ensuring every person has the opportunity to receive feedback in a way that allows them to learn and grow genuinely.



Steps to prepare for a conversation, creating a psychologically safe space where people can fully engage with feedback, regardless of their work environment, neurotype, communication style, or personal circumstances.

Before the Conversation

1. Send a Brief Pre-Read

- What to include: agenda, purpose, key discussion points, any supporting artefacts (e.g., documents, screenshots, data).
- Why: It reduces anxiety, gives the person processing time, and allows them to come prepared, especially helpful for neurodivergent employees or those who need time to organise their thoughts.
- Relational Tip: Frame it as *"so we can make the best use of our time"* rather than *"so you are ready for what is coming"*.

2. Offer Write-First Options

- Allow the employee to jot down reflections or use chat-based responses before speaking.
- Ideal for individuals who process information better through writing or require additional time to articulate their thoughts.
- In remote calls, you can send prompts ahead of time: *"Before our conversation, can you note your top three reflections on X?"*

INCLUSIVE & NEURODIVERSITY-AWARE FEEDBACK

During the Conversation

3. Adjust for Sensory Load

- Pace: Speak slower than you think you need to, and pause more often.
- Visual load: Minimise distracting backgrounds and keep visual materials simple.
- Audio clarity: Use a good microphone and avoid overlapping speech.
- Processing space: When discussing complex topics, allow silence for thought without rushing to fill the gap.

4. Build in Anchors

- Recap key points as you go: *“So far we have agreed that...”*
- In virtual settings, use screen-share bullet points to keep both parties on track.
- Use collaborative tools (shared documents, whiteboards) to track discussions in real time.

After the Conversation

5. Summarise in Writing

- Bullet points: **What we discussed** → **What it means** → **What we will do next.**
- Keep it concise but specific; avoid vague action items.
- Send within 24 hours to maintain momentum and shared clarity.

6. Invite Asynchronous Follow-Up

- Allow space for post-meeting reflections: *“If you think of more after we finish, please add it to the shared doc or email me”.*
- This honours that insights and questions often emerge after people have had time to process.



ALIGN IN ACTION

Your Micro Script to Follow (copy, paste, tailor)

Acknowledge

Susan, I'd like to spend some time talking through your executive reports. This matters to me because I care about your success and the quality of our working relationship. It may feel a little uncomfortable, but my goal is to support you and strengthen your impact.

Layout

In the last two reports sent to the executive group, I noticed some errors in the data. I've brought copies with the relevant sections highlighted, so we can review them together.

Impact

I know mistakes happen — that's human. The challenge here is that these reports directly inform our quarterly funding decisions. Accuracy is critical, and even minor errors can have a significant impact on how our area is resourced.

Gain Agreement

From our earlier conversations, I understand you were under time pressure and didn't have enough space to review the reports thoroughly. Does that reflect your experience? Is there anything else you'd like me to know about what got in the way?

Next Steps

Let's work together on strategies that will set you up for success with future reports. What one or two changes do you think would make the most significant difference? And how would you like me to support you in making that happen?



ALIGN IN ACTION

Your Micro Script to Follow (copy, paste, tailor)

Acknowledge

Alex, I'd like to talk about how things have been going in our project partnership meetings. This matters because I know you are committed to the intake project. This feedback conversation is essential to me, as I value collaborative participation and strive to maintain strong team dynamics. I know these conversations can sometimes feel uncomfortable, but my intent is to support your success and our team's collaboration.

Lay Out

In last Friday's partnership meeting, when Linda was sharing her ideas, I noticed you cut her off a few times. I also noticed that you rolled your eyes twice and checked your email while others were contributing.

Impact

This affected the meeting's tone. It made it harder for others to share openly and may have left Linda and the team feeling dismissed. Because these meetings are about partnership and co-design, it's essential that everyone feels heard and respected.

Gain Agreement

That's what I observed. How does that match with your experience of the meeting and how you felt when you left? Were you aware of how that might have come across to others? I'd like to understand what was happening for you in that moment.

Next Steps

In the future, what strategies could help make sure your contributions come across with the respect and openness I know you want to bring? Would you like me to give you a quick signal in the meeting if I notice similar behaviours, or is there another way I can support you?



ALIGN IN ACTION

Your Micro Script to Follow (copy, paste, tailor)

Acknowledge

Priya, I'd like to talk about your recent email communications. This matters to me because your expertise is respected, and I want your emails to reflect the professionalism and credibility you bring to your work. My goal is to help you strengthen your written communication, which will then enhance your influence.

Lay Out (The Impact)

In last week's email to the finance team, the line 'You need to get this done now' came across strongly. In yesterday's partner update, the closing statement, 'We'll do it my way', was very abrupt in the moment. These are just two examples where the tone could be interpreted differently than you intended. I have the emails with me now, if you would like to review them.

Impact

When emails arrive as abrupt or dismissive, it can impact how colleagues respond and how external partners perceive our team. It risks damaging collaboration and, at times, can create misunderstandings that slow down progress.

Gain Agreement

That's what I've noticed. How do those examples land for you? Were you aware of how they might have been interpreted? What was happening for you when you wrote them?

Next Steps

We have spent some time discussing your thoughts on the work. Going forward, what adjustments would help your emails better reflect the respectful, collaborative intent I know you want to convey? Would a quick self-checklist before sending, or asking a colleague to peer-read essential messages, be helpful? Let's agree on one or two small strategies, and I'll support you in implementing them.



Final Leadership Wisdom - Advancing Leadership Through ALIGN

A well-facilitated feedback conversation is one of the most relational acts a leader can perform. It says: I see you. I am invested in you. I will not look away.

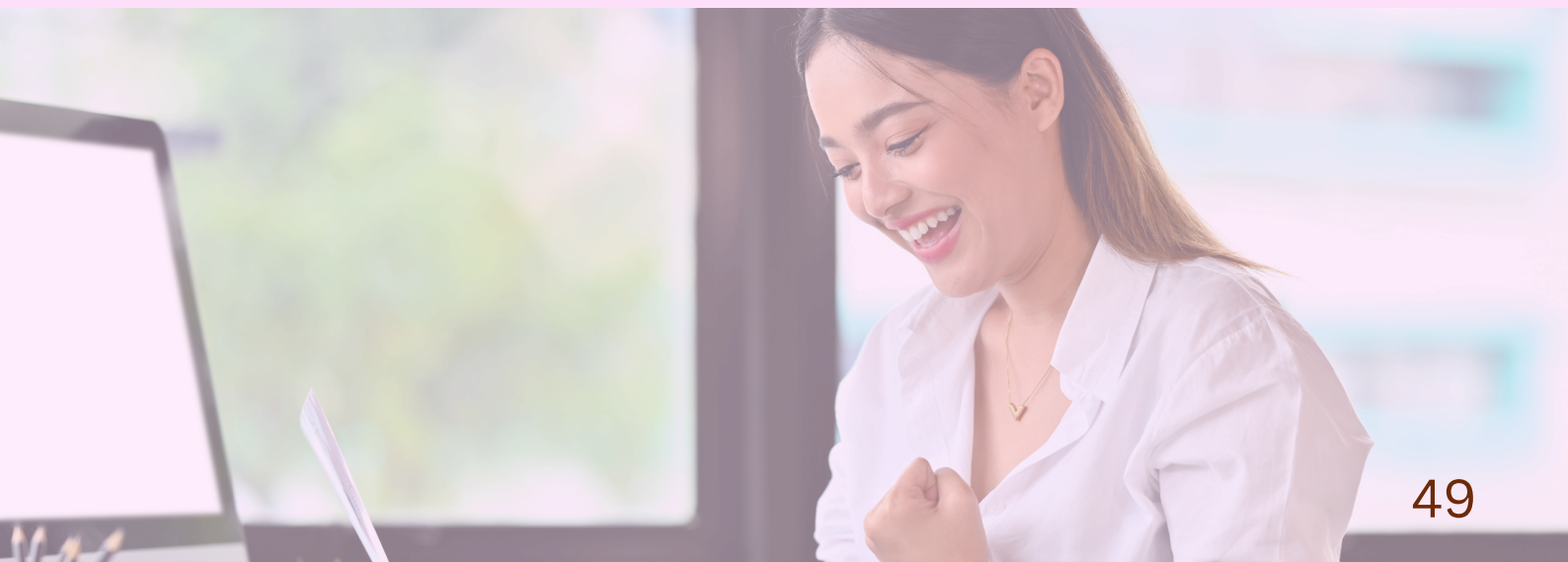
ALIGN gives you the structure to do that consistently, even when it is hard. But structure alone does not make a leader.

What surrounds it – how you read the room, how you hold pressure, how you lead people through uncertainty and change – transforms a manager into someone people genuinely want to follow. That is the work of the Relational Leadership Method.

At collabbWAY, we call this the Relational Leadership Method. It is a six-lens framework built for leaders who understand that how you lead people is inseparable from how well you lead the work. ALIGN lives inside Lens 2 and Lens 3 – but there is a whole leader waiting to be developed across all six.

If ALIGN has shifted something for you, we would love to take you further.

If you are ready to go deeper, visit collabbway.com.au or contact hello@collabbway.com.au





ALIGN FEEDBACK TOOLS

- ALIGN Conversation Planner
- Feedback Reflective Question Prompts
- Courageous Conversation Script Builder
- Feedback Culture Checklist

“ALIGN makes feedback safer, clearer, and more people-centred because growth happens when people feel seen, not judged”.



Thank you

FOR BRINGING ALIGN TO YOUR FEEDBACK CONVERSATIONS

Congratulations on completing this journey towards becoming a confident and connected leader in feedback conversations.

Remember, feedback isn't just about pointing out what needs to change – it's about building trust, clarity, and growth. With the ALIGN Feedback Model, you now have a practical, people-focused way to turn even the most challenging conversations into opportunities for connection and progress.



BROOKE BAXTER
collabbWAY Founder

WWW.COLLABBWAY.COM.AU
HELLO@COLLABBWAY.COM.AU

ALIGN Feedback Model Influences & Further Reading

- **Situation-Behaviour-Impact (SBI)** – Centre for Creative Leadership
- **Nonviolent Communication (1984)** – Marshall Rosenberg
- **Motivational Interviewing (1983)** – Miller & Rollnick. (Evoking change talk, autonomy support)
- **SCARF Model (2008)** – David Rock (Social threat/safety in conversations).

The above models have shaped the design of the **ALIGN Feedback Model**, but within collabbWAY, they've been reimagined through a relational and developmental lens.

The ALIGN Feedback Model is one of the core practical tools within collabbWAY's Relational Leadership Method (RLM) – a six-lens framework that develops the full range of capabilities leaders need to lead people well in the real world.

Integrated with both the **ALIGN** and **ARCA+** approaches, this means leading with alliance and connection first. Fostering reflection and capability always, holding accountability with respect, and delivering feedback in a flexible, person-centred way.

