

The Frustration Audit

Get clear before you have the conversation.

ABOUT THIS TOOL

You are frustrated with someone on your team. You have been frustrated for a while. You have rehearsed the conversation in your head ten times and you still have not had it. The longer you wait, the bigger it gets in your mind and the messier it will be when it finally comes out.

This is a tool I use in leadership coaching when a manager is carrying frustration they have not named yet and the conversation they need to have keeps getting delayed.

WHY MOST FEEDBACK GOES SIDEWAYS

It is not the words. It is that managers walk into the conversation carrying a tangle of frustration, story, assumption and unspoken expectation — and then try to sort it out in real time in front of the other person.

That is not feedback. That is processing out loud at someone, and it almost always makes things worse. The work happens before the conversation, not in it.

BEFORE YOU GO ANYWHERE NEAR THE OTHER PERSON

Five questions. Answer them honestly, on paper. Ten minutes, tops. The audit does not replace the conversation. It makes sure you are actually ready to have it.

- **If you cannot name a specific behaviour**
you do not have a feedback conversation yet. You have a feeling.
- **If you cannot name a real impact**
the conversation might not be worth having yet.
- **If you do not know what you want from it**
they certainly will not either.

The Five Questions

Answer these honestly before you have the conversation.

HOW TO USE THIS AUDIT

Think about the specific person and situation. Work through each question in order and write your answers down. Do not filter them. The value is in what surfaces when you slow down and actually look.

1 What exactly has happened?
Write only what you observed. The missed instruction, the handover without the fix, the specific moment — not the pattern or the story you have built around it.

2 What story am I telling myself about it?
This is the part you have been replaying in your head. They do not care. They are lazy. They think it is someone else's job. Write it down then read it back. That is a story, not a fact.

3 What is the actual impact?
Not how it makes you feel — but what it is costing. The work that has stalled, the person picking up the slack, the trust that is eroding, the standard that is slipping.

4 What is my part in this?
Did I set the expectation clearly? Did I let it slide the first time? Have I been modelling the behaviour I am now annoyed about? This is the uncomfortable question.

5 What do I actually want from the conversation?
Not for them to change — that is too vague. What specifically needs to be different, and what does this person need from you to make that possible?

Now Step Back

Read your answers once. Something will have shifted.

WHAT YOUR ANSWERS ARE TELLING YOU

Read back through what you wrote. You will notice the frustration feels smaller and the conversation feels clearer. You know what it is about, what it is not about, and what you are actually asking for. That is the shift the audit creates.

THREE THINGS TO CHECK BEFORE YOU GO IN

● Can I describe what I observed in question one?

Not a pattern, not a character trait — but one specific observable moment. If yes, you have something real to work with. If not, go back to question one and keep writing until you can name it.

● Can I name a real impact?

Something with a cost the other person would also recognise as real — not just something that bothered you. If yes, that is the heart of your conversation.

● Do I know what I am asking for?

Something specific and observable that could actually be different by next week. If you know the answer, you are ready. If not, sit with question five a little longer.

WHEN YOU ARE READY TO GO FURTHER

The audit gets you clear on what to say. When you are ready to work on how to say it, the Clarity Triangle in Hold the Room is the next step.

The frustration is not the problem. The unspoken conversation is. Now you know what to say.