

# WEAK SAUCE OR RICH GRAVY? WHY FEEDBACK ONLY MATTERS IF IT IS HEARD

**FEEDBACK IS EVERYWHERE - ANNUAL REVIEWS, PULSE SURVEYS, 360S, END-OF-YEAR REFLECTIONS. BUT HERE'S THE QUESTION THAT CAME UP IN A RECENT LEADERSHIP SESSION:**

**"WE TALK ABOUT FEEDBACK ALL THE TIME - BUT IS IT ACTUALLY LANDING?"**

This wasn't about whether feedback is happening, but whether it's honest, useful and courageous enough to make a real difference. At the start of a new year - when teams are setting goals, facing change, and navigating uncertainty - it matters more than ever.

## **WEAK SAUCE: WHEN GOOD INTENT GETS LOST**

There's no shortage of evidence to show that regular, meaningful feedback boosts engagement and performance. Gallup's research into high-performing teams makes this clear. And yet, many managers still hold back - not because they don't care, but because they're worried about getting it wrong.

That hesitation often leads to what we call weak sauce. It's vague, over-softened and diluted. As Scott Smith, Director at People Spark, puts it:

*"Most managers don't lack good intent - they lack confidence. And when confidence drops, clarity goes with it."*

Confidence in feedback doesn't mean being blunt or confrontational. It means being grounded enough to say what needs to be said - clearly, respectfully, and with awareness of how it will land.

Because that's the thing about feedback: it doesn't live at the moment it's given. It lives at the moment it's heard.

## **THE SCIENCE OF WHAT'S HEARD (AND WHAT'S NOT)**

Harvard Business School research shows a consistent gap between feedback given and feedback received. When someone feels threatened or overwhelmed, their brain moves into self-protection mode - and they hear far less than we think they do.

Neuroscience supports this: threat responses narrow focus and limit learning.

As Victoria Arnold, Head of Organisation Development at People Spark, reflects:

*"We often focus on what we want to say - and far less on what the other person is actually able to hear in that moment."*

One of the metaphors we share with leadership clients is to lift your head and widen your perspective. Imagine a giraffe - tall, steady, able to see further and stay aware of what's going on around it. That's the mindset leaders need when giving feedback that sticks. It's about pausing, staying present, and being willing to hold space - even when the conversation feels uncomfortable. When leaders do that, they create the conditions for feedback to be useful.

This is where rich gravy feedback lives: specific, timely, anchored in intent - delivered with curiosity, not judgement. And followed by enough space to reflect, respond and grow.

## **HELPING FEEDBACK LAND**

The most effective leaders don't just "give feedback" - they help it land. They slow conversations down, check understanding, and invite dialogue rather than closure. So as organisations set intentions for the year ahead, perhaps the most important question isn't are we giving feedback? It's this:

**Is it weak sauce...  
or rich gravy - and  
do we know the  
difference?"**

# PEOPLE SPARK

If you'd like to explore how feedback can supercharge your team's confidence, performance, and connection, we're always open to a conversation.

*Get in touch....*

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