Communicating Effectively: Or Teaching Your Team How Not to Suck at Giving Feedback

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Agenda

• Introductions
• Guiding Principle
• *What is a Conversation? (Crucial Conversations)*
• *Should I Say Something?*
• SBI Model
• Workshop
  • Scenarios
  • Fix your Own Problems!
• Follow Up Exercises
• Closing
Guiding Principle

A Communication Feedback Model
Guiding Principle: Communication is a built environment.
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What kind of environment do you create?
What is a Conversation?

A Communication Feedback Model
Each Conversation has 3 Components:

THE FACTS

THE FEELINGS

THE IDENTITY
Each Conversation has 3 Components:

**THE FACTS**

Observable, objective information

A Fact:
“Yesterday, you arrived at work twenty minutes late.”

Not a Fact:
“You’re micromanaging me!”
Each Conversation has 3 Components:

**THE FEELINGS**

Emotional state or reaction; an often unreasoned opinion or belief leading to an attitude or judgement

The Feelings:
“I can’t believe you went the extra mile for me! That’s so sweet and considerate! Thank you!”

“I feel like you don’t care about this project as much as I do.”
Each Conversation has 3 Components:

How are my beliefs, and self-identity impacted by this conversation?

“I’ve been a software engineer for two decades now so I know what I’m talking about.”

“You’re the worst Scrum Master I’ve ever had—and I’ve had plenty!”

The Identity
Each Conversation has 3 Components:

THE FACTS

THE FEELINGS

THE IDENTITY
Perspectives, Experiences, & Conclusions

THE FEELINGS

THE IDENTITY
A person’s intent is not the same as the impact their words/actions have on others.

You don’t know what others intend, thus always assume positive intent.

Separate this perceived intent from the impact their words or actions have on others.
Distractions in Conversations

- WINNING
- PUNISHING
- KEEPING THE PEACE
- PLACE BLAME
A gentle answer deflects anger, but harsh words make temper flare.

Proverbs 15:1
How Do You Create Safety?

1. Find Common Ground
2. Establish Trust
3. Be Vulnerable
Should I Say Something?

• Do you mean it?
• What is your intention?
• Can you back it up?
• Can you say it with empathy and compassion?
A person doing QA keeps finding bugs in a Developers code. Over time, this QA person comes to believe that this Developer isn’t good at coding. One day, the QA person, stressed about a deadline, says: “I’m sick of QA’ing your code. It’s always full of bugs and I don’t think you know what you’re doing at all.”
Should I Say Something?

The Developer has two things they can address:

1) “The code is full of bugs.”

2) “I don’t think you know what you’re doing at all.”
As a Developer, both of these comments will be insulting—you have a few choices:

1) You can respond back in kind with insults

2) You can address the facts by examining the code in question to find ways to improve it, providing more context to help the QA person better understand the situation

3) You can address the insults to your feelings & identity
Ask yourself the following questions before you decide what direction the developer should take:

• What information do they have that I don’t?

• How might they see the world such that their view makes sense?

If you’ve decided to say something ask yourself:

• What is your intention? Are there potential distractions to your intent?

• Do you mean it?

• Can you back it up?

• Can you say it with love?
THE SBI FEEDBACK MODEL

S  Situation  Describe the situation. Be specific about when and where it occurred.

B  Behavior  Describe the observable behavior. Don’t assume you know what the other person was thinking.

I  Impact  Describe what you thought or felt in reaction to the behavior.
Situation: I’d like to talk to you about what you said to me about the bugs you found in my code.

Behavior: You appeared frustrated and angry

Impact: I felt insulted, hurt, and angry when you said that you didn’t think I knew what I was doing.
You used the SBI model and things are still going south. Your conversation is off-kilter and you feel you are having to defend your intent.

Create safety in the conversation
Establish Trust & Safety

• Find common ground:
  • From the look of things, we are both eager to improve our code and make the team better.

• Contrast & make clear your intentions:
  • What I do want to do is bring awareness that the way you told me that there were bugs in the code was hurtful, what I don’t want to do is not accept responsibility for the obvious bugs in my code.

• Assume positive intent
  • I’ll bet you didn’t realize you were being hurtful because you are so concerned with code quality.

• Have genuine openness and curiosity about the other person’s perspective
  • I’m curious about your perspective and how you think we can improve moving forward.
Let’s Review!

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THE FEELINGS

THE IDENTITY
Intent & Impact

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Workshop

A Communication Feedback Model
WORKSHOP: SET UP

1. Get into groups of 3.
2. Pick one of 3 roles:
   1. Arbiter
   2. Converser #1
   3. Converser #2
3. Review the Scenario.
4. Open the grey envelope.
WORKSHOP: MATERIALS

The Grey Envelope contains:

• 1 Scenario Worksheet for the Arbiter

• Information for each Converser, including:
  • Your perspective and motivations for the conversation;
  • Any distractions you’ll need to play out despite your intended motivations
  • KEEP THESE TO YOURSELF! This is YOUR internal motivation and others should not be privy to it!
WORKSHOP: WHAT TO DO

1. Once everyone understands the scenario, reviews their own roles (and potential distractions), one of the converser will begin the conversation.

2. The Arbiter acts as an objective observer, using the Scenario Worksheet to make notes.

3. Let the conversation unfold!

4. After the conversation comes to a logical conclusion, the Arbiter will review what she saw and discuss with the two conversers what worked/what didn’t, strategies, feedback etc.
SCENARIO #1

Layla, the Senior Software Engineer interrupts Jo, the Scrum Master, in team Refinements, Planning, or other team related meetings.
QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

• **Intent and Impact**
  • **Actions:** What did the other person actually say or do? (The Facts)
  • **Impact:** What was the impact of this on me? (The Feelings and The Identity)
  • **Assumptions:** Based on this impact, what assumptions am I making about what the other person intended? (Intent and Impact)
    • What information do they have that I don’t?
    • How might they see the world such that their view makes sense?

• **Deciding to say something**
  • Do you mean it?
  • What is your intention?
  • Can you back it up?
  • Can you say it with empathy and compassion?
SCENARIO #2

Robin is working with Patrick, who asks a lot of the same questions, or very similar questions over and over again. The sprint is nearing the end and both Robin and Patrick feel the pressure to meet their sprint commitments. The two meet to discuss another question Patrick has.
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SCENARIO #3

Susie the developer yells at Marcus the Solutions Architect, "You don't know what you're doing!" before storming out of the room and slamming the door. Later that day, you two schedule some time to speak privately.
QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

• **Intent and Impact**
  • **Actions:** What did the other person actually say or do? (The Facts)
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During refinement, Amanda, the Product Owner outlined in the Acceptance Criteria exactly how the team needed to code the story in order for her to accept the story. Bailey, a developer, asked, “Why do you think we should code the solution in that particular manner? I think there are better, more effective approaches to resolving the problem for the customer.” Amanda replied, “We’re under a tight deadline and I know this will work. Let’s not waste any time dreaming up complicated solutions.”
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  • Can you say it with empathy and compassion?
During standup yesterday, one developer, Janet, committed to working on something and communicated to the team that she was on it. During the next standup, Bob, a Senior Developer announces he completed the same work. There’s an awkward silence after Janet speaks up and says, “I did that exact thing because I said I would do it yesterday. Why would you do that Bob?”
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FOLLOW UP EXERCISES AND RESOURCES
Margaret, a Communications Director at a non-Profit Foundation frequently asks Jody, a Communications Manager, to order supplies, set appointments, and run errands on her behalf. Jody has been in her position for six months and is generally happy to help. Today, upon arriving at the office, Margaret went directly to Jody’s office and said, “Jody, you know the event we’re holding next week? I’ve decided we need to order gift bags with our branding. We also need to change the menu; I know we decided last week that we were going with canapés but we really must have those little caprese bites. The foundation chair loves them. Have the order forms on my desk by noon so that I can approve them.”
Tyrion is a new and inexperienced Scrum Master leading a team known to have resistant team members. A team member, Joffrey, is vocal about his disapproval of scrum events and all things Agile and his dismissal influences other team members who might be more open to an Agile mindset. In the middle of the team Retro, Joffrey sighs loudly and exclaims “instead of being yet another meeting talking about nothing valuable, we could be doing actual work!” This comment changes the mood of the event—no one wants to talk much and it ends up being less successful and valuable to the team.
Guiding Principle

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Guiding Principle: Communication is a built environment.
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What kind of environment do you create?
What kind of environment do you create?

"If we have already decided that the new guy is a stupid jerk, and thereafter we only look for evidence to back up our evaluation, we’re not going to see anything that negates our belief. We will only see poor performance. That can definitely get in the way of collaboration."

~Linda Rising How to Deal with Cognitive Biases that Hinder Collaboration
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SOURCES

• Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking when the Stakes Are High by Kerry Patter
• Difficult Conversations by Douglas Stone
• SBI
• TED Talks:
  • Why good leaders make you feel safe – Simon Sinek
  • How to lead a conversation between people who disagree – Eve Pearlman
  • Get comfortable with being uncomfortable – Luvvie Ajayi