SAFE-SEEN

LEADERSHIP REFERENCE GUIDE

Feedback that builds trust. Not threat.

A human-centred framework for conversations that create growth, strengthen connection and drive performance.

bridge

WHY THIS MATTERS

Great feedback isn't about what you say. It's about how you make it safe, how you make them feel valued, and how you make it possible for them to grow.

When feedback is received as threat, the brain shuts down.

When safety comes first, the brain can listen, learn and grow.

When people feel safe, they open up. When they open up, they grow.

LAYER 1

SAFE

THE CONDITIONS

Can this person safely receive feedback right now?

SETTING
Right time, right place, right moment.
Create the conditions before you begin.

ATTACHMENT
Do they genuinely believe you're on their side?
Trust is the foundation. Build it first.

FRAMING
Lead with your intent, not the issue.
Share why you're talking and invite them in.

EMOTIONAL STATE
Are you both regulated enough for this conversation?
Pause if needed. Regulation creates reception.

LAYER 2

SEEN

THE CONVERSATION

How we give feedback.

SPECIFIC
Be clear about what you're referring to.
Focus on observable behaviours and impact.

EXPLORE
Listen to their perspective with curiosity.
Ask questions. Understand their experience.

EMPOWER
Collaborate on solutions and actions.
Make it a joint plan, not your directive.

NEXT
Agree on the next step and follow up.
Clarity now. Accountability always.

THE SHIFT WE CREATE

We move people from defensiveness to development.

THREAT
- Defensiveness
- Disengagement
- Learning shuts down

→ **SAFETY**
- Calm
- Openness
- Willingness

→ **UNDERSTANDING**
- Curiosity
- Shared perspective
- Better decisions

→ **GROWTH**
- Capability increases
- Confidence grows
- Performance improves

LEADERSHIP REMINDERS

Use these questions to prepare for meaningful SAFE-SEEN conversations.

BEFORE YOU START — SAFE

- ☐ Is this the right time?
- ☐ Is this the right environment?
- ☐ Do they know I am on their side?
- ☐ Have I created the conditions for trust?
- ☐ Are we both in a regulated state?

DURING THE CONVERSATION — SEEN

- ☐ Am I being specific?
- ☐ Have I explored their perspective?
- ☐ Are we creating solutions together?
- ☐ Is the next step clear?
- ☐ Have I agreed on follow up?

THE SCIENCE BEHIND IT

Our brains are wired for connection.

When people experience THREAT:
- Amygdala activates
- Stress response increases
- Listening decreases
- Defensiveness increases
- Learning slows

When people experience SAFETY:
- Prefrontal cortex activates
- Calm and connection increase
- Curiosity increases
- Reflection improves
- Growth accelerates

> "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care."

THE SAFE-SEEN PRINCIPLES

SAFETY BEFORE PERFORMANCE.
Create safety first so people can perform, grow and contribute.

CONNECTION BEFORE CORRECTION.
Build connection so corrections are received and not rejected.

GROWTH THROUGH UNDERSTANDING.
Seek to understand first so growth becomes possible.

Want to go deeper?
Scan to access the full SAFE-SEEN Guide, resources and leadership tools.

Safety before performance. · Connection before correction. · Growth through understanding.

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