

Confronting tough issues – Every Fish Needs Chips!

This tool can be used for feedback, coaching, exploring issues with peers and gives a simple framework to air issues objectively and collaborate to resolve them.

There are times when we all become frustrated and angry at work – particularly when something happens which stops us doing our jobs or hinders the Company’s success. However, finding the right way to challenge and address issues can be daunting. We often have concerns about the consequences of raising issues (especially with more senior people) and we may experience some emotions (anxiety, anger, frustration, fear), which can result in us avoiding the issue or worse still getting into discussions which spiral out of control and become emotionally charged.

This tool is designed to help you to address problems in a constructive and positive manner.

First some things to remember

Be Direct

- Address the issue with the person who can own resolving it with you.
- Clearly define the problem and how it affects your work

Be Objective

- Use facts, data, observations, or experiences
- Seek the best solution for the situation & the company
- Document agreed actions and agree follow-up
- Acknowledge and articulate your feelings/ their feelings about the issue

Be Positive

- Outline the issue/ behaviour – don’t attack the person (beware of adjectives – these often feel judgmental e.g. “your work is sloppy” rather than “there are errors in the data”)
- Be clear about your positive intention – you want to find a solution
- Be ready to share your part – what you’ve contributed to creating this issue.
- Find a way to address it in a non-threatening manner
- Direct emotion towards the issue and its resolution
- Focus on resolving the issue together whilst maintaining the relationship
- Ask for the other person’s view of the issue (& listen!)

Timely

- Confront issues when they arise (or as soon after as possible)
- Ensure they are dealt with before they significantly impact your work or the business.

'Every Fish Needs Chips' – a simple 4 step process

This is a tool that can be useful in addressing situations positively and assertively. Use this tool to help you prepare for the discussion. You can use it both in a 'Push' (Tell – giving your view) and a 'Pull' (asking them) style. It's worth deciding which to use before you start! Using a push style can be quick (and I would always ask for the persons thoughts and reactions) and you need to be sure of your facts. Using the 'Pull' style and asking them can take longer and puts the onus on them to do the thinking – it can often feel more uncomfortable for the recipient.

1. **EXPLAIN** the situation Push/ Tell: Clearly define your issue (what is happening, evidence & data) Pull/ Ask: Set the context briefly and ask them about what's happening.
2. **FEELINGS** – Push: Acknowledge how they feel and describe how you feel. How is this issue affecting your work (use 'I')? Recognise their point of view (what issues they may have). E.g. I understand that you.... I am feeling.... Pull: Ask "How do you feel/ how do you think I feel/ how others feel?"
3. **NEED** – Push: Describe your goal (where you would like to get to). What I need to happen is/ what I would like us to do..... Pull: Ask them to say where they think they need to get to? What needs to change?
4. **CONSEQUENCES** - Why is this worth confronting? (the benefits to you both & the Company) These will be the consequences (positive!) Push: Outline your view. Pull: Ask them what they think the benefits are for them, the team and the organisation.
5. What will you say to open the discussion in a non-threatening/ positive manner (write down the words)?
6. Where and when will you address the issue?
7. What questions will you ask to explore their perspective, understand it, and shape solutions together?
8. What possible options/ solutions and actions would you suggest?

A special thank you to Julie Sandford Yule who originally shared this with me.

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