Structured Feedback System

Preparation guide · observation, impact, invitation, forward-ask — say the hard thing so it's heard, not defended against

What this is for: you have something difficult to say to someone, and you've been putting it off. This guide helps you **prepare** the conversation so the message lands as a signal about behaviour, not a verdict on the person — and so you both leave with one specific change agreed. It's mostly solo work: you think the four beats through beforehand, then have the conversation in your own words. You're not running an exercise *with* them; you're preparing yourself *for* them.

The one line: the moment feedback feels like an attack, learning has already stopped.

· WHEN DO I USE THIS?

Use this when

GOOD FIT

- There's **hard feedback you keep meaning to give** but haven't
- You've softened a message so much it stopped meaning anything
- A pattern needs to change and no one has named it out loud
- You want to say the hard thing without damaging the relationship

USE ANOTHER TOOL

- You're the one **receiving** hard feedback → **Steady Receive** (the other side of the same conversation)
- It's a live, two-way disagreement, not one message to deliver → **Alignment Under Conflict Lab**
- There's a decision that has to be settled → **Trade-off Conflict Resolver**

The test question: "Do I have one specific thing to say to one specific person?" If yes, this prepares you to say it well. If you're the one about to be on the receiving end, use Steady Receive instead.

PART 1 PREPARE

before the conversation

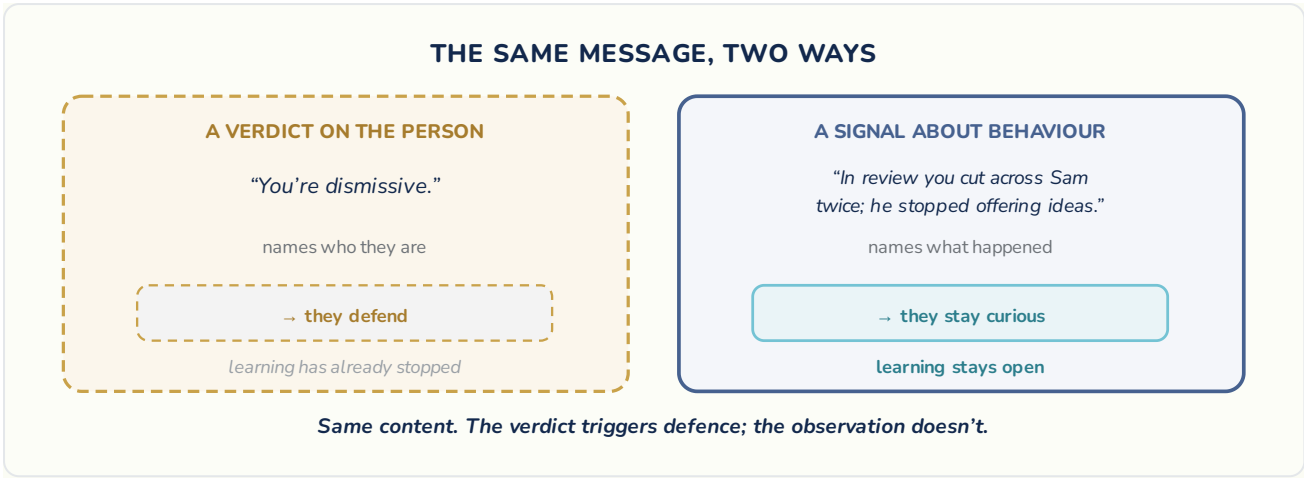
1 · WHAT IS THIS REALLY DOING?

The one idea

THE ONE IDEA

People learn when they feel safe enough to listen. A judgement about who someone is triggers defence; a specific observation about what they did doesn't. Prepare the message as a **signal about behaviour**, invite their side, and agree one change — and the conversation stays about learning, not blame.

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Same content. The verdict triggers defence; the observation doesn't.

2 · WHAT DO I NEED?

What you'll need

Item	What it is, and when it's used
One real conversation (core)	A specific person and a specific thing you've been needing to say — not a general intention to "give more feedback".
The preparation sheet (core)	Where you draft the four beats — observation, impact, invitation, forward-ask — and the one change to land. Prepared beforehand; kept for reference, never read aloud.
A quiet few minutes	This is preparation, not performance. Somewhere you can think the message through before you have it.
Optional: someone to rehearse with	For an especially hard message, saying it out loud to a colleague first takes the edge off the delivery.

3 · HOW DO I PREPARE IT?

The four beats

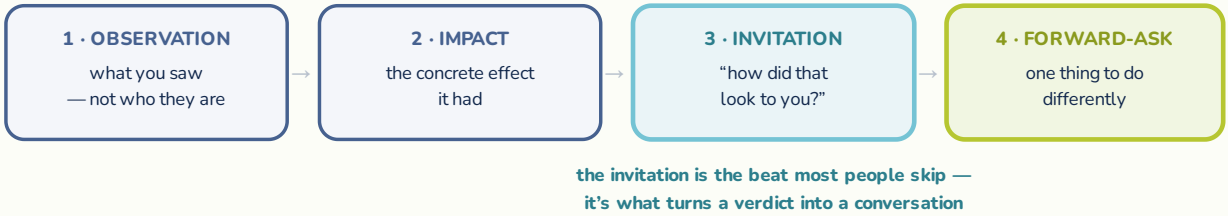
Draft each beat on the sheet before the conversation. Keep them short — a line each. You're preparing what to hold in mind, not a script to read.

1 · Name the observation	**4 min**	Write the specific thing you saw — behaviour, not character. *"You cut across Sam twice", never "you're dismissive".* If you can't point to a moment, you're not ready to deliver it.
2 · Name the impact	**3 min**	Write the concrete effect it had — on the work, the team, or you. *Factual, not accusatory: "he stopped offering ideas", not "you shut everyone down".*
3 · Prepare the invitation	**3 min**	Write a genuine question that hands them the floor: *"how did that look from your side?", "does that fit your view?"* You'll pause here in the room — and mean it.

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4 · Prepare the forward-ask	**3 min**	Write one specific thing to do differently next time — *small, concrete, doable.* This is what you're steering toward, not a list of grievances.

FOUR BEATS — PREPARE THEM, THEN SPEAK THEM HUMANLY



**the invitation is the beat most people skip —
it's what turns a verdict into a conversation**

Prepare all four on paper. In the room, speak them in your own words.

PART 2 HAVE IT & LAND IT

the conversation, and the change

4 · HOW DO I HAVE THE CONVERSATION?

In the room

Speak the four beats in your own words — observation, impact, invitation, then *listen*, then the forward-ask. The sheet stays in your pocket. Two things carry the whole conversation:

THE TWO THINGS THAT MAKE IT WORK

Keep it human — never read the structure out. The four beats are yours to hold in mind, not a form to recite. The moment it sounds like a technique, the other person feels handled, and the defence you were avoiding comes straight back.

Actually mean the invitation. Ask how they saw it — then stop, and listen as if you might be missing something. This is the beat most people skip, and it's the one that turns a verdict into a conversation. If you ask and then talk over the answer, you've delivered a verdict with a question mark on it.

5 · HOW DO I LAND THE CHANGE?

Finish on one change

The conversation isn't finished when you've said your piece — it's finished when **they name one specific thing they'll do differently**. That named change is the output; a good talk that ends without one is a talk you'll be having again. Ask for it plainly: "so what would you do differently next time?" — and let them say it, in their words.

6 · WHAT IF IT GOES WRONG?

Common mistakes

What you'll see	The fix
It comes out as a verdict ("you're…")	Go back to the observation. Name the specific moment you saw — behaviour they can picture, not a label they'll dispute.

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The structure sounds robotic	You're reading it, not holding it. Put the sheet away; say it as you'd say it to someone you respect. Human beats correct.
You ask the invitation but talk over the answer	Then it wasn't an invitation. Ask, then be quiet longer than feels comfortable. Their answer often changes your forward-ask.
You soften the message until it disappears	The fear was about their reaction, not the message. The structure exists so you can say the hard thing *and* keep the relationship — don't trade one for the other.
It ends on agreement but no change	"That was a good chat" isn't the outcome. Ask for one specific thing they'll do differently before you close.

Before you walk in, check your sheet:

- ✓ The observation is a specific moment, not a character label
- ✓ The impact is concrete — on the work, the team, or you
- ✓ The invitation is a real question you'll pause on and mean
- ✓ The forward-ask is one small, doable change
- ✓ You know what "one change agreed" will sound like

7 · HOW DO I MAKE THIS STICK?

Take it back to work

THE HABIT

Before your next hard conversation, ask yourself one question: "am I about to name what they did, or judge who they are?" The first keeps them learning; the second makes them defend. Catch it before you open your mouth, and half the work is done.

Over time, the four beats stop being a sheet and become how you think about feedback — you find yourself reaching for the observation before the verdict without preparing it.

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Appendix a worked example · where this sits

8 · A WORKED EXAMPLE

Watch the four beats land

The conversation: a lead needs to tell a talented engineer that they talk over people in reviews. It's been true for weeks; the lead has been avoiding it — and the team's best ideas are quietly going unsaid.

Beat	What the lead actually said
Observation	"In yesterday's review, you cut across Sam twice before he finished." *A moment, not a label.*
Impact	"After the second time, he stopped offering ideas — and he's usually one of our sharpest in there."
Invitation	"How did that look from where you were sitting?" Then silence. *The engineer:* "*... honestly, I didn't notice I'd done it twice.*"
Forward-ask	"Next time, can we hear each person out before we respond?"
The change	Engineer: "I'll hold my point until they've finished — and I'll ask Sam directly what he thinks." **Named, specific, theirs.**

The lesson, not stated but felt: "you're dismissive" would have started an argument about character. The observation and the invitation kept the engineer curious — and the change was theirs, so it will hold.

9 · WHERE DOES THIS FIT?

Where this sits in the Gym

Four tools handle hard conversations — each a different job. Reach for the one that matches your side of it:

Tool	Its job — and when to reach for it
Structured Feedback System	**Give** difficult feedback so it's heard — you have one thing to say to one person.
Steady Receive	**Receive** difficult feedback without the reaction doing the damage — the other side of this same conversation.
Alignment Under Conflict Lab	**Protect the relationship** through a live, two-way disagreement — not one message, a real clash.
Trade-off Conflict Resolver	**Resolve the decision** when two sides are deadlocked on a specific call.

The clean pairing: you prepare and deliver with this tool; the person on the other end can use **Steady Receive** to take it well — same conversation, both sides equipped.

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