HOW TO BUILD
A Successful
Speaking Up
Process

A publication by **Work In Confidence**
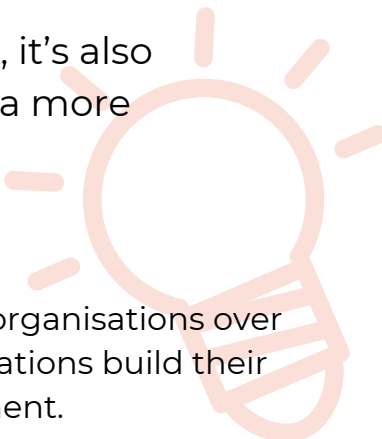
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Getting Speaking Up Right

Many organisations have Speaking Up policies but have you stepped back to consider why people might not already be speaking up?

Speaking Up isn't just about spotting problems, it's also about surfacing great ideas – so you can have a more engaged and productive organisation.

We have compiled this eBook based on feedback from many organisations over the years. This feedback has often come while helping organisations build their Speaking Up processes and improve their employee engagement.

We hope you find these ideas useful. If you have any suggestions, we'd love to hear your thoughts

> "
>
> **James Detert,**
> professor in transparent communication in the workplace - Cornell's Johnson Graduate School of Management
>
> "We have a deep set of defence mechanisms that make us careful around people in authority positions…
> That is why the information you're getting from people multiple levels below you in the organisation is likely to be filtered."
>
> However, he continued that you need this feedback because: "They are better in touch with customers and stakeholders and they understand problems and possibilities, what works and what doesn't better than you."

The Foundations

At the heart of any policy and system around Speaking Up should be a few core principles.

| Trust | Awareness | Connection | Action |

In this book we explore these four key pillars in more detail.

Trust

If ever you break trust, you are likely to permanently undermine any speak up procedure or system. Not only is it wrong, but it is also self-defeating.

Make it clear what the rules on confidentiality and/or anonymity are and observe these without fail.

Make it clear where responsibilities lie and observe this (for instance, we cannot overstate the horror we felt in April 2017 at the interference of the Barclays CEO when trying to identify a whistleblower). This sadly was not a one-off, but something that repeatedly happens across businesses.

Be clear about the "Ground Rules" of any speaking up process. What will be done with the information, who will it be shared with, how will it be used?

If there is ever any doubt, err on the side of caution.

Recognise that for some, anonymity has a place in enabling conversations.

Awareness

Any Speaking Up procedures are only as good as the publicity they receive. It is key that staff are aware of how to access any speak up system. As part of this, it is important to remember that a problem can occur at any time during the year – not just after an initial burst of publicity. Maintaining that awareness is key.

Possible means of publicising include:
- links from your intranet to guidelines / any system
- inclusion in your onboarding process
- introductory and periodic emails
- posters in staff areas
- inclusion in staff handbook (if it is something people read and is updated as needed)

However, you choose to publicise your procedures, don't just put a procedure in place, then forget about it, embed it into your company culture.
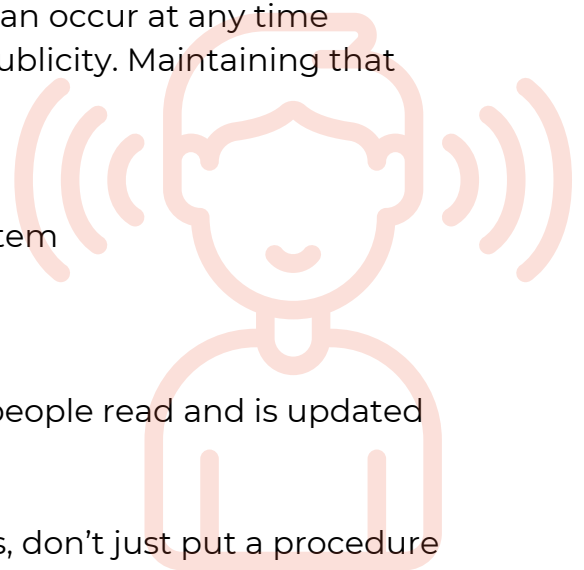
Connection

Feedback: If it will take some time to get to the bottom of things, keep the individual appraised of progress. Even if an update says you are still gathering information or looking into things, it's important to update people. You may know that you are dealing with things as quickly as you can, but your member of staff needs to be kept up to date and managed.

Remember, to have gotten this far must be an issue that has been of major concern to the person raising it and has been playing on their minds, possibly for quite some time. So as well as being proactive makes sure the person raising the problem knows this.

At some stage during the process, you may need to discuss with the person raising the concern how widely you can share details. But, again, establishing a rapport and a clear understanding of the ground rules will be the key to a successful outcome.

Whoever contacts you may be anxious, frustrated or worried (for themselves or others). This could cause them to appear reticent or have a myriad of other reactions. Part of your function is to be able to accommodate this.

Remember too that what someone says and what you hear can at times lose something in the exchange. As before, be willing to give people the benefit of the doubt. Likewise, you may have to give someone time to open up.

Different people can use language in different ways (and be responsive to different styles). Being responsible for empowering speaking up may need you to work hard at accommodating these differences.

Remember, many people raising concerns could have a number of fears. As well as concerns about the underlying issue, which could itself involve aspects like patient safety, there may be concerns such as, "How will this affect my job?", "How will this affect my relationship with colleagues?"

Action

Learn from feedback: After fears that there will be repercussions for raising problems, one of the most significant inhibitors to staff raising concerns is a feeling that nothing will be done as a result. Make sure that your organisation takes the opportunity to learn from concerns or problems raised and is seen to do so.

Make sure you capture and share learning with management: Ensuring that you capture appropriate information, follow it through, and report back to all relevant parties (within the bounds of confidentiality) is integral to successful outcomes. As part of the follow-up process, step back and consider where the issue raised has wider consequences or application.

Demonstrate You Are Learning: Within the constraints of any confidentiality, make sure learnings and the benefits brought by them are shared and celebrated. Not only will this have a positive impact on whoever has raised the initial concern, but you should find there is a ripple effect in the organisation. Make being a *Listening and Learning* organisation part of your fabric.

Ensure You Understand: Make sure you have a means of understanding whether staff are aware of your speaking up procedures, trust them and feel your organisation wants people to speak up and is learning from this. Don't leave it for a check-in via the annual survey – do it often and effectively.

Things to Avoid

We regularly contact and speak with Freedom to Speak Up Guardians and Speaking Up Champions in organisations. We thought we would share some of our thoughts on things to avoid when cultivating a successful speaking up process.

In this section, we refer to the "Speaking Up Champion", which means the person or persons responsible for receiving calls from staff members with concerns. They may be referred to differently in your organisation.

In the NHS, they are known as "**Freedom to Speak Up Guardians**".

Staff Not Knowing Who the Right Person to Contact is

It's important that staff know who the correct person to contact is and what their role is. We have been surprised at the number of organisations we have contacted, opening the conversation with, "Hello could I speak with Jo Bloggs" or "Hello could I speak to the speaking up champion" and been met with the response ... "Sorry who is that and what do they do?"

Voicemail – No name given

Often, we have been put through to a voicemail that does not say who's it is or whether it will and can only be collected by a particular named person. Having no identification on the voicemail and no reassurance about who will collect messages should be fixed immediately.

Voicemail – Shared

On some occasions, we have been put through to a shared voicemail – "Hi, this phone is shared by and ..." We suggest that if a number is being given for someone to receive speaking up concerns, it should only be accessible by that person.

Voicemail – Name on the Answer Message is not that of the Speaking up Champion

Another common problem is reaching voicemail, and the name given on the voicemail is different from the person we were told we were being put through to. Again, if we are looking at instilling confidence in people, such discrepancies are bound to give immediate concerns.

Messages on the answering machine

We are not desperately keen on leaving a message on an answering machine as an option, but if you must, make sure it is clear:

- who the message box belongs to
- that they and only they will collect messages and
- that they are password protected.

The Unrequested Callback

A couple of times with organisations, we have called and left no name or number and had a call back from the speaking up champion. The call goes something like this:

"Hi, I have a missed call from you, so I was calling back."
Us: "Who is that?"
Caller: "The Speaking Up Champion from ABC"

We thoroughly applaud diligence, and particularly in this job. It is fantastic to see people eager to ensure no person is left unable to raise a concern or problem. However, suppose we had been a whistleblower. We have possibly taken time out to call from outside the work environment; then the phone rings while we are back in our work environment... That may not be a conversation we want in front of colleagues – possibly in front of the person about whom the conversation relates, or our boss (or maybe the two rolled together)!

The Ring Out

On a couple of occasions, we have tried a number over a dozen times with no answer. While with an individual's phone line, you cannot guarantee the person will always be there. If we were looking for support, help or a confidential conversation, by the stage of the tenth call we may have given up.

Conclusion

You have read this far, so it's clear that you care about establishing and maintaining a successful Speaking Up process.,

By keeping these four key principles: Trust; Awareness; Connection; and Action at the centre of what you do, and by remaining aware of things to avoid, your process is much more likely to succeed.

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